



PASSING THE MESSAGE STICK



**A guide for changing the story on
self-determination and justice**

passingthemessagestick.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We'd like to pay our respects to the Traditional Owners, Elders and Ancestors across this vast continent, who have maintained and kept us strong in country, culture and community.

We extend our gratitude to leaders in our community who have left a lasting legacy for us all, and who's work this research is built from.

Our land was stolen – never ceded.
It always was, and always will, be Aboriginal Land.

What is a message stick?

From time immemorial, we have used message sticks to communicate with each other – between Nations, Clans and Language groups. We pass our message sticks to one another, with our stories engraved, granting us safe passage through other groups' country. Message sticks are the original token of authenticity of First Nations voice and messages.

This research – from the very early days of ideation, through to the report that's in your hand now – has been created for us, and by us, at every stage.

Please pass this report as far as you can.

Artist Credit

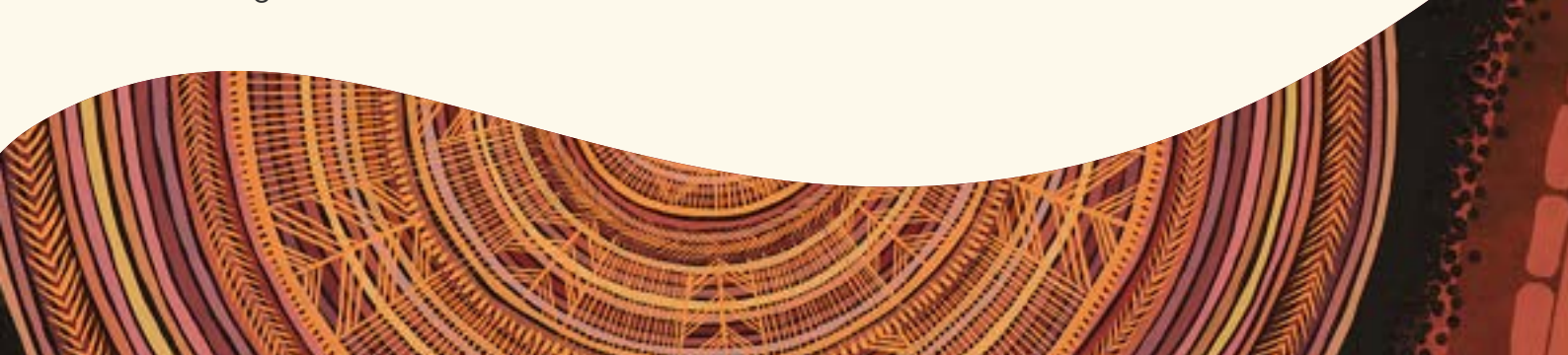
Tarsha Davis is a proud Kuku Yalanji woman from Far North Queensland, now based in Melbourne. Her works are inspired by memories of being on country with family and community, and are reflective of her connection to country and her passion for social health.

Tarsha uses her art practice therapeutically, working with Aboriginal communities and young people to empower them to connect to culture and share stories.

Tarsha's artwork is featured throughout the Passing the Message Stick report.

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An aerial photograph of a desert landscape, likely in Australia, showing red sand dunes and sparse, low-lying green vegetation. The scene is captured from a high angle, looking down on the terrain. The sand is a vibrant reddish-orange color, and the vegetation consists of small, rounded bushes and shrubs. The lighting is bright, creating sharp shadows and highlighting the textures of the sand and plants. The overall composition is a mix of natural patterns and colors.

INTRODUCTION

As First Nations people, we are storytellers and we need to share our truth.

How we speak to our experience is how we hold people accountable. The anger we feel about the experiences of injustice that our families and communities face is real. This guide shows us how to express this fundamental truth, and at the same time shift those who can be persuaded to take action on our issues to support us. By doing this we can break down the barriers of inaction that our potential allies experience, and win transformative change.

Here's the good news: this research shows us that what we've done in the past works. But in recent years, our message has changed. We've stepped away from messages shared by previous political movements and campaigns that our communities led and won. Instead of speaking to a broad audience, we've stepped into a frame of deficit and charity to appeal to Government. **We're telling a story that isn't ours.**

The words we use matter. When we share our vision and truth, we can build powerful movements and win public policy and transformative changes we've been calling for.

To do this, and create the space for massive gains, we all need to sing from the same songbook - communities, allies and organisations alike. *It's all about repetition* - we tell our stories and show others how to repeat them.

When we repeat effective messages we can shift public support and win transformative change.

A LETTER FROM DR JACKIE HUGGINS AM

This project came about when I was the co-chair of National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, back in 2019. I met Anat Shenker-Osorio, a world leading expert on cognition and language in politics, who had done work with the refugee movement here, to help them adopt more persuasive language. I could see that it shifted the public discourse and helped change policies to get people off Nauru and Manus Island.

I knew that's what we needed here - messages that are persuasive and help us win change.

I have been rolling out deficit language for decades, sharing the statistics of how bad things are. For too long, we've been talking about ourselves in the deficit to appeal to the government's morality and mobilise them to help. But deficit is not how we see ourselves.

“ Learning messaging theory made me realise deficit doesn't always work - these messages are wrong and unhelpful, and we're not getting through.

We need a way of communicating that is persuasive, and a lot of our answers for how to do that are in our history. You look back at the movements our people have led in the past, with their staunch messages, they shifted public support and won big changes.

That's why I was so excited to be part of this fantastic project, working on the Steering Committee alongside Larissa Baldwin, First Nations Justice Director at Getup, and Karrina Nolan, the founding Executive Director of Original Power, with the support of Kirsty Albion, Executive Director at Australian Progress. We've brought together the wisdom and knowledge of our people, and combined that with world-class messaging research to develop messages that are persuasive.

This project is for us and by us.

There have been 500+ First Nations advocates who have contributed to the research project, and I do want to thank the 18 First Nations Message Research Fellows who led the first stage of the project: Amelia Telford, Dale Sutherland, Dixie Link-Gordon, Edie Shepherd, Esther Joy Montgomery, Ethan Taylor, Jade Bradford, Jinny-Jane Smith, Jordin Payne, June Riemer, Karly Warner, Kelly Williams, Lara Watson, Melissa Clarke, Nicole Brown, Nicole Hutton, Siani Iglewski and Steve Hodder Watt.

I've learned so much through being part of this message research project, and I'm so thrilled we're able to share the results with you. I wish I could have gotten this messaging research four decades ago, so I could be more powerful and more persuasive in my language. To date, I don't think I've done a bad job, but knowing how to use this messaging all those years ago would have made a powerful difference.

This research project is an offering to all First Nations advocates working towards self-determination and justice for our people.

This research comes at an important moment. Through the Black Lives Matter movement, we're seeing a global reckoning on race and racism. This has strong roots in our Stop Black Deaths in Custody movements. It's changing the way people understand the injustices we face, and this research helps us lean into this moment.

I hope this project gives you the confidence to speak our truth and share our strength. Together, we can defeat the entrenched deficit narratives, and work towards a better future.

This project has been an eye opener for me. I'll be using the findings to inform the Treaty process in Queensland, and other truth-telling processes.

“ We need to share these messages far and wide, and keep on repeating them. So, please take this research and share it widely - it's for us all. ”

Waddamooli,

Dr Jackie Huggins AM, Bidjara/Birri Gubba Juru
Passing The Message Stick Steering Committee



A LETTER FROM ANAT SHENKER-OSORIO

It's been my immeasurable honour to have played a role in the First Nations Fellowship and messaging research project detailed here.

“ Having delivered strategic messaging advice, designed and helped run communication campaigns, and conducted empirical testing across issue areas and countries for over a decade, I can definitively say that this project is unprecedented.

This is training, testing and truth-telling done by the community, for the community.

Upon first meeting the indomitable Dr. Jackie Huggins and briefing First Nations leaders and progressive allies, I could see a familiar and daunting challenge for making a compelling case for First Nations people's sovereignty and justice.

Precisely because of the legacy of brutality, dominant messaging tended to relegate First Nations people to the object position rather than render them capable subjects in their own story.

In an earnest and even laudable attempt to point out ongoing harms, advocates had unwittingly fallen into the common trap of making First Nations seemingly weak and thus incapable of the self-determination they rightly demand.

Through my deeper engagement with Larissa Baldwin as a participant in my Global Messaging Fellowship, I knew there could be a new way forward. Larissa, alongside Kirsty Albion, took the backbone of my course and turned it into a powerful new experiment: training an entirely First Nations cohort in strategic messaging and then conducting participatory research to understand how people perceive issues impacting First Nations and how to engender support for their sovereignty.



“ Here are those results: the words and frames that - if repeated - can animate our base to break through the political noise with a persuasive case for the rights of all people, no matter their background or colour, income or postcode.

I have led messaging research on people seeking asylum in Australia that helped pave the way for four consecutive policy victories, to uncovering how to deliver effective arguments for racial and economic justice, combating rightwing race baiting, and winning the 2020 US Presidential election.

From these projects, I have seen how flipping the script on deeply entrenched narratives can engage our disaffected base and move the middle to our cause.

The job of a good message isn't to say what is popular. The job of a good message is to make popular what we need said. And here are the ingredients and the recipe for that message.

The task now is to take them and equip people to repeat them relentlessly until these truths become so instantly recognised and widely understood that they become the 'common sense' that undergirds policymaking with, and for, First Nations.

Yours,

Anat Shenker-Osorio
ASO Communications
Global messaging expert and advisor
to *Passing the Message Stick*



FIRST NATIONS MESSAGE RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

For this message research project to be effective, we knew it needed to be grounded in the expertise of our people, and work across diverse organisations and movements.

This project started with a First Nations Message Research and Communications Fellowship.

First Nations communicators, journalists, community advocates and activists came together for a first-of-its-kind Fellowship over the summer of 2019-2020.

Fellows included leading communicators from peaks, community organisations and grassroots movements, as well as journalists, including Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT, First Peoples Disability Network, First Nations Workers Alliance, Northern Land Council, Seed Mob, Original Power, Blaq, ABC, National Indigenous Times, and Black Star Radio.

Over five months, two residential retreats and a series of online seminars, fellows learnt best practice approaches to messaging and message research, including the use of frames and metaphors, skills for message analysis, research methodology and narrative development.

Guest speakers included Anat Shenker-Osorio, Adam Luna, Shen Narayanasamy, Susie Gemmell, Sarah Enderby and Tom Maclachlan.



Dale Sutherland
Nganduwal/Minjungbal



Dixie Link-Gordon
Gurang Gurang



Edie Shepherd
Wiradjuri/Noongar



Esther Joy Montgomery
Mardudhunera



Ethan Taylor
Warumungu



Jade Bradford
Ballardong Noongar



Jinny-Jane Smith
Wiradjuri/Walbunga



Jordin Payne
Nimanburr Djugun
Yawuru



June Riemer
Gumbaynggirr Dunghutti



Karly Warner
Palawa



Kelly Williams
Bundjalung



Lara Watson
Birri Gubba



Melissa Clarke
Ngarrindjeri



Millie Telford
Bundjalung/South Sea
Islander



Nicole Brown
Larrakia



Nicole Hutton
Garawa



Siani Iglewski
Wiradjuri/Wongaibon



Steve Hodder Watt
Lardil

Dunghutti Country

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An aerial photograph of the ocean with a white rounded rectangle containing text.

**We are excited to share the results of
our two year message research and
narrative shifting project.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research project is for us and by us, and ours to share.

The goal of the project is to build public support for self-determination and justice, paving the way for long term, systemic change.

While it draws on global best practice in message research, the knowledge is ours, and the lessons can be found in the narratives of our advocates past. The findings are for all First Nations advocates, organisations, spokespeople, journalists and grassroots changemakers - and there's also a section for allies and ally organisations.

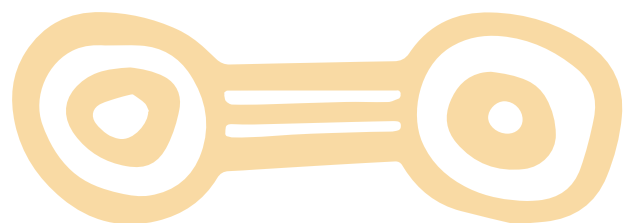
For messages to become a dominant narrative, we need to repeat them over and over.

We all need to be singing from the same song sheet. But right now, our messages are disparate and we don't have a cohesive, shared narrative.

We can overcome this challenge by repeating shared foundational messages, from which we can tailor narratives that build support for issues from law reform and justice, to climate, health, land rights, housing, treaties, truth and justice commissions and more.

We chose to research how to build public support for high level concepts like self-determination and justice. This report shares effective frames to use in this context, as well as foundational messaging principles to apply to your work.

That way, together we'll be reinforcing each other, building a bigger story of our strength and capability, who is harming us and what needs to change. Together we can persuade the majority of the public to support us and win transformative change.





HOW WE REFER TO OURSELVES

A note on how we refer to ourselves, and the use of Aboriginal and First Nations throughout this research.

We prefer to be known by distinct and diverse nations, clans and tribes, and have great pride in reclaiming those identities over collective terms. In a survey of GetUp supporters, First Nations people clearly indicated a dislike of the term “Indigenous”, which has been co-opted by all levels of government.

As a collective, we generally prefer terms that highlight diversity, such as First Nations, First People and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, over the melting pot of ‘Indigenous’. More often than not, we use colloquial terms like mob, Koori and Murri.

In a global context, some people noted that ‘First Nations’ is more associated with people in Canada and the United States, and our persuadable group of middle Australia doesn’t generally know or use this term.

For this reason, in the focus groups and survey, we used “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people” first, and “Aboriginal people” thereafter. This was a pragmatic decision, to use a short term that most people already know and understand.

In the context of messaging, the use of ‘Indigenous’ and ‘non-Indigenous’ can reinforce unhelpful black and white binaries. Often, people don’t consider People of Colour and migrants as ‘non-Indigenous’, which can erase ethnic diversity, an important consideration when crafting values-based messages.

We acknowledge how you refer to yourself is a personal choice.



OUR GOAL

We want to increase public support for self-determination and justice for our people. This will lay the foundation for transformative change.

To do this, we need to shift the opposition's dominant narrative, so the majority of the public support us and believe:

1. We are strong and capable people,
2. Current injustices exist and there are unfair barriers that persist today, and
3. The solution is First Nations people making decisions, because we know what's best for us.

HOW WE DO IT

We can persuade the majority of the public to support us, if we share messages that energise our base, persuade the middle and alienate our opponents.

A message is like a baton - it gets passed on by people.

The vast majority of the population are either with us, or persuadable - meaning they don't have strongly held beliefs about us. Messages that engage the base are then repeated, and persuade the vast majority of the public. This is how we get majority support for our asks and win transformative change.

During the research process, we separated our audience into four groups based on their level of support for our self-determination and justice. These four groups include us, our base, the persuadables and our opponents.

Given the most important part of the 'base' is 'us', this report collectively refers to these two audience groups as 'our base'.



OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH PROCESS

Language analysis

The First Nations Messaging Fellows collected and analysed 3,400 messages, across diverse issues, including law reform, gender equality, community control, land rights, housing, health, racism and January 26.

Qualitative research

We held 9 focus groups with First Nations advocates, base, persuadables and opponents.

We also did interviews and surveys with First Nations advocates.

Quantitative research

We tested the messages we'd developed through a representative survey of 1,500 people, and an additional 200 First Nations people.

This survey included a 'dial test'.

To ensure messages resonated with us, First Nations advocates reviewed messages at each stage of the research process.



How to use this document

This message research belongs to us. Be confident it works - it's here to be used by us all, across our issues. This is a comprehensive guide that shows not only which messages work and why, but also gives you clear examples you can apply to your own work. A summary report, and series of workshops and briefings, supplement this full report.

WHAT WE FOUND

When our narratives centre our strength and capability, we can build majority support for self-determination and justice.

We need to go back to our messages of the past, that start from strength, and be confident that it works. It's time to move beyond entrenched deficit language that paints us as problematic, vulnerable and unable to make good decisions.

Most people support us when we use simple language to explain concepts like self-determination and justice, and combine truth-telling with clear asks.

There are some messaging challenges to overcome - but we can do it. Our opponent's story is strong - but our best messages outperform theirs.

If we all sing from the same song sheet, and are powerful in our voice, story and messages, we can win majority support for our demands.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Start our messages with a shared value

Powerful values like equity, taking care of one another, freedom, and knowing what's best for ourselves can build support for self-determination and justice. By crafting messages around a shared value, we can bring our audiences along, and show how the barriers that hold us back violate widely-held values.

2. It's time to reclaim our strength

People believe we're capable of making good decisions and are more likely to support our demands for self-determination when we share stories of our strength and leadership.

3. Name the unfair barrier we face, who causes us harm and why

We need to shine a light on who causes the problems we face, and spell out their motive. When we do this, audiences understand people create our problems, and therefore, people can solve our problems.

4. Combine truth and action

By combining truth and action, we help persuadables move beyond the guilt felt when we tell the truth, and towards supporting our asks. It's important to combine both truth and action, because our communities may disengage unless messages include truth and lived experience.

5. Create a collective 'we'

Our base and persuadables are nervous that self-determination means segregation. We can overcome this by bringing them into our message, with clear asks for their solidarity.

6. Use simple language to explain big concepts

Many people don't understand what concepts like self-determination, systemic racism, colonisation or equity mean. We need to say what we mean, by putting these terms in plain language - and when we do, we get wide support.

7. Never negate - don't repeat the opponent's message

The opposition's story that we're 'less than', or 'get special treatment', is strong. When we negate or myth bust the opponent's message, we only reinforce it. Say what we are, not what we are not, and always speak from our frame.



Photo by Andrew Arch, Creative Commons

66 TESTIMONIAL - AMELIA TELFORD

I heard Anat speak in 2015 about her research to shift people to support progressive issues - and I remember hoping for the day we could run a similar project here. A project that analyses the language we use, and finds the best messages to activate our allies and shift persuadables.

I'm so proud to see this research come together. These messages are an incredible resource, and I can't wait to see how we, as a movement, roll them out.

Amelia Telford, Bundjalung and South Sea Islander
National Director, Seed Mob



Ikara, Adnyamathanha Country

INTRODUCTION TO FRAMING



**A great message doesn't say
what's already popular –
a great message makes popular
what needs to be said.**

AUDIENCES

A message is like a baton – it gets passed on by people.

The vast majority of the population are either with us, or persuadable - meaning they don't have strongly held beliefs about us.

When we share compelling and inspiring messages with our base, they become motivated to share those messages with their persuadable friends, family and colleagues. This is how together we can reach and persuade the vast majority of the public.

We need to energise our base, persuade the middle and alienate our opponents.

Base

People who strongly support self-determination and justice. If we craft messages that resonate with our base, they're more likely to be shared and heard by persuadables. Our base includes two groups:

Us: The most important part of our base is us, First Nations advocates. Too often messages about us aren't by us, or with us, and so we don't share them.

Allies: There are millions of people who strongly support self-determination and justice and will share our messages.

Persuadables

The majority of people in the middle who don't have a firm view on us, self-determination and justice. They toggle between conflicting ideas - what we say, and what our opponents say. The ideas they hear the most, or most recently, are the ones they believe more.

Opponents

People who oppose self-determination and justice - they will never support us and we don't need them to. Messages that alienate our opponents are powerful, because they distance them from the majority. When our opponents actively oppose our messaging it can also help move persuadables to us.

ENGAGE THE BASE

Our messages need to resonate with our base - we are the ones who spread the message.

Too often our messages try to appeal to federal and state governments, and we lose the support of our most important people - us. That's why we need to think about our communities first.

Everything about us, with us, and by us. This is a matter of principle, but it is also a matter of impact.

We are the most credible spokespeople on our experiences, and people are more likely to believe us when we speak from our point of view.

When we hear messages that fail to engage our communities, and lack an understanding of our lived experience and the barriers we face, then we don't trust them and we tune out. And if messages don't resonate with our base, they won't spread to the people who need to hear them.

The base includes us, and our allies.

First Nations base

We are the most powerful and persuasive messenger. Messages need to resonate with us, so we share them.

We see ourselves as strong, resilient and persistent.

At every stage of the research we rejected the frame of 'vulnerable' and found deficit descriptions of our communities offensive. That is not how we talk about ourselves, that is how others talk about us.

We also rejected any message that wasn't grounded in an element of truth-telling, about the current injustices we face and who causes them. A persuasive message must speak to the present day injustices and who or what causes them, alongside a clear ask or solution.

Ally base

The rest of our base were very quick to adopt our language and ideas around community control, us having decision-making power and equity.

People who support us are always asking what they can do to help. The base are enthusiastic to share our history and educate their peers. By adding a clear ask to our messages, we can mobilise allies within our base. In turn, they help to persuade the people we can't reach.

PERSUADE THE MIDDLE

The middle is almost 60% of the population - so we can win big change by focusing our attention on these people.

In our research, the vast majority of persuadables believe both:

- “Aboriginal people and communities are strong and resilient”, which is a strength-based message.
- “Aboriginal people and communities are vulnerable, and need the federal government to step in and help them”, which is a deficit message.

They believe the second one more, because they’ve heard it more, but they hold both as true.

Persuadables often agree with whatever point you’re making, regardless of the strength or deficit frame. They move between different competing views, but ultimately they believe the messages they hear most.

Our job is to repeat messages in our frame, over and again, so over time we can move persuadables onto our side, and into our base.



The vast majority of people hold conflicting views about the world, and can toggle between the two ideas.

Like the picture here - you might see someone facing you, or you might see someone side-on.

ALIENATE OUR OPPONENTS

Too often, advocates craft messages to appease everyone, watering down our voice and compromising on our asks.

There are a percentage of the public (about 15%) who disagree with almost everything we say. Our opponents are a persistent group of people who don't believe racism exists. They don't want to give our land back, don't support truth-telling or veto powers, and believe we get handouts and special treatment.

We don't need these people, they will never support us. By trying to appease our opponents, we often don't say anything at all. Messages that fail to annoy our opposition also fail to ignite our base - leaving us disempowered and our messages unheard.

Our opponents work to undermine our rights and profit off our land. And the messages we put into the world are in direct contrast to theirs. That's why we must avoid mentioning, negating or even myth busting their frame - which does little more than reinforce their unhelpful frames.

By using messages that engage our base, persuade the middle and alienate the opposition, we:

- > Empower our base who can convince the public.
- > Argue on our terms - not those of our opposition. If our committed opposition registers disapproval at our words, we can rest assured we're advancing our ideas, not merely saying something bland, or worse, counterproductive.
- > Can position opponents like the outliers they are - out of touch with what the vast majority believe and desire.



FRAMING PRINCIPLES

WHAT IS A FRAME?

A frame is like a picture frame, it helps our audience focus on what we want them to think about, and excludes and obscures ideas outside it.

For example, when you think of the word 'restaurant', things like food, cutlery, tables and chairs fit in the 'frame'. But things like an elephant or a truck don't fit in the 'restaurant' frame. You'd be surprised or confused if an elephant or a truck suddenly appeared in a restaurant.

It's the same with messages.

When we add something that doesn't 'belong' to the frame, it becomes more difficult for the reader or listener to understand what's happening.

When we craft messages, we frame issues in a certain way. This helps our audience to understand the problem, solution and context, and see things the way we see them.



LEAD WITH SHARED VALUES

It's best to start messages with a shared value, such as care, being free to choose our own destiny, or knowing what's best for our communities.

By thinking about the problem you want to solve, who causes it, and why, you can determine **the shared value that is being violated**. A good message will lead with this value, and then follow up with the problem that's undermining it.

Always use a **universal shared value**, rather than one that only we hold.

For example:

- “Every person deserves respect”
- “We're all better off when we're free to choose our own path”
- “Taking care of one another is what community is all about”
- “Like everyone else, we know what's best for our community”

DESCRIBE WHAT WE WANT

Often we focus on what we're against, rather than what we want. Phrases like ‘stop racism’, ‘no more police brutality’ and ‘end homelessness’ focus on stopping something bad, and don't describe our end goal.

The existence of trauma and pain in our communities is undeniable, and there are lots of things we want to share. But we exist in a contested messaging landscape, and with a 24-hour news cycle, where we often only have a few moments to get our message across. We need to use this precious time to say what we want and what needs to change, not what we are against. When we fail to provide the answers to what we want, journalists, outside experts and governments repeat the opposition's deficit messaging and drown out our voices.

We're best placed to motivate our base and persuade the middle when we have clear demands for what we want, alongside stories of community strength and a vision for a better future.

BRING PEOPLE INTO THE FRAME: PEOPLE DO THINGS

Once we've stated our shared value, we need to share the problem we face.

When describing the problem, we must also say who is causing it.

If we talk about problems without an individual or a villain - for example 'incarceration rates are rising' or 'our communities are living in poverty' - people will assume **we** are the problem.

Sometimes it's hard to avoid abstract concepts that cause our problems, like 'the system', 'colonisation' or 'policies'. It's important to be as specific as possible. For example:

- "By taking away funding, the federal government chooses who does and doesn't have access to healthcare, based on the colour of their skin or where we live."
- "The state government has prioritised corporations and their profits over adequate housing for our community."
- "Police aggressively target our children."

To bring people into the frame - ask yourself these questions:

- Who caused this problem?
- Where did this problem come from?
- Who made a choice?
- Why are they doing it? Is it ignorance, racism or profit? All are credible motives.



How we talk about ‘government’

It’s important to name specific ministers or governments in our messages. If we talk about the generic ‘government’ causing our problems, people can become cynical of all government action and doubt that change on our issue is possible. This is a problem when we have clear asks or policy changes we’re trying to get people to support.

Pinpoint an exact minister or government that is causing the problem. This will motivate our base to see that change is possible. You can do this by:

- Naming the leader’s name, party or state before the government, for example, “the Rudd Government”, “the Coalition Government”, “the NT Government”.
- Naming a specific minister or department for example, “the health department is choosing...”, “the Education Minister’s decision...”.
- Naming the previous decision-maker who started or changed the legislation, for example, “John Howard did...”. This implies that the current government could undo the problem.
- If it’s a consistent problem, you could say “successive governments”, or “the current government continues to...”. This helps people to understand the current government could do things differently.



SHAPING YOUR MESSAGE

We know our strength and we have the solutions that are best for our families and communities.

We also have the tools to overcome our opponent's message that paints us as dysfunctional and vulnerable.

Here's a framework to shift the story away from our 'wounded bodies' and towards a strength-based message that puts a spotlight on the people and institutions who inflict harm on us.



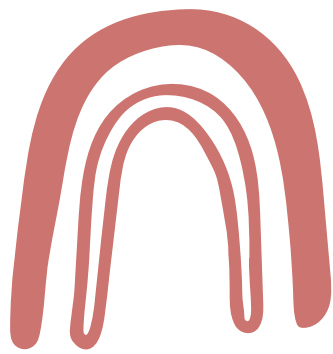
VALUE

Start with a **shared value** that hooks our audience. These are common sense statements that reasonable people agree with.



VILLAIN

Then describe **the villain** who is creating barriers for us, and name their intentions. Be as specific as possible - who is involved, what they are doing, and what's their motive?



VICTORY

Next, share your **victory**, or a clear ask and solution. Clear asks and solutions grounded in strength and capability are compelling and show we know what's best for our communities.



VISION

Wrap up your message with a **vision** of a positive, hopeful future. This provides hope to our base and persuadables who genuinely want better lives for First Nations people.

VALUE – VILLAIN – VICTORY – VISION IN PRACTICE

SHARED VALUE

“Everyone deserves **equal respect and dignity.**”

“People are better off when they’re **free** to set their own course.”

“**Taking care of one another** is what community is all about.”

VILLAIN

“**The state government** took away funding from our services.”

“**Police** are targeting Aboriginal people.”

“**Mining corporations** are destroying our communities for profit.”

VICTORY

“Our communities thrive when **we’re in control.** We need everyone to stand with us and call for full funding of our community controlled services.”

“We need to change the Heritage Act so that Aboriginal people have **the right to veto projects** that will destroy our heritage.”

VISION

“Together, we can make sure everyone in our community has the things they need to **live well.**”

“With true justice, we can live in a society where everyone is treated with **respect and dignity.**”

EXAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POST

GetUp! 12 February 2020 ·

Water is life for Northern Territory communities. That's why Traditional Owners aren't backing down to Origin Energy who are planning to frack in the Territory.

“
Origin wants to come out here and frack on our land. We're trying to stop it because it's going to pollute the water in the area.
We got new generations growing up and they want to live in the land free of fracking.
Aunty Stephanie Roberts
Alawa Traditional Owner

Like Comment Share

1,035

Write something...

VALUE

VILLAIN

VICTORY

VISION

WHERE WE'RE AT: CURRENT FRAMING PRACTICES

The First Nations Message Research Fellows did a comprehensive analysis of how we currently frame our issues.

We selected 24 diverse issues to research including housing, health, land rights, climate justice, community-controlled services, representation, identity, remote communities, employment, January 26, systemic racism, truth and self-determination.

Fellows collected 3,400 phrases or sentences used by advocates, journalists, politicians and opponents. They scoured media, social media, policy papers, poetry, music and websites. Then analysed them for common language patterns, metaphors, and frames.

What emerged from the language analysis were some consistent messaging challenges. The good news is, they are easy to fix, and we will share more about how to do that throughout this guide.

DEFICIT LANGUAGE

Deficit language was pervasive and the strongest recurring theme through the messages analysed. We found advocates and allies are regularly communicating in the opposition's frame.

Deficit language reinforces white supremacy. It perpetuates the idea that our communities are vulnerable and dysfunctional.

While deficit is not the way we see ourselves, we use deficit language to appeal to people's morality. It is so human to think if we lay out all of the problems we face, then people will support us. But **problems don't persuade people**. Sharing our pain makes people turn away, and gets them to see us as less than human.

We need to share our truth in a way that's grounded in our strength, and motivates action.

See Recommendation 3 and 4 for more information on how to do this.



NEGATION

Negation is when we say what we are ‘not’ rather than what we ‘are’. We do this especially when we’re forced to rebut or myth bust the opposition’s frame.

The problem is, people don’t remember whether something we say is true or not. They only remember the association.

- > We say “our families are not dysfunctional”
They hear *families* and *dysfunctional*.
- > We say “Aboriginal people are not innately criminal”
People remember *Aboriginal people* and *innately criminal*.

People forget small words like ‘no’ and ‘not’ and remember only the big words.

By associating our communities with something we’re ‘not’, we’re doing the opposite of what we intend. We are reinforcing the opponent’s story.

It’s important we **never negate** the opponent’s frame. Instead, we need to learn the art of reframing, so we’re always speaking from our power.

EMBRACE	REPLACE
“Our families take care of one another.” “Like all families, we love our children.” “Community-run services help keep our families strong and together.”	“Our families are not dysfunctional.”
“Police target our families because of the colour of our skin.” “The justice system we have now is like an exceptionally difficult maze, with lots of entrances, but not many exits—and lots of dead ends.” “When kids make mistakes, what they need is support and guidance, not being targeted by police and locked in prison.”	“Aboriginal people are not innately criminal.”

PASSIVE VOICE

Messages that are passive fail to name an active agent - who is causing the problem. When we state problems without an individual who causes it, our audience fills in the blanks.

If it's unclear who is causing the problem, people will conclude that we are.

We say “the gap in health outcomes is widening”.

Our audience concludes we are the problem. There is some innate weakness or inferiority in us making our health outcomes worse.

Stating problems without making clear who causes them, reinforces the deficit story. Naming a specific person is one of the most powerful ways to overcome deficit framing.

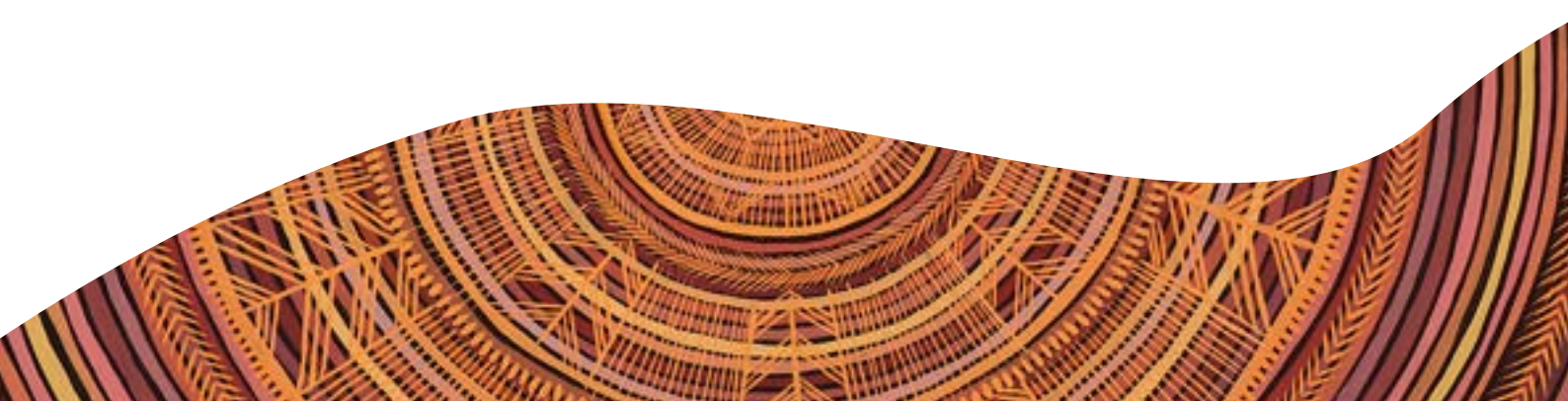
EMBRACE

“It’s not fair that the federal government chooses to provide health services to only some people, and our communities have to go without.”

“It is racist for the federal government to not provide the same level of healthcare to smaller Aboriginal communities as to major cities, and we’re getting sicker and dying earlier because of it.”

REPLACE

“The gap in health outcomes is widening.”



HEDGING

Hedging language is cautious and vague. It waters down our messages, and undermines confidence in what we are saying. It makes us seem untrustworthy at worst, or wishy-washy at best.

Hedging is the adding of unnecessary words like ‘we seek to’, ‘we believe’, and ‘we aim to’ throughout our messages.

For example, ‘we set our own course’ is a more assertive and believable message than ‘we aim to set our own course’.

Hedging is easy to remove, and makes our messages shorter.

EMBRACE	REPLACE
“We will...” “Do...” “Ensure...”	“We strive towards...” “We work towards...” “We may...”
“We need quality healthcare”	“We need access to quality healthcare”

Macarthur River, **Gundanji Country**

THE RESEARCH

An aerial photograph of a forest with a white, rounded rectangular text box overlaid in the center. The forest is divided into two distinct sections: a lush green forest on the left and a sparse, brownish forest on the right. The text box contains three paragraphs of bold, orange text.

Effective messages must resonate with us first, because we are our best messengers.

We want to share messages that use our voice and speak our truth.

At each stage of the research process, we developed and tested messages with First Nations advocates.

OUR RESEARCH PROCESS

1. Language analysis

2. Qualitative research

3. Quantitative research

LANGUAGE ANALYSIS

The research started with **24 interviews** and a survey of **82 First Nations people** to help us understand current frames and messages. This showed how we talk about self-determination, justice and our vision, in our own words.

The First Nations Message Research Fellows then did a comprehensive language analysis of how our issues are framed.

We collected 3,400 phrases from across 24 issue areas - messages shared by our organisations, allies, governments, corporations and people who oppose us.

We analysed the language patterns, frames and metaphors to give us an understanding of:

- How advocates talk about us, the problems we face, and solutions.
- How those who oppose us talk about us, the problems we face, and solutions.
- What's promising and problematic in our messages.
- Questions for further research.

This informed the next stage of research - how audiences respond to messages for self-determination and justice.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

We conducted nine focus groups online from July to September 2020 to research how audiences understand self-determination and justice.



**TWO WITH
FIRST NATIONS
ADVOCATES**



**THREE WITH
OUR BASE**



**THREE WITH
PERSUADABLES**



**ONE WITH
OPPONENTS**

Each focus group ran for two hours. Focus groups were held in Fremantle, Melbourne, Penrith, Cronulla, Lismore, Cairns, Townsville and Darwin. We chose a mix of regional, metro and locations with both low and high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

In these focus groups we put forward a series of messages we'd developed. We then asked questions to gauge beliefs, understanding and barriers to supporting us.

We adapted the messages throughout the process, in response to feedback from the First Nations advocate focus group.

The focus groups gave us a strong understanding of:

- The beliefs our base, persuadables and opponents hold.
- How far we can push audiences to support self-determination and justice.
- The barriers to gaining support.
- The huge divides between First Nations advocates, base and persuadables - and some promising ideas for how to bridge them.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH



We finished the research with a quantitative survey in May 2021 to test messages that work. A representative sample of 1,500 adults living in Australia and 200 First Nations people completed the 15 minute survey.

We were testing how our base, persuadables and opponents respond to the refined messages. To separate people into these groups, we tested support for statements including “we need more Aboriginal people in leadership roles in all sectors” and “Aboriginal people should have the final say on what does and does not happen on their land”.

We found:

26%

Base

Our base tends to be university educated, vote Greens and ALP, younger (18-34 years old), and more likely to speak a language other than English at home.

59%

Persuadables

Persuadables largely reflect the demographics of the general population.

15%

Opponents

Opponents are much more likely to be older (aged 50+), vote Coalition and One Nation, live regionally, in WA and Queensland, and be of European cultural background.

The quantitative survey gave us an understanding of:

- Some effective messages that engage the base, persuade the middle and alienate the opposition.
- How to overcome some of the messaging challenges effectively.
- How our problems, barriers, asks and solutions are viewed by different audiences.

GROUND-TRUTHING WITH FIRST NATIONS ADVOCATES

Before we compiled this report, we shared the results with First Nations advocates to get feedback. We wanted to make sure that the messages resonate and the recommendations are useful.



THE GOOD NEWS

Positive signs from the research give us a lot to be hopeful about.

STRENGTH-BASED MESSAGING WORKS

Almost all the messages people hear about us are in the deficit. Yet, as soon as we start telling our stories of strength and capability, they trust these messages.

Our strength builds credibility and support for our demands of self-determination and justice.

During the survey, audiences heard 10 minutes of strength-based messaging. Over this time, their support for the statement “Aboriginal people and communities are strong and resilient” jumped 15% points. That’s huge and shows it works!

We can reclaim our strength and capability, and drown out messages of deficit. From the land rights movement, to calls for Royal Commissions, our messages in the past have come from a place of strength.

The resurgence of these narratives and messages means we currently have a national spotlight on some of our issues. This is a great place to start.



Strength-based messaging at Seed Mob

It was so good to be part of the First Nations Messaging Fellowship and have dedicated time to think about the way we talk. Learning alongside others, and each having similar realisations that what we say influences how people get involved or support us, was really amazing.

For me, what stood out most was the way we, at Seed Mob, use hedging language. Now I rethink what I say. I understand the importance of owning the moral high ground and speaking with confidence when we say we're the experts, we know best for our communities, and we're strong in our leadership - because it's true. Indigenous people need to be at the forefront of the climate movement.

At Seed Mob we've always had a strength based approach to how we talk about what we do and always try to avoid the deficit. This was reinforced for me during the Fellowship.

I use the lessons all the time in my messaging, whether it's writing a grant, a social media post or a video script. For example, here are some of the lines from a recent video we did. We start from our leadership:

“ We are the first scientists, the oldest continuing culture, we've defended mother earth for thousands of generations... We follow in the footsteps of our ancestors, fighting for country, for culture and our future.

We also name who is causing the problems we face, and we demonstrate that everyone needs to stand with us:

“ Mining giants are paying politicians to stand in our way but what we have that they don't have is each other... It's time for everyone, everywhere to stand up. We know what to do, it's time for you to follow our lead and together we can build a future worth fighting for.

Amelia Telford, Bundjalung
National Director, Seed Mob

THE GOOD NEWS CONT...

Self-determination is sticky

People, particularly the base, are very quick to pick up the idea of self-determination.

We didn't use the technical term 'self-determination' in focus groups. Instead we used plain language like 'community control' and 'final decision-making'. Once they heard these phrases, they started repeating them. This shows it is a sticky idea and will spread through the base.

Base and persuadables both strongly support solutions that put our communities in charge.

It's worth noting their support disappears when they think it causes segregation (discussed further below).

People are with us and everyone wants to be better (even opponents)

Across all the focus groups, it was clear that people want to support us, and want to avoid being racist. Whenever someone said something offensive or racist, the rest of the group moved away from them. They tried to distance themselves, and would actively challenge what the person had said.

We ground our messages in shared values that everyone agrees with. So when our opponents disagree, they sound more fringe and push persuadables closer to us.


Persuadables support our demands and leadership

When we made our demands clear, persuadables were much more likely to support us.

The majority of persuadables supported the following asks: "representation in leadership roles", "veto power over decisions that affect our communities and country", and even "land back". This is a strong foundation to start from. As we lean into our strength and capability, and have clear asks for our audiences, support will only grow.

People accept historic injustice


Across the board - from base to opponents - people acknowledged our history of injustice. When we shared stories of massacres, invasion or removal from country, people usually accepted them as true. They did find historic injustice uncomfortable, and were quick to move to guilt and defensiveness. Persuadables and our base also accept we need to hear these truths to move forward together.



Equity is a strong frame


All audiences respond well to 'equity' messages when we describe them in simple ways. Equity simply means meeting people's differing needs.

For example, when building support for resourcing community controlled services, equity helped. We presented it as having “the same access to services and resources as other Australians”. It was even better when we shared a familiar analogy: “The state government funds a flying doctors service to provide services to those who live far from GPs and hospitals”. When people are further away, it makes sense that more funding is needed to meet people's needs.



People recognise our connection to country

All groups recognise our connection to country, culture and values as important. They understand our connection to country as something special about us and our culture. The base also understands that when governments and corporations disrupt our connection to country, it harms our wellbeing.



Our values and knowledge are seen as a strength

Encouragingly, many people support the idea that our people, culture and values should be at the heart of policy decision-making.

People understood the value of our commitment to caring for one another. Our expertise was particularly referenced around land management. This was front of mind, as the focus groups were held soon after the 2019 bushfire season.

THE MESSAGING CHALLENGE

There are some big messaging challenges we need to overcome so our messages resonate with our communities and persuade the middle.

Deficit

The deficit frame is everywhere - it's the dominant way that all audiences understand us. We're seen as 'a broken people' in need of outsiders to step in and help us get back on our feet. That is paternalistic, and not how we see ourselves.

Deficit language is so entrenched in the way we are described. Phrases like "over represented in cases of family violence", "dying younger", "living in poverty", "Australia's most vulnerable communities" or "world's most incarcerated people" are all over campaign materials, websites and in the media.

Base, persuadables and opposition all believe the deficit - that we are less than, and not capable. Opponents say things like "they won't make good choices", while our base say more paternalistic things like "we shouldn't set them up to fail".

It's time to reclaim our strength, leadership and capability.

When we had conversations with First Nations advocates, deficit language disappeared. Our communities reject deficit language.

We see and speak of ourselves as strong, persistent, resilient, knowledgeable and capable. We need to bring this way of talking into our messages to the public.

At its core, self-determination is about First Nations people being in control. That means setting agendas on our terms, making decisions, running services by and for our people, and shaping the future of the country as a whole.

Conceptually, self-determination only makes sense to others if they think of us as strong and capable people.



Describing problems, without invoking deficit

We need to describe the problems we face by describing how we are overcoming those difficulties. **That is, we need to focus on our strength *despite* the unfair barriers we face and the people or policies that cause them.**

Guilt

Truth-telling on historic injustice makes persuadables feel guilty and defensive. If we only tell them the brutal facts of the past, they get stuck in inaction. Persuadables have very limited understanding of the current injustices we face. And don't understand how historic injustice leads to the impacts we experience today. **We need to include truth-telling in our messages, but we need to quickly pivot to our ask.** This helps persuadables move through their guilt to action.

Excluding us

Too many messages don't resonate with our communities. We reject deficit language that paints us as vulnerable. When we hear messages that paper over the brutal truths of historical and current injustice, or the real problems our communities experience today, we don't trust them. It leaves us feeling sceptical of the solution. **Messages must resonate with us and are most powerful when spoken from our lived experience.**

Fear of separation

All audiences were uncomfortable with the idea of putting decisions exclusively in our hands. They think it would lead to separation from the 'rest of Australia' or segregation. The base and persuadables were saddened by the idea of 'us' and 'them'.

People want a united Australian community where we all work together to build a better future for everyone - and are wary of anything that appears to promote segregation.

By including a way for our audience to support us, even if it's just listening or standing beside us, we can dissipate this fear and build a sense of collective 'we' (see Recommendation 5).

THE MESSAGING CHALLENGE CONT...

Opponent's story is strong

It is very important we don't negate the opposition story.

Myth busting, for example, 'we do not get special handouts' or 'I never got a free car', doesn't work - it reinforces the opponent's frame. The messages people take away from these statements are: 'Aboriginal people get special handouts' and 'they all got free cars'. **Do not engage on opposition terms, walk away from these discussions or reframe the debate back to your terms.**

The opponent story also says that we are a small minority that is creating division by focusing on race. They call us 'an elite' and when we call out racism, they say we're divisive and creating 'reverse racism'. We can combat this by creating a collective 'we' (see Recommendation 5) and starting messages with a shared value that shows we are aligned with broader society (see Recommendation 1).

Underpinning the opponent's story are some pervasive ideas that came up frequently in focus groups. First, that we are genetically inferior, which is the foundation of racism, and unfortunately reinforced by deficit language. Similarly, the idea of the 'noble savage'. Focus groups regularly brought up assimilationist ideas that we've assimilated, and lost all connection to culture, or that we've 'rejected' dominant society and are 'true' or 'traditional' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. People said if we were both practising culture and living in modern society, we were somehow 'double dipping'.

We must not unintentionally reinforce these ideas. For example, the term "remote community" makes us seem far away (both in space and time). Instead, replace it with "Aboriginal communities" or "[name of] community". Wherever possible, also communicate the diversity of our modern lives - such as, "Aboriginal people living in the bush, towns and cities".

People don't understand what self-determination is

Most people don't understand what self-determination is. Big concepts like colonisation, systemic racism, sovereignty and even equity, go over most people's heads.

We need to unpack these big concepts and put them in simple terms. As soon as we used words like “community control”, “final decision-making power”, or “steer our own course” to describe self-determination, the base were quick to repeat these ideas (see Recommendation 6).

Framing self-determination as special

The suggestion that some groups in our society should have special and unique rights and access doesn't sit well with many people, especially our persuadables. Granting special rights and privileges to one group clashes with the belief that many people hold – that everyone should be treated equally and have the same opportunities and access to the things they need to live well.

Rather than framing self-determination as a special or unique right held only by First Nations people, we need to be careful to instead talk about removing the unfair barriers that target us and stop us from being able to live our lives freely, as everyone deserves to do.

Limited knowledge about us

Most people don't know much about Aboriginal people. The vast majority of Australians haven't met an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person, so media stereotypes and messages shape their views. This gives us an opportunity to fill the void with rich stories of our strength and leadership.

While most people (even opponents) were generally comfortable acknowledging past atrocities, they knew very little about current injustices. Many people within our base reflected that it was only as adults that they became aware of these historic truths. They suggest that this lack of knowledge is why the current situation we face is incomprehensible to most Australians.

For example, persuadables in focus groups were mostly ignorant about what the Black Lives Matter protests were about in Australia. They hadn't heard of the ongoing police brutality and rates of deaths in custody for our people. And they couldn't draw the parallels between why people are protesting in the United States and why we're protesting here.

Kaurareg Country

**HOW WE WIN
SUPPORT FOR
SELF-DETERMINATION
AND JUSTICE**

Photo by Danny De Hek, Creative Commons

An aerial photograph of a tropical coastline. In the foreground, a vibrant turquoise river winds through dense green vegetation. The middle ground shows a rugged, forested hillside leading down to a white sandy beach. The ocean is a deep, clear blue, with two small, rocky islands visible in the distance. The overall scene is bright and scenic, suggesting a remote island location.

We are strong and capable is a foundational concept for supporting self-determination.

Together we can shift public discourse and bring the majority of people to support our asks. This chapter outlines our seven messaging recommendations.

1. START WITH A SHARED VALUE

When we start our messages with a shared value, we bring the audience along with us.

People primarily form their opinions and make decisions based on values, emotions and identity, not facts.

If we start our messages with problems, our audiences get fatigued. Because we experience injustice and trauma first hand, we tend to amp up the problems in our communications. But problems alone don't help us motivate the base to act, or persuade the middle.

Starting with a shared value can help create empathy and connection. For example, most people can't imagine that they could ever be subject to income management. So starting with a shared value can help them jump into our shoes for a moment.

Here are some examples:

Everyone should be treated with **respect**, regardless of their skin colour, gender or postcode. But today, our federal government is segregating and targeting our communities. Their policies control where we can go, what we can do and what we buy.

Every person wants to be able to go to their **family** when they need help. But today the federal government chooses where we can go and who we can see. They control which shops we can spend our money at, stopping us from being able to travel to see family.

We are better off when we are **free** to make the choices that are best for us. But today, the federal government decides who does and doesn't get to choose the food they buy or the shops we can visit, based on the colour of our skin.

Everyone wants the **freedom** to choose where they spend their money. But today, the federal government targets our communities, and controls where we can shop and what we can buy, based on the colour of our skin



EMBRACE

“Everyone should be able to go to a hospital when they or their loved ones are sick.

But the federal government and health minister are choosing who has to travel further and who has to pay more for healthcare, based on the colour of our skin.

When our loved ones get sick they don't get the healthcare they need and are dying younger.”

REPLACE

“Our communities are dying younger and getting sicker.”

(There's no agent causing this problem, so people will assume we are innately sicker. In focus groups, people stated that we must be genetically sicker or weaker.)

2. RECLAIM OUR STRENGTH

We can quickly shift people to believe we are strong and capable.

A large majority of people are open to strength framing - but they haven't heard it much before. They've been bombarded with vulnerability frames, and repeat them.

When we exposed persuadables to 10 minutes of strength-based messaging in the dial test, their support for the statement **“Aboriginal people are strong and capable” increased by 15% points.**

This is huge - and shows strength framing works.

We need to share many stories about our strength and capability, so the majority change the way they view us.

It's time to bombard the public with stories of our strength and leadership.

Rather than making claims based on exceptionalism, the key is to ground it in a universal truth. The message, in a nutshell, is “First Nations people are strong and capable. We make our own decisions about what's best for our people and for country”.

Examples of strength and leadership include:

- Stories of leadership about community-controlled services or early responses to Covid-19.
- Everyday people telling stories that demonstrate “we are strong despite current injustices”.
- Phrases like “we know what's best for us”, “community knows best” and “we have the solutions”.



EMBRACE	REPLACE
“We are strong and capable”	“We are vulnerable, we are broken”
“We need your solidarity” “We’ve got this” “We’ve got us” “Stand with us, hear us, support our leadership”	“We need your help”
“We know best” “65,000 years of wisdom and leadership” “We are strong despite current injustices” “Our people and our culture are strong and resilient and, just like everyone else, we thrive when we can set our own course” “We make our own decisions about what’s best for our people and for country”	“Aboriginal people are vulnerable and need the government to step in and help them” “The current situation for a lot of Aboriginal people and their communities feels hopeless”

SPEAK FROM OUR VOICE

We best speak from our strength when we speak from our voice and lived experience. We need to bring ourselves into the centre of the story, rather than othering us. We should say “we” not “they” when referring to us.

We are the most credible voice on our issues.

We found the base and persuadables responded really well to a First Nations speaker, speaking in first-person, whereas opponents dialled down stronger to the voiceover than they did to the same message in written form. It seems that a strong message delivered from our voice is antagonistic to opponents, so we can alienate them just by opening our mouths.

For allies or organisations, you can include our voice (with permission) by including direct quotes from First Nations spokespeople, or including us as spokespeople or narrators.

GetUp case study: Switching to the First Nations voice

Since we launched GetUp over a decade ago, we've had more than a million members sign up, built a huge social media following and engaged thousands of active volunteers - everyday people taking daily action on the issues they cared about.

Through our work, a significant proportion were exposed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, politics and campaigns for the first time. In the beginning, members were resistant to our positioning and narratives, any communication would elicit thousands of responses and feedback, rarely supportive - our action rates were in the tens and hundreds, it was crushing.

We persisted and spent a lot of time researching and networking with local and global advocates working on comparable issues from other First Nations, refugee, asylum seeker and black campaigns. Through this, we learnt valuable insights into narrative development, values shifting, education and persuasive messaging.

We implemented and tested so many things, and a large part of that work was developing a 'First Nations voice' for our work - pivoting from positioning First Nations people as the subject being spoken about, to First Nations people voicing our messages and communications as the subject expert.

Instead of speaking about 'First Nations cultures and communities', we now speak about 'our cultures and communities'. When we say 'we', we're talking about ourselves.

Through that, we've connected our members with actual people, championing First Nations people as the heroes of our own stories, instead of dehumanising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who need 'help' and 'fixing' by outside campaigns.

We've created authorising voices through our work, building trust and shifting the narrative amongst our members to align more closely with the goals and aspirations of the First Nations Justice team. We have tough conversations, lead with ambitious asks and our members respond.

Our work is now one of the fastest growing campaign areas in terms of regular members taking consistent actions and new members coming in. The icing on the cake is that a large chunk of those members are First Nations people - this shift is transforming and diversifying our base.

Larissa Baldwin, Widjabul Wia-bul/Bundjalung Nations
First Nations Justice Campaigns Director, GetUp





DON'T FRACK
BORIGINAL LAND RIGHTS



DON'T

BORROLOOLUN SAYS NOT TO...

WATER IS LIFE

KEEP WATER CLEAN

BAN

KEEP WATER CLEAN

Deficit to strength: case study

The best way to create empathy is by sharing stories in an authentic voice and by showing that we, as First Nations people, are already leading the way. It's important to make sure we are seen as leaders - not as people who need help, but people who are doing amazing things.

I took the First Nations Message and Communications Fellowship as an Executive Producer at the ABC. Since then, the biggest impact has been in the headlines I commission. For me, it was really important to start changing the headlines of my stories to focus on the positive outcomes in the work that was being done, rather than on the deficit messaging that those headlines were repeating.

The ABC also recognised that a lot of our stories about Indigenous people focused on the disadvantage and struggle that was making news. The focus is now to do more reporting on stories of self-determination and leadership coming from First Nations communities.

Since bringing in this new focus, we've seen more engagement with our stories from audiences. They can recognise the authenticity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people sharing our own stories, being seen as leaders and talking about the amazing things we are achieving.

Here's an example headline change:

TO	FROM
Dr Charles Perkins Prize: Winners encourage others to pursue academic dreams	Dr Charles Perkins Prize: Indigenous student overcomes disadvantage and homelessness to succeed

It's when we speak in our own voice - showing that we're already doing the work and leading the way - that our messages and stories have the most impact.

As black fellas, we're sick of other people telling us what's good for us. We know what's good for us, now let us do it.

Kelly Williams, Bundjalung

Indigenous & Diversity HR Case Advocate, People & Culture / Deputy Chair ABC Bonner Committee / Co-Lead ABC & First Nations Media Australia Strategic Partnership



3. NAME THE UNFAIR BARRIER WE FACE

“Our messages need to stop shining the gaze on our wounded bodies, and instead shine the gaze on the bullets fired at us, and the people firing them.”

– Messaging Fellowship participant

Taking action for self-determination revolves around equity, not ‘special treatment’. We need to take action to remove unfair barriers that have been placed in our way.

Lower life expectancy, higher incarceration rates and removal of our children are real issues that we need to talk about. But when we talk about problems without who or what is causing the problem, then people assume there is something inherently or innately wrong with us.

This is common across all issues. When poor people are discussed without ever naming the unfair policies that keep people trapped in poverty, then audiences assume there must be something innately wrong with them. This leads to ideas like ‘they don’t work hard’, so they ‘deserve’ it.

The same is true for us. We are talked about in the media as vulnerable so much that base and persuadables genuinely thought we are genetically sicker or weaker.

We are strong, and we persist despite the unfair barriers put in our way.

We need to start naming these barriers that cause the problems, in order to turn the gaze away from us, to the perpetrators that harm us.

It’s important to frame the barrier in a way that avoids activating the opponent’s frame. The most effective idea put forward by our opponents is that we get ‘special treatment’, which is unfair and harmful to the unity of the nation. A large proportion of persuadables and even some base agree when this idea is put to them.

We can turn that around by saying we’re **removing an unfair barrier** that is disproportionately put in our way. Therefore it requires targeted action to redress this unfair situation.

We’re asking for equity. We don’t want our audience thinking we’re getting something ‘extra’ or ‘special’, instead we are righting wrongs.

EMBRACE

“Aboriginal land and our people were **stolen** and we want our land back.”

Everyone knows stealing is wrong, so handing land back is righting a wrong.

REPLACE

“Aboriginal people have a **special connection** to country, that is why we need legislation that protects our **unique rights.**”

This invokes special rights.

WHO IS CAUSING THE HARM?

When describing the barrier, we need to name the perpetrators - the people who have put the barrier in place or who keep it there.

By naming who is choosing to cause harm, we bring people into the frame. When we frame problems without saying who is responsible, it suggests harm happens without anyone causing it. For example - ‘racism exists, independent of people’s thoughts and actions, and there’s nothing we can do to change it’.

We want to follow the ‘people do things’ rule. It helps people understand that the problems we face are made by people, and can be solved by people.

Sometimes, it’s really hard to narrow down who is responsible to a single person. We are experiencing the impacts of centuries of colonisation, unfair policies and racism.

The more we name a specific person, minister, or even ‘X government’, our audiences will understand people in power make choices that harm us. It also makes clear the solution, and helps people imagine how they can contribute. By naming a clear perpetrator, it helps our audiences move from feeling guilt and blame, to action.

WHY PROVIDE A CREDIBLE MOTIVE?



Provide a motive for perpetrators' actions. When we include a credible motive for why someone is choosing to do bad things, it makes our messages more believable.

Providing a motive helps our audience make sense of why perpetrators do what they do.

Persuadables agreement with the following statement jumped 10% points when we added a motive, shown in bold: "For years, the state government has been hurting Aboriginal people with their discriminatory policies that **enable corporations to profit off Aboriginal land**".

We tested three key motives during the research - they are all credible:

- 1. Ignorance** - this was the most credible motive we found. You could use it by including statements like "X government doesn't understand what they're doing". This also positions us as the experts, which we are.
- 2. Racism or discrimination** - racism and discrimination are equally credible motives. We recommend calling it for what it is: racism. You could include statements like "X Minister's racist policies".
- 3. Profit** - this was an equally credible motive to racism. That governments target or discriminate against us so that mining corporations can profit from our land. You could include statements like "X Minister has cut funding to housing, so mining corporations can come in and profit off our land".

You don't need a long rationale, even just one word like 'racism' can help people understand why something is happening. More generic motives, like 'governments discriminate against us to help the economy', don't work as well.

Putting the perpetrator and motive in the message structure:

- VALUE** Every family needs healthcare to enjoy our lives to the full.
- VILLAIN** Poorly funded and culturally insensitive health services run by outside 'experts' have meant many Aboriginal people have missed out on quality health care.
- VICTORY** Aboriginal run and controlled community health services work really well.
- VISION** With this approach we're seeing much healthier Aboriginal people and communities.

“

Australian society is ready for a fair go when it comes to First Nations people.

The support is there for addressing the issues that affect First Nations people. If we don't do it now, it's a lost opportunity.

We know that Australia's ready. They're ready for justice. We need to show that they can be a part of the movement for change when it comes to First Nations people.

Lara Watson, Birri Gubba

Indigenous Officer, Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)



Re-writing a deficit message

Here's how to rewrite a deficit message like "Aboriginal kids are more likely to drop out of school" using the strength-based message structure. If you don't have enough time or space to include all four points, drop the vision and keep the value, villain and victory.

First, name a shared **VALUE**:

- > Every kid should be safe at school.
- > No matter where we live, or who we are, **every kid should have access to a good education.**
- > Just like every family, we want our kids to do well at school and in life.

Then name the **VILLAIN**, or unfair barrier, including who is harming us and why:

- > **Ignorant teachers** leave Aboriginal kids feeling unsafe at school and more likely to leave without a full education.
- > The **racist curriculum** means our children are unsafe at school and more likely to leave without a full education.
- > Today our **government** chooses who does and doesn't get a good education, with funding that discriminates against our communities.

Include your **VICTORY**, by describing how Aboriginal strength and leadership can solve the problem:

- > When **Aboriginal teachers** are in the classroom, our children and all children have better learning outcomes.
- > When the curriculum includes **Aboriginal-led education**, all kids get a better education.
- > Our children thrive in **community-run schools.**

Finish with your **VISION** for a better future, ideally by including a collective 'we':

- > **We need to work together** for all kids to have an education that sets them up for the future.
- > When we have **community-led schools** our kids can learn safely and graduate with the talents and skills they need to thrive.
- > We all need to **support truth-telling and Aboriginal teachers** in all schools, so every student can get a full education.



“

As a participant in the First Nations Messaging Fellowship, I've learnt that in our messaging, it's important to create a new framework for our story in order to build a better future.

Until recently, we've been framing our issues in the 'double deficit' - but **our strength has always been about our people being resilient, and now we can use that agency to move forward in selling our own voices, not the narrative we've been sold in the past.**

June Riemer, Gumbaynggirr Dunghutti
Deputy Chief Executive Officer, First Peoples Disability Network (Australia)

4. COMBINE TRUTH AND ACTION

Combining truth and action is a powerful way to get support of our communities and persuadables.

First Nations advocates told us loud and clear the First Nations strengths frame by itself is not enough. Our messages also need to include truth, linking to recent and current injustices.

They also made clear that truth-telling involves white people acknowledging ongoing racism and opening their eyes to forms of power and violence.

For example, when we talk about community-controlled health services, we need to share why they exist - “state governments excluded us from health services, so we set up our own”.

It became clear in the focus groups that persuadables know very little about current injustices. Their perception is that injustice is historic and exists only in the past. When we bring up harms, they feel like they’re being blamed for past generations’ behaviour, and feel defensive about this. Feelings of guilt and defensiveness hold back persuadables from supporting our messages.

Our task is to ‘thread the needle’ to meet the needs of both our communities and persuadables, to share our lived experience, and help persuadables move from guilt to action.

To do this, we need to:

- 1. Name the current injustices we face**, or connect historic injustice to modern impacts.
- 2. Have a clear ask** or action that our audiences can do.

1. Naming current injustices

Our messages need to include truth-telling linked to current injustices or impacts. This means naming who put the barrier in place, or who is causing the harm.

Both base and persuadables understand that truth-telling helps all of us move forward together, and that truth-telling must translate into action. So combine your truth-telling with clear asks.

2. Include an ask or action

Guilt festers when there is no opportunity to atone. We can circumvent guilt by describing the actions we can take now to right past and present wrongs.

This shows people we're not asking for guilt, we're asking for action. We can say things like:

“While many people today are not to blame for past atrocities, we all have a responsibility to deal with the impacts now. Setting up places for people to hear and understand these truths would be a big step forward. Add your name here to support a national truth-telling commission.”

The research shows clear, simple, bold asks are effective. In the survey, the following statements garnered high levels of support from our base and persuadables:

“Aboriginal people should have the **final say** on what does and does not happen on their land.”

“Aboriginal people must have the **power to veto** business and government decisions that impact on Aboriginal people, culture, and country.”

By combining truth about current injustices, and clear asks, we can create persuasive messages. You will know best what you need from your audience. Including specific things they can do makes your message stronger, for example, showing up to a rally, signing a petition, donating, meeting their MP, volunteering or spreading the word.

Truth and action in a message

TRUTH

Everyone wants to be treated equally and free to live our own lives.

But right now, we have a justice system that actively works against Aboriginal people. Police actively target us in the streets, purely based on the colour of our skin. Our politicians have known this since the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

We need to fix this racist system so everyone is treated fairly. You can help by supporting our call for all of the Commission's recommendations to be implemented, right now.

With true justice for everyone, we can live in a society that works for all of us, where everyone is treated with respect and dignity, free to live our own lives.

ACTION



Recommendations for allies

Wherever possible, allies can best serve First Nations causes by taking the lead from First Nations people and elevating their voices.

There will also be times when allies need to speak up as themselves, as allies.

Phrases like “First Nations people know what’s best for their communities” and “we are standing with First Nations people by [doing X]” are helpful ways to **show your solidarity**.

It’s going to take more than First Nations people speaking up to shift the narrative, so please back us and share our messages loud and clear, in all types of forums, with as many people as you can.



5. CREATE A COLLECTIVE 'WE'

Bring your audience into the message, show there's a role for everyone to take action.

As First Nations advocates we constantly hear well-meaning people ask 'what can I do?' A central goal of our messaging is to point people to clear and specific actions we want them to take, now.

Our audiences need to feel included, welcome and part of a bigger community or movement for change. They also need to feel agency - capable of taking action to make a difference. Here, the tone is about bringing people along on the journey.

Persuadables balk at any hint of segregation. Our base and persuadables are saddened by the idea of an 'us' and 'them' and want to see a greater focus on togetherness.

In the survey, we saw stronger support from our base and persuadables when we included the idea of working together. For example: "The land we live on always was and always will be Aboriginal land, so we should work side-by-side with Aboriginal people and return land to traditional owners".

We can create a collective 'we' and bring our audience into the frame in different ways.

Start with a shared value that creates a universal 'we'

- "We all know and want what's best for our community."
- "We all do better when we're free to make choices in our life."
- "Just like parents everywhere, Aboriginal mums and dads want to have the final say about what is best for their kids."
- "Just like communities everywhere, our communities don't want people from outside telling us how to run things."

Describe ourselves in all our beautiful diversity

We need to break through the stereotype that we live very different lives in far away places. This only serves to create distance between us and our audiences. Instead, we can describe people living in their “homelands” (not “remote” communities) and add “and in towns and cities” or “living and working alongside more recent arrivals to this land”.

Create a collective ‘we’ when describing actions

- > “We all have a responsibility to...”
- > “We need to all hear our stories and...”
- > “Stand with us...”
- > “Work together to...”
- > “Together we can build...”
- > “Back us to...”

Note that the idea of a role for everyone to act requires some careful navigation. We need to emphasise that solutions are First Nations-led, with others acting in solidarity.

Use groups of three to bring your audience into the frame

Whenever we describe two groups, for example, ‘blackfellas and whitefellas’, or ‘First Nations and settlers’, people will automatically think we’re competing with each other. If you want to create a collective ‘we’, group people in threes, like:

- > “Whether your family’s been here 5 years, 5 generations or 5,000 generations...”
- > “... regardless of skin colour, gender or where you live.”
- > “First Nations, migrants and more recent arrivals.”

EXAMPLE COLLECTIVE 'WE' IN A SOCIAL POST



GetUp!

14 October 2020 · 🌐

The Federal Government is determined to bailout the dying gas industry - but that won't stop us.

Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities have stood up and said no to the aggressive plans to frack for oil and gas across the Northern Territory.

Politicians and corporations are working together to steamroll people on the frontlines who are standing up for precious water. But we know there are thousands of people around the country who are listening and hear the requests of Traditional Owners.

Thousand of people across the country are already calling out the Morrison governments dodgy plans to bailout this industry with our public money. Will you join us?

The collective 'we'



👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share

👍❤️👹 10,306

Write something...





6. EXPLAIN BIG CONCEPTS IN SIMPLE LANGUAGE

Many people don't know what self-determination, systemic racism or sovereignty mean. We need to use simple language to explain.

The general public has very little understanding of what self-determination is.

People find it easier to understand when we explain in simple language - like “final decision-making power”, “communities in control”, or “being free to make decisions for ourselves, family and community”.

Our base, in particular, are quick to repeat these concepts. It makes perfect sense that our communities should have control over our lives, and make decisions that affect us and country.

To explain big concepts in simple language, we need to:

- 1.** Say what we mean and provide tangible examples
- 2.** Paint a vision for what self-determination means
- 3.** Use helpful metaphors



1. Say what we mean and provide examples

When describing big concepts like self-determination, sovereignty, colonisation and systemic racism, say what you mean in simple language and wherever possible, provide tangible examples.

This helps people understand what we're saying, and will bring them along. It also stops persuadables being alienated by terms they don't understand or think of as 'woke'. Wherever possible, make your communications personal, tangible, visual and emotional. Use fewer statistics and avoid jargon.

SIMPLE LANGUAGE	TANGIBLE EXAMPLES
Self-determination	
"First Nations people in charge."	"Aboriginal people should have the final say on what does and doesn't happen on their land." "Aboriginal people must have the power to veto business and decisions by any level of government that impact on Aboriginal people, culture, and country." "We need to change the Heritage Act so Aboriginal people have the right to veto projects that will destroy our heritage." "We need the state government to stop stripping our communities of autonomy, and instead back community controlled services and decision-making."
"In the driver's seat."	
"We make the decisions."	
"Steer our own course."	
"Community controlled health or other services."	
"Being in charge of our own destinies."	
Systemic racism	
"X person targeting us based on the colour of their skin."	"State governments are locking Aboriginal people out of decisions, cutting services, and driving inequality in the very places where billions of dollars of wealth are being extracted by mining corporations." "Aggressive policing of Aboriginal children, controls put on what Aboriginal people can spend their pensions on, and discrimination when applying for jobs."
"Unfair policies that divide us based on who we are."	
"Racist policies that unfairly target people based on their colour."	



2. Paint a positive vision of self-determination

We want self-determination so our communities are free to live in the way we want to. When we have more control over decisions, all of society is better off.

This vision of self-determination and justice are so far outside the current discourse, but people can grasp it.

We can do this by painting a picture of what the future looks like when we have more power, equity and justice.

As a general rule, people respond to ‘more good things, not less bad things’. When we lead with our shared values and a positive vision of where we can go together, we’ll bring more people along.

EMBRACE	REPLACE
<p>“We want a society that works for all of us, not some of us.”</p> <p>“We want a better, fairer society led by our values of caring for everyone.”</p> <p>“We want everyone to be free to live their own lives.”</p>	<p>“We want self-determination.”</p>



Indigenous self-determination can offer more to settlers... Look what Blackfellas are protesting for, it’s a much more inclusive and caring society than has been built here since 1788.

Professor Chelsea Watego – Mununjali and South Sea Islander woman and academic at the University of Queensland; co-director of the Institute for Collaborative Race Research.

3. Use metaphors

Cognitive metaphors are incredibly powerful. They are how we understand complex and abstract ideas, like self-determination or racism.

We often understand abstract concepts as metaphors. For example, we liken concepts of the 'prison system', 'nation' or 'equity' to a direct experience, such as a 'cage', 'friendship', 'container', 'body' or 'hill'.

The metaphors we use to describe abstract ideas shape people's understanding of the problem and solution. And they are completely unaware of it happening.

Through all the language analysis we did, we found 30 metaphors to describe self-determination and justice. Each metaphor carries certain connotations that can be helpful or unhelpful to our cause.

The role of metaphors in reasoning

In a 2011 Stanford University study, researchers investigated how metaphors shape responses to crime policy.

Two groups were given reports about increasing crime rates in a city. The first group were given a report that metaphorically described crime as a 'virus infecting the city', while the report given to the second group described crime as 'wild beast preying on a city'. They were then asked to describe the best way to solve the problem they'd imagined.

The results revealed how metaphors profoundly influence how people viewed crime and possible solutions. When crime was framed as a 'virus', participants suggested investigating the root causes, implementing preventative measures, like vaccination, eradicating poverty and improving education. When crime was framed as a 'beast', participants proposed catching and jailing criminals and enacting harsher enforcement laws.

Even fleeting or seemingly unnoticed metaphors can have a powerful influence over people's perception of a problem and solution. For this reason, we need to embrace helpful metaphors, and steer clear of those that invoke the deficit frame or negative ideas about us.

Helpful metaphors

We can use metaphors that show problems are people made - and that together, we can fix them.

Of the metaphors we tested, **free**, **journey** and **build** were the most effective. Our base and persuadables responded positively to these metaphors throughout the research process.

Free - “People are better off when they are free to set their own course”, “when we are free to be who we are”.

Journey - “in the driver’s seat”, “move forward together”, “walk with us”, “to a better future”, “chart our own course”.

Build - “work together to build a better future for everyone”.

Notice that journey and build pair nicely with the idea of working together, which is a central desire of both our base and persuadables.

Also, the free and journey metaphors can work well in tandem, as in “free to set our own course”.

Use with caution

Body - We want to be careful when using body metaphors. We want people to know we are ‘strong’ and ‘capable’, not ‘hurt’ or ‘wounded’. The word heal can show a positive vision, as in “healing country” or “healing society”. But we want to be careful when we use the word heal to describe ourselves, as it can lead to deficit thinking, implying we are wounded or broken.

Unhelpful metaphors

For our purposes, unhelpful metaphors are ones that invoke the deficit frame, or give people the wrong idea of the concept we’re trying to share.

Black / dark - When everything bad is ‘black’ or ‘dark’ (‘our dark past’, ‘a black day for this country’) and everything good is ‘light’, ‘white’ or ‘bright’, this doesn’t bode well for us as bla(c)k people. We can use other words like ‘our brutal past’ and ‘a shameful day’ to avoid reinforcing the black/dark metaphor in a negative and evoking racist tropes.

Gap - A gap is something permanent and natural that widens over time. Conceptually it doesn’t make sense to close a gap. As a natural phenomenon, there are no humans in the frame of ‘gap’. Gap also invokes a natural hierarchy with one group of people superior to another. Without explaining the barrier about why the differences exist, people will assume we are innately inferior.

Cultural heritage campaign case study

This video script by the GetUp First Nations Justice team shows how to integrate the recommendations into a campaign message.

Unfair barrier

“Heritage Protection Acts are supposed to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage and sacred sites.

But for years, mining corporations and industry have been undermining and white-anting our legislation. The patchwork of state and territory legislation is leaving thousands of cultural heritage sites at risk. What we’ve seen at Juukan Caves is happening right across the country.

There is no legislation that can stop the destruction from happening again.

We need a Federal Act that is co-designed with Traditional Owners, meaning the people who know and have responsibility and custodianship over cultural heritage are in the room, making decisions about how to protect it. Any Cultural Heritage Act that doesn’t give Traditional Owners the right to veto, the right to say no, we don’t want our cultural heritage destroyed, isn’t worth the paper it’s written on.

Combine truth and action

Australia is home to the oldest continuing culture in the world. Cultural heritage is everybody’s business. For you and me that means we need to keep the pressure on, share this video, sign the video, and stand with Traditional Owners who are demanding the federal government legislate real cultural heritage protections.”

Collective ‘we’

Shared value

Reclaim our strength

Simple language for self-determination

7. NEVER NEGATE

Never repeat the opponent's message. We need to constantly tell our story. When we negate or myth bust the opponent's story, we only reinforce it.

We need to avoid statements that include 'not', otherwise we risk repeating what the opposition says.

When we say "we don't get special treatment" people remember the association of us and special treatment.

In the Uluru Statement, when we say "...we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people..." we connect our people with the concept of being innately criminal.

These two statements are doing the opposition's work for them.

We want to have our own powerful messages that the opponents feel like they need to myth bust and negate.

We can draw hope that this is possible by looking at the work done to reframe the narrative on people seeking asylum. You may remember the refugee movement used to constantly negate. They would say 'it's not illegal to seek asylum', and 'refugees are not criminals'.

That's because, similar to us, they were under attack from successive governments, so they were stuck in a defensive frame.

They got out of it - by doing a very similar message research project to this. As a movement they agreed to be very disciplined about their messages. They stopped myth busting, negating, and wouldn't comment on the opposition's frame, even when baited.

Instead, they led strong and powerful campaigns, using many of the techniques described here, like 'Bring them Here', 'Let them Stay', 'Kids Off Nauru' and 'Home to Bilo'. The Kids Off Nauru campaign was so effective at bringing persuadables to support the campaign, that the opposition started to negate.

The Daily Telegraph ran a front page story riffing off their message of 'stop the boats' with a headline 'Stop the Kids'. They were negating the base's story and it made them look outrageous and out of touch. By arguing in the movement's frame, they were getting more persuadables to join the base's side.

NAVIGATING CULTURE WARS



Culture wars pit one social or cultural group against another - which often forces us to communicate in the opposition frame. January 26 is an example of an issue that can easily descend into a culture war.

To date, framing of January 26 has been shaped by opponents. It's largely a debate around whether we should celebrate or not celebrate. But the binary 'to celebrate or not celebrate' doesn't serve us well. It obscures the conversation about our history, current injustices, our demands for justice, and reinforces guilt without naming the vision or ask needed to move people to action.

First Nations advocates have been effective at sidestepping this frame and reframing the conversation in our own terms.

Rather than rebutting the 'celebrate or not celebrate' frame, it's more effective to craft messages around specific narratives and demands, such as why we protest and asking people to listen to us.

We can do this by centring shared values, as opposed to 'this vs that'.



Arrernte Country

**MESSAGES TO
EMBRACE
AND REPLACE**



**Messages to engage our base,
persuade the middle and alienate
our opposition.**



**BLACK
LIVES
MATTER**

BRINGING OUR AUDIENCE ALONG

We need to put forward our values and frames loud and clear, and repeat, repeat, repeat until they are common sense.

In the survey we tested three best-practice messages in our own frames - including 'fair treatment', 'community knows best' and 'making our own decisions'. We also tested a deficit message used by our base, as well as an opponent message. All three advocate messages, set in our own frames, outperformed the opponent message.

Each follows the **VALUE > VILLAIN > VICTORY > VISION** format.



ADVOCATE MESSAGE: 'EQUAL TREATMENT'

'Equal treatment' was one of our most effective messages, because it taps into a universal value of equity.

**Collective
'we'**

**Shared
value**

Everyone deserves to be treated with equal respect and dignity.

But today, the federal government enacts a racist system that unfairly targets people based on their colour and blocks them from setting their own course. We have aggressive policing of Aboriginal children, controls put on what Aboriginal people can spend their pensions on, and discrimination when applying for jobs.

**Unfair
barrier**

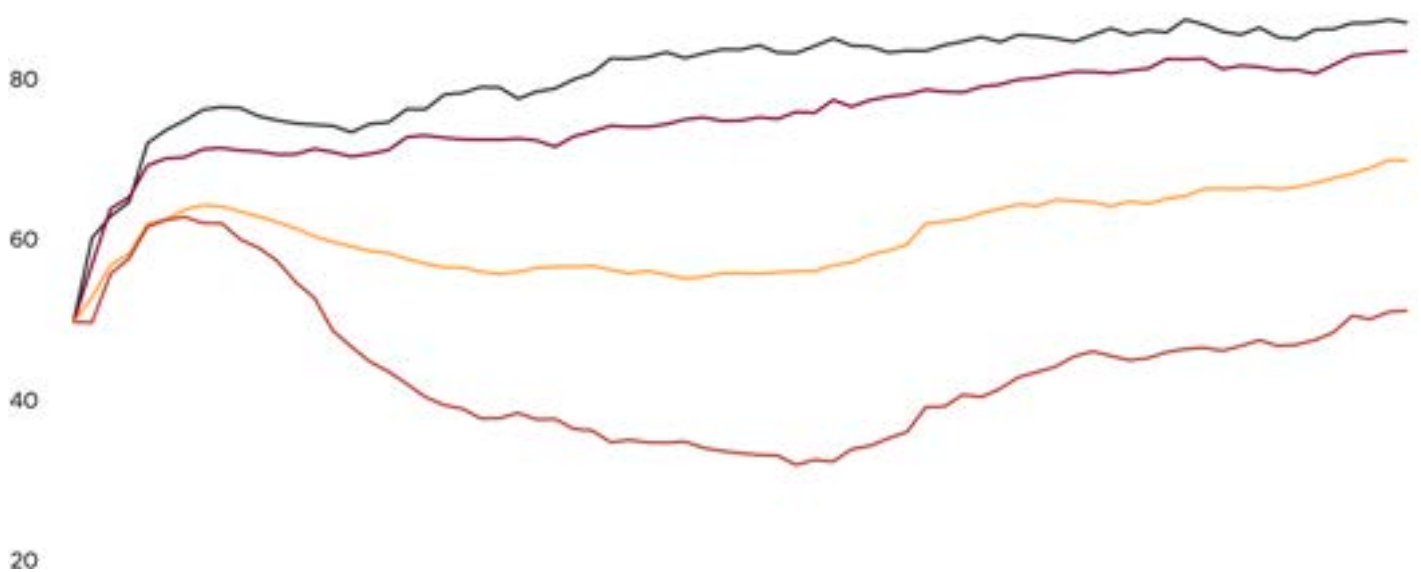
**Positive
vision
in our
own
frame**

We need to work together, whether we've been here for 5 years, 5 generations or 5,000 generations, to redesign things so it's fair for everyone.

**Combine
truth and
action**

With a system that reflects the values we all share, everyone, no matter who they are, can be treated equally.

Dial test results



— First Nations people — Base — Persuadables — Opposition

As you can see in the dial test, all audiences strongly agree with the value of respect and dignity, but the opponents quickly drop away when we start describing the unfair barriers.

Persuadables start rising quickly when we say: “We need to work together, whether we’ve been here for 5 years, 5 generations or 5,000 generations, to redesign things so it’s fair for everyone”.

ADVOCATE MESSAGE: 'COMMUNITY KNOWS BEST'

'Community knows best' is a strong message we can use to highlight the ignorance of governments, and show that we have the capability and knowledge to lead solutions for our community.

Shared value

People are better off when they are free to set their own course.

Journey metaphor for self-determination

Unfair barrier

Yet the government keeps locking us out of decisions and forcing their policies on us, insisting they know what's best for Aboriginal people.

Reclaim our strength

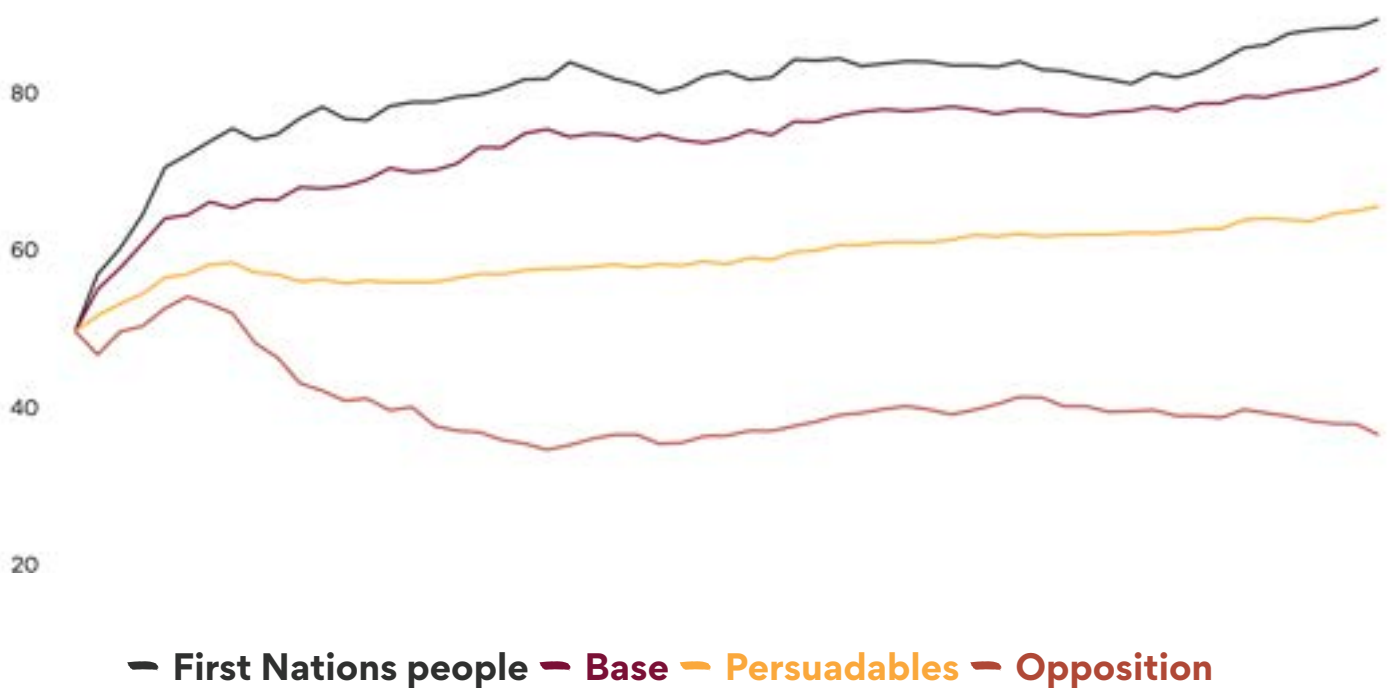
But we know what our communities need. 40 years ago, when government health services were failing us badly, we took the driver's seat and set up Australia's first community health centres. Today, our services are the best in the country and the government models their health, legal aid and childcare systems on ours.

Our people are strong and resilient and when we are free to choose our own path, the whole country benefits.

Combine truth and action

Positive vision in our own frame

Dial test results



This is a great example of energising the base, persuading the middle and alienating the opposition.

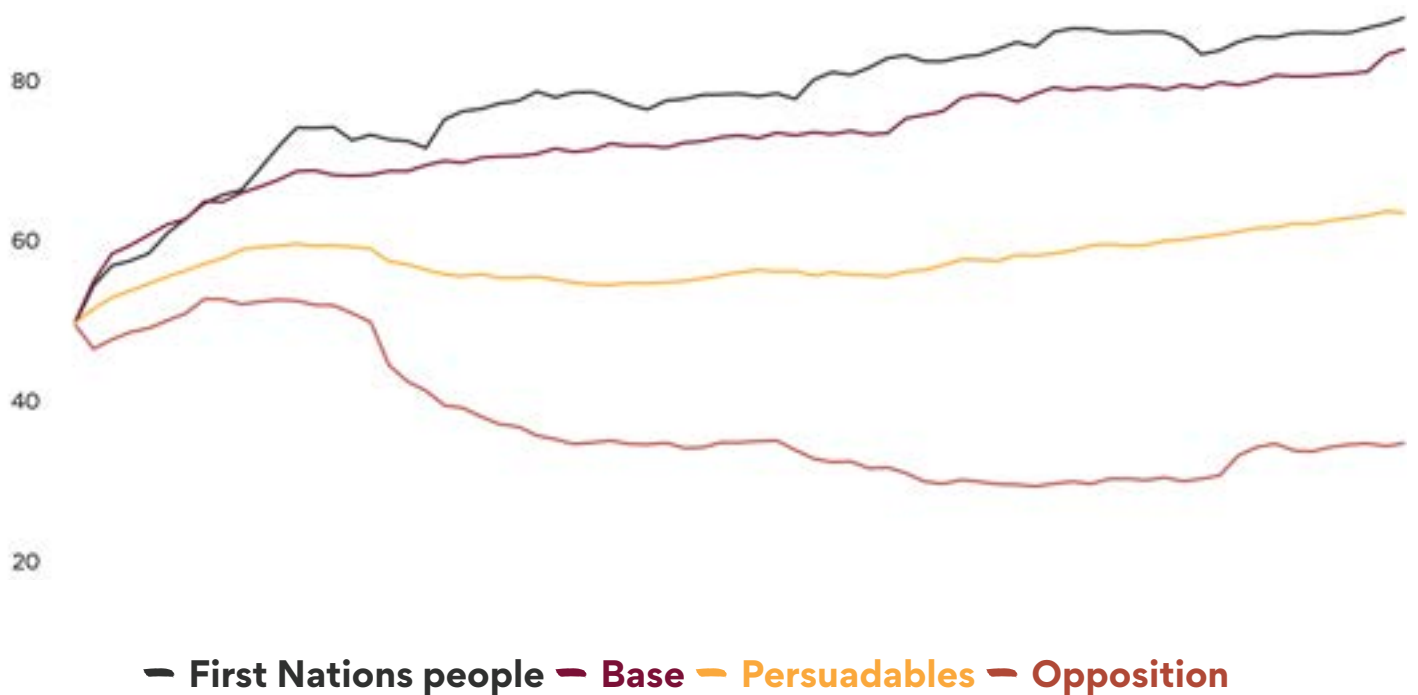
The persuadables respond particularly well to stories of strength and leadership. They also dialled up strongly to the statement “when we are free to choose our own path, the whole country benefits”.

ADVOCATE MESSAGE: 'MAKING OUR OWN DECISIONS'

This message is quite simple. Self-determination is 'making our own decisions'.



Dial test results



Right from the start, this message alienated the opposition. They dialled down strongly and barely agreed with anything.

The persuadables are particularly supportive of the last two paragraphs - with a clear ask that's grounded in our strength.

DEFICIT MESSAGE

We tested our messages against the deficit, status-quo message. This is a very persuasive message still, because people have heard it so many times.

The more people hear a message, the more they believe it. Because everyone has been describing us in the deficit for so long, everyone dials up, and believes it, even us. It makes it very difficult to build a case for self-determination and more community control.

We found people are extremely receptive to strength-based messages, and we can defeat the deficit message by using the recommendations above.

The 'who' and 'motive' are unclear

Taking care of one another is what community is all about.

But the government isn't taking care of us. Since colonisation, Aboriginal people have been trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and disadvantage, unable to improve the wellbeing of our communities. Our health outcomes are poorer, our suicide rates higher, and drug and alcohol use affects too many families.

We need the government to help us get back on our feet by putting us in the driver's seat.

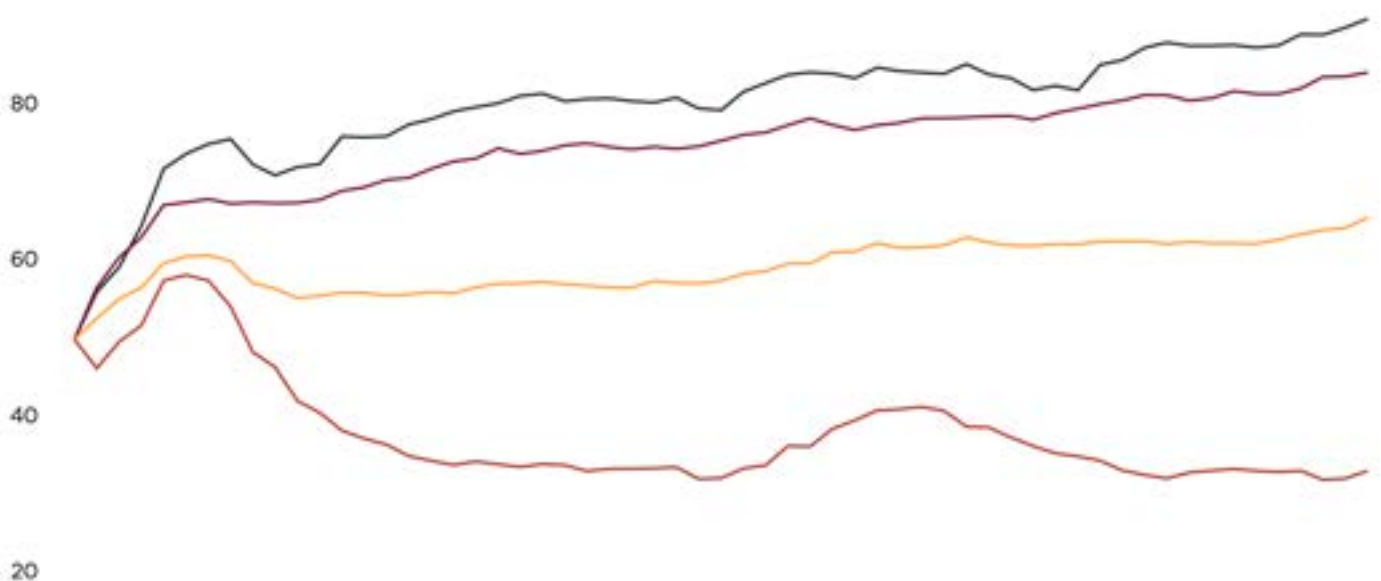
When we steer the policies and programs that impact our communities, we can make sure everyone in our community is taken care of.

Implies we need taking care of, rather than reclaiming our strength

Deficit

**Charity,
rather than
solidarity**

Dial test results



— First Nations people — Base — Persuadables — Opposition

The deficit language in this message is so familiar, that it is not surprising it resonates with base and persuadables.

The good news is that our strength-based messages perform equally as well, even though people have heard them less.

Our audiences are very supportive of the value ‘taking care of one another’.

OPPONENT MESSAGE

Our opponents also use the frame of fairness, but they describe 'fair' as treating everyone the same and getting rid of 'special treatment' for Aboriginal people.

Their messages are very persuasive, so make sure you don't repeat them, negate them or myth bust them - as that will just reinforce their story.

Opponent's definition of the problem

Every Australian deserves a fair go.

But our government continues to set double standards by giving Aboriginal people special treatment.

While it's true that a lot of bad things happened in the past, today Aboriginal people have an easier ride than most because of all the handouts, scholarships and jobs the government provides.

Making Aboriginal people dependent on government support doesn't help them in the long run and it's not fair on everyone else - treating people differently creates conflict and division.

By removing these double standards we can make sure that every Australian has the same opportunity.

We all accept bad things happened in the past, but opponents frame it as *only* happening in the past, and that it's time to get over it.

'Fair' is a powerful value used in both contexts.

Opponents want to treat everyone the same, whereas we are asking to right wrongs, remove unfair barriers.

We need to be careful to specify what we mean when we use the word fair, because opponents also use fair to mean a different thing:

- We say fair means equity, taking away the unfair barriers we face, so we can self-determine our future.
- They say fair means treating us all the same, no special treatment, and that hand-outs and government support are unfair and driving division.

Dial test results



— First Nations people — Base — Persuadables — Opposition

This time the colours are reversed.

The opponents support this message, and they are alienating us.

The base and persuadables agree with some of the opponents' messages especially about 'handouts' and 'treating people differently creates conflict and division'.

Always speak from our frame. Never negate the opponents' message, we will only reinforce it.

EMBRACE-REPLACE

A quick-reference table of words to use and avoid

1. Start with a shared value

	EMBRACE	REPLACE
Use shared values that connect us with our audience	<p>Vision, values and emotion, for example, “everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity”.</p> <p>Values include freedom, care, family, community and equity.</p>	Statistics and jargon
Name the shared values being violated and who is doing it.	<p>“Everyone should be able to go to a hospital when they or their loved ones are sick. But today, the federal government and the health minister is choosing who has to travel further and who has to pay more for healthcare, based on the colour of our skin. When our loved ones get sick they don’t get the healthcare they need and are dying younger.”</p> <p>“Taking care of each other in hard times is what community is all about. But when Covid-19 hit, the federal government sent our communities body-bags, not the PPE we asked for. They need to stop blocking us from being healthy.”</p>	Problem on its own: Our communities are dying younger and getting sicker.

2. Reclaim our strength

	EMBRACE	REPLACE
Move from First Nations deficit to strength	<p>“We are strong and capable.”</p> <p>“We are strong despite ongoing injustice.”</p>	<p>“We are vulnerable people.”</p> <p>“The most incarcerated people on the planet.”</p> <p>“The highest suicide rates in the world.”</p>
Reclaim our strength and demonstrate we know best	<p>“Designed by and for First Nations people.”</p> <p>“Run by and for First Nations people.”</p> <p>“When others decide for us; services run by others.”</p>	<p>“Partners; co-designed” - this shows the government has co-opted, and it’s always on their terms.</p> <p>“Mainstream services” - implies non-First Nations is the default and First Nations is the exception or fringe.</p>
Reclaim our strength and what is rightfully ours	<p>“Hand back power, decision-making and funds - on First Nations terms.”</p> <p>“Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.”</p>	<p>“Give them a voice and the ability to determine their own future” - a gift or charity, on X government terms.</p>
Ask for solidarity not charity	<p>“We need your solidarity.”</p> <p>“We’ve got this, back us.”</p> <p>“Stand with us, hear us, support our leadership.”</p>	<p>“We need your help.”</p>
<p>What talking about ourselves as a collective group of First Nations peoples</p> <p><i>When naming individual people, state our affiliation with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Nations. For example: Dr Jackie Huggins AM, Bidjara and Birri Gubba Juru.</i></p>	<p>“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people / peoples”</p> <p>“Aboriginal people / peoples”</p> <p>“First Nations people / peoples”</p> <p>For use by First Nations people: “Mob” “Our Mob”</p>	<p>“aboriginal” (lower case)</p> <p>“Aboriginals”</p> <p>“Aborigines”</p> <p>“ATSI”</p> <p>“ATSI people”</p> <p>“Aboriginal Australians”</p> <p>“Indigenous Australians”</p>

3. Name the unfair barrier we face, who is causes harm and why

	EMBRACE	REPLACE
Name unfair barriers that violate universal morals and values	<p>Right: what is “morally right or wrong” - for example, we all agree it’s wrong to murder.</p> <p>“Right wrongs.”</p> <p>“Make amends.”</p>	<p>Rights: “human rights” - an external construct that is up for debate.</p>
Name the agent in an active way, be as specific about the individual as possible	<p>“It is racist for the federal government to not provide the same level of healthcare to smaller Aboriginal communities as to major cities, and we’re getting sicker and dying earlier because of it.”</p> <p>“<u>X Minister</u> has cut health funding to our communities, making us sicker.”</p>	<p>“The gap in health outcomes is widening.”</p>
Name unfair barriers that are wrong and need to be put right	<p>“Aboriginal land and our people were stolen and we want our land back” - everyone knows stealing is wrong, so handing land back is righting a wrong.</p>	<p>“Aboriginal people have a special connection to country, that’s why we need legislation that protects our unique rights” – this invokes special rights.</p>
Provide a credible motive - name why people are doing the wrong thing	<p>“This federal government is choosing this unfair policy because:</p> <p>“...they don’t know what they’re doing.”</p> <p>“...they are racist.”</p> <p>“...they are helping their mates in the mining industry profit off our land.”</p> <p>(All of these are credible motives)</p>	<p>“This government policy is unfair...”</p>

4. Combine truth and action

	EMBRACE	REPLACE
Include both truth and action in messages	<p>“Today, companies are destroying our cultural heritage, we need final decision-making power on what happens on our land.”</p> <p>“Today, police are actively targeting our children based on the colour of their skin. Join us in calling for an end to this racist system so everyone is treated with respect, dignity and free to live our lives.”</p>	<p>Describing historic injustice without connecting to its impacts today, or how it continues into the present.</p>
Make bold and clear asks, and avoid hedging	<p>“We will...”</p> <p>“Do...”</p> <p>“Ensure...”</p>	<p>“We strive towards...”</p> <p>“We work towards...”</p> <p>“We may...”</p>

5. Create a collective 'we'

	EMBRACE	REPLACE
Bring your audience into your message by creating a universal 'we' or including them in the ask.	<p>"We all do better when we're free to make choices in our life."</p> <p>"Just like communities everywhere, our communities don't want people from outside telling us how to run things."</p> <p>"We all have a responsibility to..."</p> <p>"We need to all hear our stories and..."</p> <p>"Stand with us..."</p> <p>"Work together to..."</p> <p>"Together we can build..."</p>	<p>Talking at your audience without including them.</p> <p>"You need to..."</p>
Describe groups of three to bring your audience into the messages.	<p>"Whether your family's been here for five years, five generations or 5,000 generations..."</p> <p>"... regardless of skin colour, gender or where you live."</p> <p>"First Nations, migrants and more recent arrivals."</p>	<p>"Indigenous and non-Indigenous."</p> <p>"First Nations and settlers" - this pits us against each other, and makes people think of competing with us.</p>
Avoid reinforcing the idea that self-determination is segregation.	<p>"Two cultures, with two ways of doing things."</p> <p>"Co-exist", "walk together", "work together", "follow our lead."</p> <p>"Respect diversity and create a society that includes everyone and excludes no one."</p>	<p>"Two worlds" - separate.</p>
Bring our communities into the centre	<p>"Homelands."</p> <p>"X [insert name of] community."</p> <p>"Aboriginal communities."</p> <p>"...in the bush, towns and cities."</p>	<p>"Remote communities" - avoid remoteness and separation.</p>

6. Explain big concepts in simple language

	EMBRACE	REPLACE
Help our audience to understand and support our asks for self-determination	<p>“First Nations people in charge.”</p> <p>“In the driver’s seat.”</p> <p>“We make the decisions.”</p> <p>“Steer our own course.”</p> <p>“Aboriginal people should have the final say on what does and does not happen on their land.”</p> <p>“Aboriginal people must have the power to veto business and decisions of all levels of government that impact on Aboriginal people, culture, and country.”</p> <p>“We need the X government to stop stripping our communities of autonomy, and instead back community controlled services and decision-making.”</p>	<p>“We want self-determination.”</p>
Help our audience to understand systemic racism	<p>“Racist policies that unfairly target people based on their colour.”</p> <p>“State governments are locking Aboriginal people out of decisions, cutting services, and driving inequality in the very places where billions of dollars of wealth are being extracted by mining corporations.”</p> <p>“Aggressive policing of Aboriginal children, controls put on what Aboriginal people can spend their pensions on, and discrimination when applying for jobs.”</p>	<p>“Stop systemic racism.”</p>
Use metaphors to evoke our audiences’ emotions and help them understand complex concepts	<p>Free - “People are better off when they are free to set their own course”, “when we are free to be who we are”.</p> <p>Journey - “in the driver’s seat”, “move forward together”, “walk with us”, “to a better future”, “chart our own course”.</p> <p>Build - “work together to build a better future for everyone”.</p>	<p>Black / dark - “our dark past”, “a black day for this country”.</p> <p>Gap - “close the gap”.</p> <p>Reconciliation - which means to make up after a fight, but we were never friends to begin with.</p>

7. Never negate - don't repeat the opponent's message

	EMBRACE	REPLACE
Tell our story and don't negate the opponent's message	<p>"Our families take care of one another."</p> <p>"Like all families, we love our children."</p> <p>"Community-run services help keep our families strong and together."</p> <p>"Police target our families because of the colour of our skin."</p> <p>"When kids make mistakes, what they need is support and guidance, not being targeted by police and thrown into prison."</p> <p>"The justice system we have now is like an exceptionally difficult maze, with lots of entrances, but not many exits - and lots of dead ends."</p>	<p>"Our families are not dysfunctional."</p> <p>"Aboriginal people are not innately criminal."</p>
Bring our communities into the centre	<p>"Homelands."</p> <p>"X [insert name of] community."</p> <p>"Aboriginal communities."</p> <p>"...in the bush, towns and cities."</p>	<p>"Remote communities" - avoid remoteness and separation.</p>



Reflections on the Fellowship

I've been in the Union movement for 16 years and been involved with community campaigns for around the same amount of time, and never have I thought that the language I'm using is actually harmful to the campaign I'm running.

This process has changed how we message our campaigns - in particular the campaign to end the Community Development Program (CDP). We had fallen into the same trap that so many of our organisations and campaigns have fallen into. We were using the Government's message.

Instead of speaking from our own voice and experience, we would negate our opposition's story. By saying things like "We don't understand how Scullion [the Minister] is getting his 15,000 jobs. He's not telling the public that they're only 26 weeks long". But by doing this, we were promoting him as a Minister who was capable of creating jobs - because people wouldn't remember the "not".

By using our opposition's language around the CDP, we were playing into existing deficit narratives around Aboriginal people - feeding into the idea that we are useless or couldn't do work and therefore needed this intervention.

Now, instead of using the deficit language, we talk about the solution.

We speak in our own voice, and we lead with our values and what we stand for as the voice of CDP workers.

It's really hard to get out of that habit of the language you're used to, but we know that we win our campaigns when we have numbers of people acting in support. After we changed our language to move away from the opposition's framing, I found people were more receptive to what we were saying, and more willing to take action.

From there, we saw more pressure on the government and ultimately they announced that the CDP will be abolished in 2023. That is a huge win, and I believe a large part of this was changing our language from talking about the opposition, to talking about the investment in real jobs and giving community workers real wages.

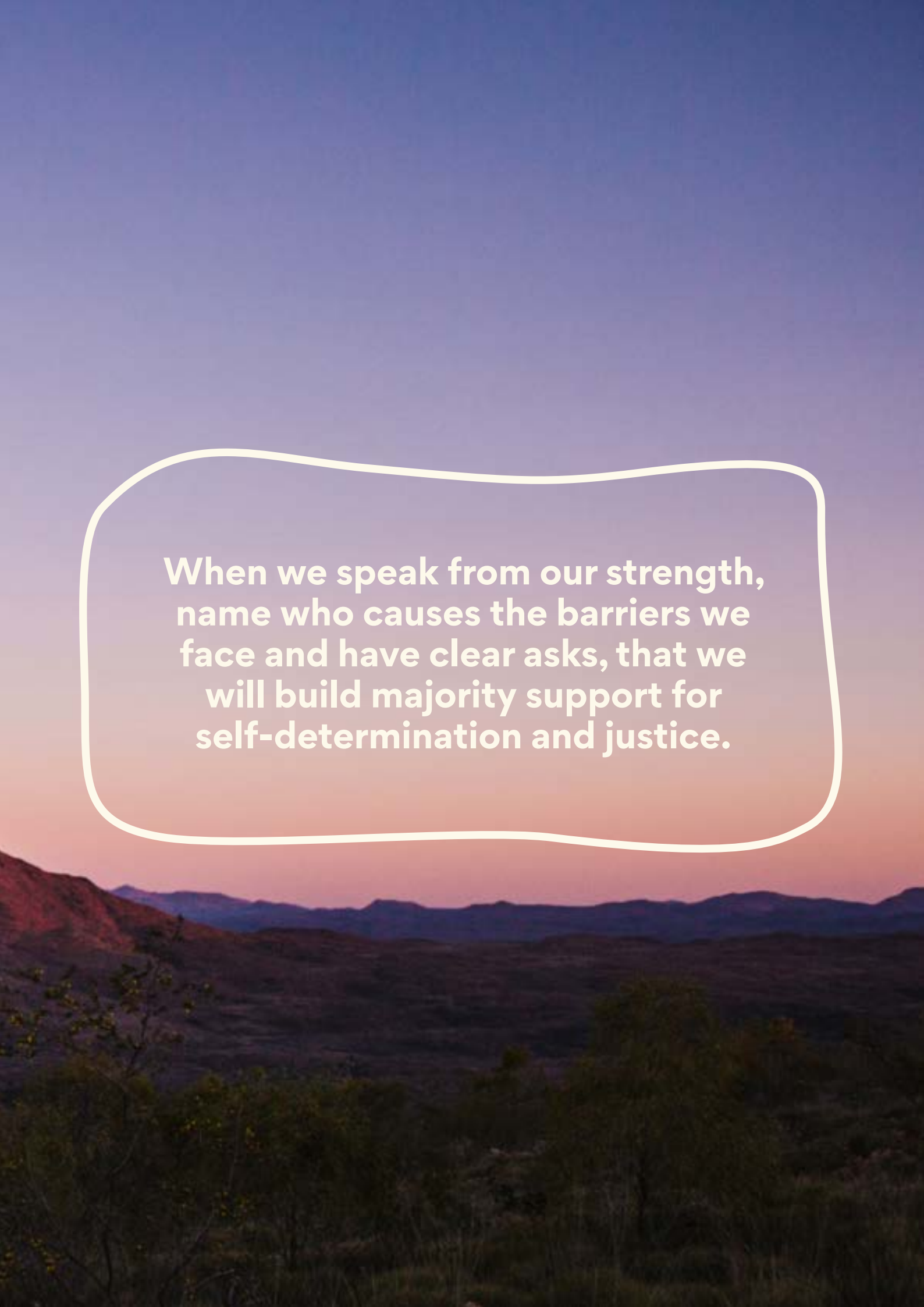
Lara Watson, Birri Gubba
Indigenous Officer, Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)



Rwetyepme, **Arrernte Country**

WHAT'S NEXT?





**When we speak from our strength,
name who causes the barriers we
face and have clear asks, that we
will build majority support for
self-determination and justice.**

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Our message has widespread support. Now it's time to pass the message stick.

Together, we can dismantle the 'hopeless case of a damaged people seeking ongoing, unfair handouts', which is still credible to many, and inspire the public with stories of our strength, leadership and capability, constantly reinforcing these stories until they seem like common sense.

We can do this by crafting messages that:

- 1.** Start with a shared value
- 2.** Reclaim our strength
- 3.** Name the unfair barrier we face, who is causing us harm and why
- 4.** Combine truth and action
- 5.** Create a collective 'we'
- 6.** Unpack the big concepts
- 7.** Never negate - don't repeat the opponent's message



This research is just the beginning of a much larger and ongoing project to shift the narrative, for transformation change and big wins for us, one that'll take years. Our immediate next steps include rolling out presentations, workshops and messaging guides around the country.

Most importantly, we're digging into specific messaging challenges in partnership with advocates and organisations - so watch this space and don't hesitate to contact us for future collaborations.

Future funding support will allow us to run additional First Nations Message and Communications Fellowships and in-house training, growing the alumni network of research Fellows and trained advocates who are changing the narrative and passing on the message stick. During the course of the project, we've become aware of a number of more specific issue areas that would benefit from further research, including law reform and culture wars. Additional funding will allow us to dig further into these issue areas, to find and test messages that build support and further shift persuadables in favour of our own solutions.

Share your feedback and ask any questions around how to apply the recommendations in this guide by contacting info@passingthemessagestick.org.

The success of this project depends on all of us passing the message stick.

We encourage you to embrace these recommendations, test new ways of communicating, share lessons with our communities and team mates, and get in touch if there's anything we can do to further support you.



THANK YOU

Our steering committee thank the incredible First Nations advocates and allies who've made this project possible.

To our donors, Australian Communities Foundation, Besen Family Foundation, CAGES, Equity Trustees, Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, Mannifera and Oranges and Sardines - thank you for your early backing, and commitment to supporting this project through to completion, including many of you who gave multi-year gifts.

To our First Nations Messaging and Communications Fellows, your early research to shift the message kicked off the project and set us up for success. Your ongoing support and determination to pass on the message stick is incredible to see in action.

To the research team, including Dr Eleanor Glenn and Mark Chenery from Common Cause Australia, and John Armitage and Holly McCarthy from QDOS, thank you for your expertise and generous support throughout the project. And of course thanks to those who completed surveys, attended focus groups and gave insightful feedback throughout the ground-truthing process.

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To the team at GetUp, Original Power and Australian Progress, thank you for providing the back-end project management support that helped to make the project possible.

And finally, to you, our fellow First Nations advocates from around the country, thank you for everything you do, and for passing on the message stick.

Our Steering Committee



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APPENDIX



FOCUS GROUP MESSAGES AND FINDINGS

The good news is that our base and persuadables responded well to stories of self-determination and justice when expressed in more familiar terms and illustrated with tangible examples.

They recognised connection to country and the importance of First Nations culture and values, not just for First Nations people but for all.

On the flipside, the focus groups revealed some significant challenges we face when reaching out to our audiences. These revolve around the deficit frame, fear of segregation, ignorance about current injustices, and perceptions of blame and guilt.

Here are some of the messages we tested in focus groups:

Current injustice hurts everyone

- **Summary of the message:** Culture and heritage are important to everyone. Destroying Aboriginal sites like the Juukan Gorge caves is both deeply hurtful to Aboriginal people and a loss for all of humanity.
- **Our audiences' response:** Our base and most persuadables were appalled that important human history, sacred to First Nations people, was destroyed. They agreed that failing to protect First Nations heritage hurts everyone.
- **Our recommendation:** Use, but a link to specific actions is required, for example, new legislation.

Current injustice and First Nations expertise

- **Summary of the message:** It was legal for Rio Tinto to destroy the Juukan Gorge site. This never would have happened if Aboriginal people were making decisions and had the final say.
- **Our audiences' response:** People were shocked that the destruction was legal. Many supported First Nations people leading legislative reform, but together with non-First Nations people, not in isolation. Some expressed doubts about the expertise of First Nations people to do this (the deficit frame).
- **Our recommendation:** Use, together with an overall push to boost the strengths frame.

Truth as self discovery, journey and healing

- > **Summary of the message:** We can only be our best and create a country where everyone can thrive when we listen and acknowledge the truth of our past and present. Together, we can work to undo the damage that still causes Aboriginal people harm today.
- > **Our audiences' response:** Our base accepted both past and present injustices, while persuadables struggled more with the present. Some persuadables felt blame and guilt, like “a black armband view of history”. They wanted a greater focus on moving forward instead of looking back.
- > **Our recommendation:** Use, and see Recommendation 4 for how to avoid guilt by combining truth and action.

Better society for all

- > **Summary of the message:** First Nations culture is about caring for everyone. We modelled this in setting up the nation's first legal aid and community health. Imagine a better society where Aboriginal values and leadership are at the heart of decision-making.
- > **Our audiences' response:** Most of our base and persuadables agree that we need more First Nations leadership and Australia would benefit if First Nations values were at the centre of decision-making. Some persuadables had trouble believing First Nations' models were first. Others wondered why we aren't teaching this in schools.
- > **Our recommendation:** Use - we need more strength-based stories to overcome the deficit.

Profit vs self-determination

- > **Summary of the message:** Some state governments have undermined Aboriginal land rights to favour big corporations. It's time to hand decision-making back to Aboriginal people about what happens on country and in our lives.
- > **Our audiences' response:** Our base were angry that the state government is putting corporate interests before communities, and strongly agree that First Nations people making decisions will produce better outcomes. Persuadables mostly agreed, but didn't want solely First Nations decision-making.
- > **Our recommendation:** Use - profit is a credible motive.

Community knows best

- **Summary of the message:** We are hurt by the X government imposing top-down policies and making decisions for us, thinking that they know best. This divorces us from our own culture and connection to country - things that are central to our health and wellbeing - making us sicker and die younger. Our people, who have been managing our own affairs for thousands of years, must be in charge of our destiny again.
- **Our audiences' response:** Our base agreed. Persuadables generally agreed but were wary of segregation. To some, the connection 'making us sicker and die younger' didn't make sense, and unfairly implied government intent to harm when it was trying to help.
- **Our recommendation:** Use, with revision. See Recommendation 3 on how to describe a perpetrator's ignorance or racism, and their specific actions that lead to bad outcomes (such as 'making us sicker and die younger').

Better future with Treaty

- **Summary of the message:** For too long, when people have come to Australia in search of a better future, it has come at the cost of the lives and livelihoods of Aboriginal people. There is a beautiful tomorrow, where we co-exist and First Nations people make decisions about the future of our country. Treaties provide a way to acknowledge past injustices, resolve differences, and work out how to create a shared future.
- **Our audiences' response:** The emphasis on collaboration, partnership and working towards a shared goal appealed to many people and gave them a sense that there is a way forward that they can be a part of. Persuadables disliked the implied blame around 'costing Aboriginal lives and livelihoods'.
- **Our recommendation:** Use, and see Recommendation 4 for how to avoid guilt by combining truth and action.

Example of our leadership

- **Summary of the message:** When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, we led the way in keeping our communities safe. But the Northern Territory government sent us body bags before they sent PPE, assuming we would fail. When decisions are in our hands, our solutions work, and we take care of our communities.
- **Our audiences' response:** Most of our base and persuadables were happy to hear a First Nations strengths story and wanted to hear more like it. Some struggled to believe in the strengths story, questioning First Nations' capability.
- **Our recommendation:** Use to boost our strengths frame.

FIRST NATIONS CONSULTATION GROUP

Mid-way through our focus groups, we held a consultation group with First Nations advocates to 'ground-truth' the messages we'd used in the focus groups to that point. Participants provided invaluable feedback and advice on how we improve the messages for use by First Nations advocates.

They recommended avoiding outdated 'noble savage' ideas of First Nations people (only) living traditional lifestyles in remote areas. Similarly, they suggested messages should move beyond fire management to the other many and varied aspects of First Nations people's culture, expertise and interests. We are three-dimensional people, and need to highlight this in our messages.

Participants suggested that messages describing First Nations people's community-controlled health services as well as early responses to Covid-19 were powerful examples of self-determination, strength and leadership: *"exemplars of success which counter that deficit discourse"*.

However, they emphasised the First Nations strength frame by itself is not enough. Our messages also need to include truth, linking to recent and current injustices. For example, the reason why community-controlled health services came about - because governments excluded First Nations people from health services - needs to be explained.

Participants also made clear that truth-telling involves white people acknowledging ongoing racism and opening their eyes to forms of power and violence:

"You can't just talk about the superstar black people, you have to talk about the processes that see us dying. White people should own their violence, their history and come to that realisation what it is to relinquish racism as a power structure in the community... It's about white violence and white supremacy. The refusal to recognise Indigenous self-determination is itself a violence."

Finally, they **painted a positive vision of a better society for all:**

"The kind of society blackfellas are marching on the streets for, a better society for everybody."

"Look what Blackfellas are protesting for, it's a much more inclusive and caring society than has been built here since 1788."

And highlighted **First Nations culture of importance and significance to all:**

"The loss of Juukan Gorge is not just a loss for traditional owners in the Pilbara, it's a destruction of a site of such cultural significance to all humanity. If we're going to use that example we need to talk about the loss to all humanity."

QUANTITATIVE SURVEY RESULTS

The quantitative research surveyed a representative sample of 1,500 Australian adults, comprising our base, persuadables and opponents, and 200 additional First Nations people.

We were testing how our base (including First Nations advocates), persuadables and opponents responded to different messages, in order to work out which messages are effective in building support for self-determination and justice.

We asked a range of questions:

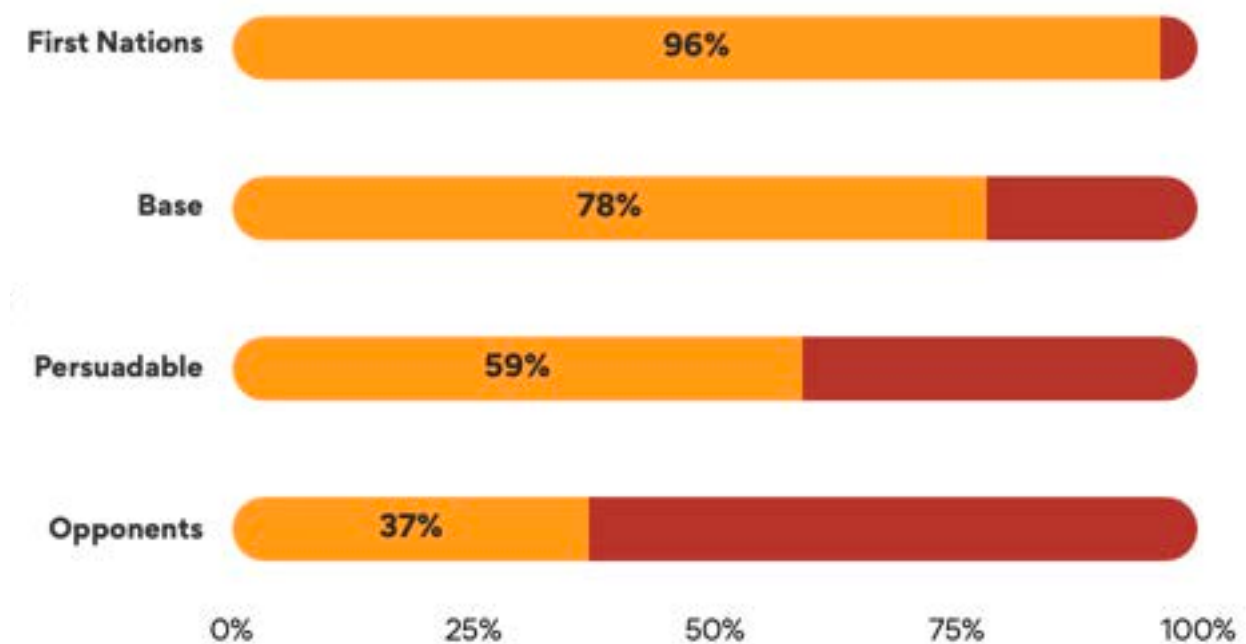
- **Forced choice** - where people were given two choices and had to choose which one they agreed with more.
- **Likert scale questions** - where people had to rate 1-5 how much they agreed/ disagreed with a statement.
- **Split choice questions** - where one half was given one question or statement, and the other given another, to see how the wording changed support for the statement.
- **Dial test or 'worm'** - which are detailed in the section 'Messages to embrace and replace'.

Here is a sample of the responses.

Forced choice questions

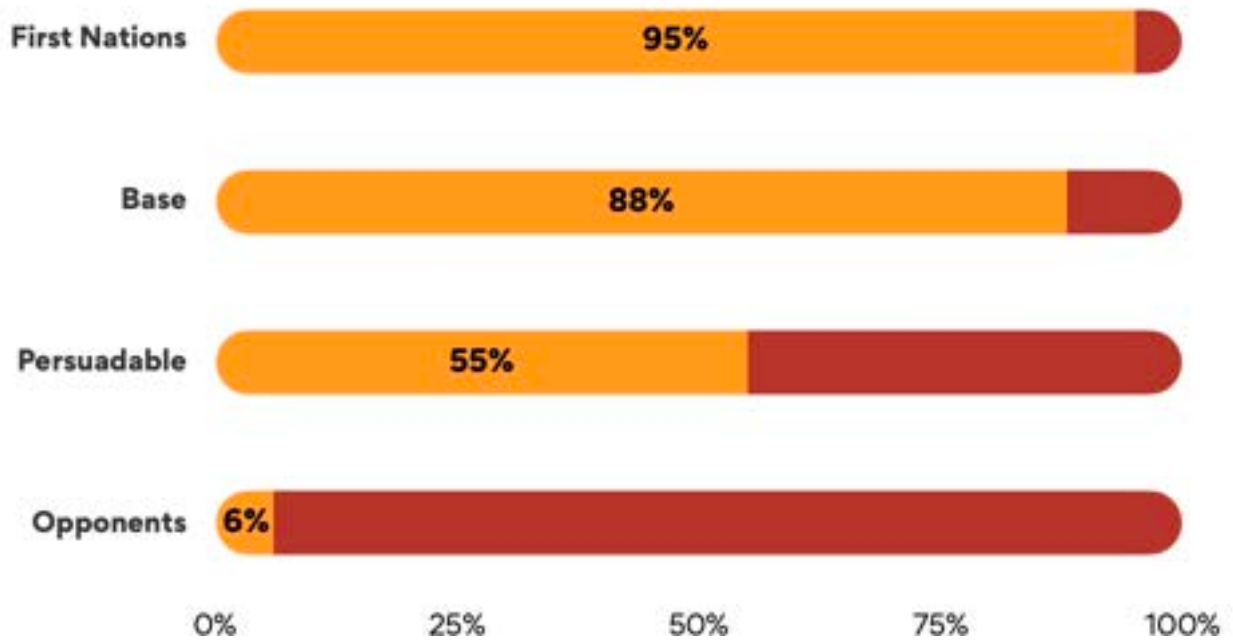
In a forced choice head-to-head with opponent messages, persuadables side with us, by a slim margin.

Here we see the majority of the public, including most persuadables, support the statement that **we know what's best** and should have the final say:



- Aboriginal people have the best understanding of what they need for their future and should have the final say in what is best for them
- Whether they are Aboriginal or not, experts in health education and social services have the best understanding of what Aboriginal people need and should have the final say in what is best for them

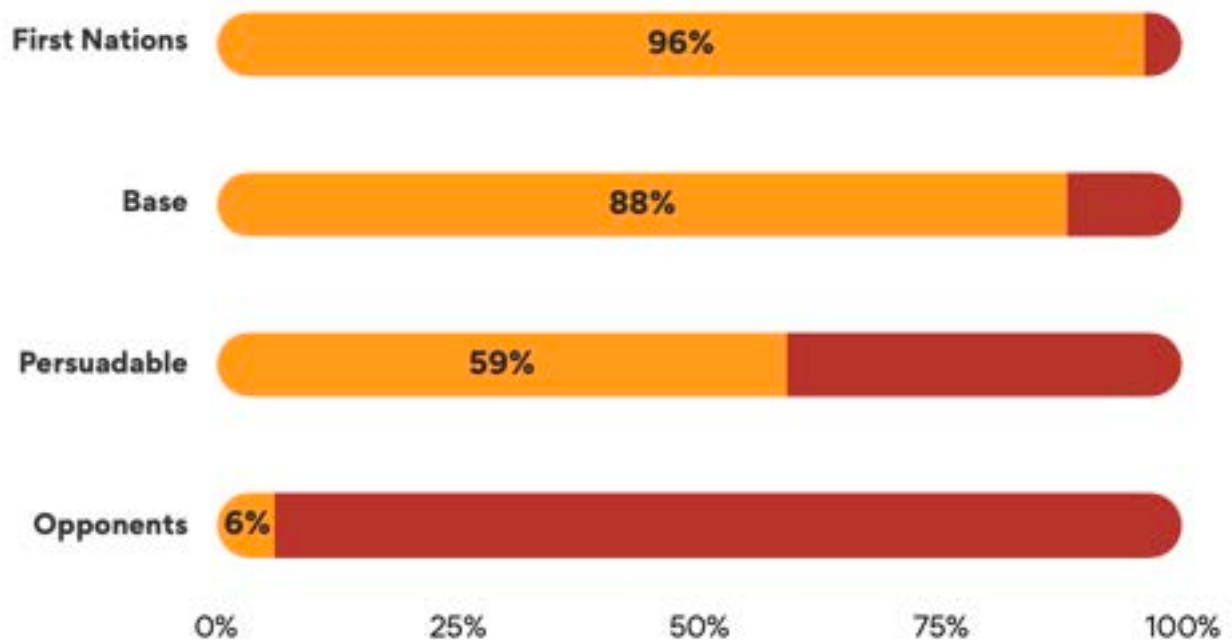
Most persuadables (55%) **recognise that Aboriginal people still face injustice today**, and agree that truth-telling helps us all move forward:



- To help us all to heal and move forward we need to tell the truth about the injustice Aboriginal people still face today
- It's wrong to only talk about Aboriginal people - everyone experiences some kind of injustice in their life.



We see stronger support from persuadables (59%) when we **pair truth with action**:



- Treating Aboriginal people fairly means recognising and making amends for the injustice Aboriginal people still face today
- Treating Aboriginal people fairly means expecting them to make their own way without any special privileges or allowances



Likert scale questions

Typically, more than 90% of First Nations advocates and base, 40-60% of persuadables, and fewer than 20% of opponents, agreed or strongly agreed with our statements.

Note that 95%+ in the examples below doesn't necessarily mean anyone disagreed - they may have chosen the neutral 'neither agree nor disagree' option.

We saw strong support for First Nations strength and leadership:

	FN	B	P	O	Total
We need more Aboriginal people in leadership roles in all sectors, particularly government, media and education	97	96	58	16	61

= % total agreement (0% – 100%)

Also strong agreement with a truth statement about current injustice and everyone's role in calling it out:

	FN	B	P	O	Total
Every person has a role to play in calling out the injustice against Aboriginal people that continues today.	96	97	57	13	61

= % total agreement (0% – 100%)

However, many people - even First Nations advocates - agreed with the deficit framing of hopelessness:

	FN	B	P	O	Total
The current situation for a lot of Aboriginal people and their communities feels hopeless.	69	72	36	16	42

= % total agreement (0% – 100%)

Split choice questions

The split test below shows **a boost in base and persuadable support when we include the idea of working together, side by side**. Note that no opponents agreed with either statement about returning land.

	FN	B	P	O	Total
The land we live on always was and always will be Aboriginal land, so we should, where possible, return land to traditional owners.	93	90	30	0	29

The land we live on always was and always will be Aboriginal land, so we should work side-by-side with Aboriginal people and , where possible, return land to traditional owners.	96	95	39	0	48
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+3	+5	+9	0	+19
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= % additional agree with second statement

Providing a credible motive, in this case profit, also boosts support for our statements:

	FN	B	P	O	Total
For years, the Government has been hurting Aboriginal people with their discriminatory policies.	98	97	34	3	44

For years, the Government has been hurting Aboriginal people with their discriminatory policies that enable corporations to profit off Aboriginal land .	97	98	43	2	51
---	----	----	----	---	----

-1	+1	+9	-1	+6
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= % additional agree with second statement



