

# Talking About Race Toolkit

Affirm, Counter, Transform (ACT)

The Center for Social Inclusion (CSI) works to advance racial equity. We work to transform structural inequity and exclusion into structural fairness and inclusion. The Talking About Race Toolkit is part of our communications strategy to: 1) re-frame the conversation on race; and 2) move us toward policy solutions that work for everyone.

## What is Talking About Race Right Toolkit?

To advance racial equity, it is critical that we are able to talk about race. Too frequently, race is a topic that is avoided, which means that we perpetuate inequitable outcomes. Other times, when race is talked about, but without an equity strategy, implicit bias is triggered and inequities exacerbated. How we talk about race matters. The good news is that there is a useful field of practice to inform effective communications about race. This toolkit is a collection of the key strategies that we have found are necessary in combatting the race wedge and advancing racial equity. Effectively talking about race is an essential skill for advancing racial equity. We believe that this approach can help a variety of stakeholders to effectively talk about race and policy.

## How should this toolkit be used?

This toolkit should be used as a guide for your own strategic messaging. Please use the worksheet as a medium to try out your own messaging ideas. Please refer to the glossary at end of this toolkit for definitions. This toolkit contains critical strategies that advocates can use to fight the race wedge frame—but with a caveat that each of these messages must be customized based on issue, audience, and the intention of the message.

## When should this toolkit be used?

This toolkit should be used not only for winning critical policy fights, but also for the bigger goal of changing our narrative on race. We have tested on issues of healthcare, subprime lending, immigration, and fiscal policies and firmly believe that the following strategies can apply to a broad variety of issues. Using our strategies together with multiple research-based messages can help bring about more racially equitable results. It's not enough to talk about race; we must act on new solutions.

*This toolkit is based on over five years of research, and collaboration with leading experts in the fields of messaging, framing, and implicit bias. For a copy of our latest report on message testing please visit our website at [www.centerforsocialinclusion.org](http://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org)*

# Talking About Race Guide

To effectively move someone to support racial justice or policy reform, we should consider the following points:

Use images and words in a story format rather than just presenting data.

Consider what your most important outcomes are, and ask yourself whether there are universal values that people can agree on.

There is no silver bullet. Not all messages work in all context or on all issues.

Message order matters...a lot! The following framework orders the conversation in a way that is engaging and persuasive. Our framework is "Affirm, Counter and Transform" (ACT).

## AFFIRM

Start off the dialogue by mentioning phrases and images that speaks to audience's values. The key is to hook and engage your audience.

### START WITH THE HEART

Start your message with an emotional connector to engage your audience in the message (e.g., We work hard to support our families and all our contributions help make America great)

### EXPLAIN WHY WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

Explain "shared fate" in racially-explicit terms (e.g., It hurts the same to lose a home or job, whether we are White or Black, male or female, a single parent or a two-parent family...)



# Talking About Race Guide

## COUNTER

Lead the audience into the discussion of race with a brief snapshot of the historical context. The key is to open your audience's minds to deeper explanations about racial inequities.

### EXPLAIN WHY WE HAVE THE PROBLEM

Give a very brief explanation of what has happened in the past and explain why we have a problem today. (e.g., Public dollars for schools, bus service, health care and a hundred more things we need, helped create jobs in the past. Cutting them now is not the answer to our problems, it will be the cause of more pain and misery.)

### TAKE ON RACE DIRECTLY

Take on the race wedge by declaring it and dismissing it by naming institutional opportunities and actions (e.g., This is not about immigrants or welfare. This is about whether Americans will see their children off to college...)



# Talking About Race Guide

## TRANSFORM

Leave the audience with an engaging solution. The key is to present a solution so that the audience feels committed and feel as though they are progressing forward.

### REFRAME "MAKERS" AND "TAKERS"

Change and define who the real good guys and bad guys are in this fight (e.g., And while oil company and bank CEOs are getting richer, some are laying off workers and fighting for tax loop holes to avoid paying taxes, instead of investing in our nation's future...)

### END WITH HEART AND SOLUTION

Present solution in emotional terms (e.g., They [corporations ] can and should do their fair share so we the people can invest in schools, health care, transit and services that help us all make a bright future for our country.)



# Talking About Race Worksheet

Consider the following questions as you brainstorm and design your own messages on racial equity.

## CONTEXT QUESTIONS:

- What is the policy issue you are working on? (e.g., Immigration reform, public transportation)
  - Who is the target audience you are trying to talk to? (e.g., White swing voters, base)
  - Where is the geographic area you are focusing on? (e.g., Los Angeles, entire state of Michigan)
  - What is the medium in which you are relaying the message? (e.g., video, presentation, flyers)
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## AFFIRM:

- Start with the heart
  - What speaks to your audience? Who is a group of people they identify most with? (e.g. working class)
  - Explain why we are all in this together
  - What identity could link your audience and the issue you are interested in? (e.g., being a parent)
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## COUNTER:

- Explain why we have the problem
  - What is the social, political and historical context of the issue you are working on? (e.g., for immigration reform look at population demographic changes and redistricting)
  - Take on race directly
  - What keywords are being used in the public debate regarding the issue you are working on? (e.g., Immigration reform, security, jobs, Americans)
  - What words and images are codes or metaphors for race? (e.g., welfare queen, inner city, foreigners)
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## TRANSFORM:

- Reframe "makers" and "takers"
  - Who are the main players on the issue? How have people of color been depicted in this issue?
  - End with heart and solution
  - What words are used in the beginning of your message? Recycle!
  - What are 1-2 action items for the issue at hand? (e.g., re-invest in safety net programs)
  - How are these actions items benefiting everyone?
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Try it out with a partner! (3 minutes/6 sentences max) (See example on next page)

# Talking About Race Appendix

## GLOSSARY

**Dog Whistle Racism** – Sometimes referred to as Strategic Racism. Political campaigning or policy-making that uses coded words and themes that appeals to conscious or subconscious racist concepts and frames.

**Framing** – Unconscious thought process consisting of networks of associations that we use to interpret information. Frames are used as a long-term strategy in changing perceptions. (e.g., individual responsibility).

**Implicit Bias** – Unconscious attitudes and stereotypes toward individuals and social groups that “affect our understanding, actions, and decisions” (adapted from Kirwan Institute).

**Individual Racism** – Pre-judgment, bias, or discrimination by an individual based on race.

**Institutional Racism** – Policies, practices and procedures that work better for white people than for people of color, regardless of intention.

**Messaging** – Re-packaging arguments using engaging and persuasive language.

**Race Wedge** – The process of using race strategically as a tactic to divide people in order to achieve a political outcome (e.g., welfare queen language).

**Racial Equity** – Race is no longer a determinant of socio-economic outcomes, and outcomes for all groups are improved. Racial equity is our lens and the outcome we seek to achieve. It is an inclusive approach to transform structures toward access, justice, self-determination, redistribution, and sharing of power and resources.

**Structural Racism** – A history and current reality of institutional racism across all institutions. This combines to create a system that negatively impacts communities of color.

## RESOURCES RELEVANT TO MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT

**ChangeLab** – Asian Americans on the Sunday Shows: What They Talk About When They Talk About Us

**Ian Haney Lopez** – Dog Whistle Politics

**Insight Center for Community Economic Development** – Winning Words for Closing the Racial Wealth Gap

**Kirwan Institute** – State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review 2015

**Perceptions Institute** – Transforming Perception: Black Men and Boys

**Opportunity Agenda** – Visions, Values, and Voice: A Communications Toolkit

**PolicyLink** – Getting Equity Advocacy Results (GEAR) Toolkit

**Public Works** – Reframe Government: Values, Systems and Civic Thinking

**Race Forward** – Moving the Race Conversation Forward

The Center for Social Inclusion is available for communications testing trainings that include these strategies and facilitated conversations on how to customize your own message.