

shift
the bay

Shifting the Narrative

2021 Messaging Guide



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Home is complicated. It is stability, and safety, and sanctuary. It is opportunity and legacy. It is family, and community, and hopes and fears for the future of each. It touches on the deepest, most personal aspects of our lives.

That means that housing justice has incredible potential to transform the lives of individuals and entire communities. Any vision for a more equitable future and a thriving Bay Area depends on housing justice.

But the complexity and personal significance of housing also mean that there is no single, simple slogan that will move people to where we need them to be. Narrative shift is about an ongoing conversation that changes the way that people think about housing and racial justice, and helps them believe in a different future for the Bay Area. Changing how we talk about these issues is a critical step in that process.

Advancing housing and racial justice requires overcoming active and passive resistance to change. It means overcoming inertia, indifference, and the learned helplessness that can make fighting for progress feel overwhelming. It means dismantling systemic inequities and unconscious biases that are so pervasive and deeply held that most people don't notice them at all — they are simply the way things are, the way they have always been, the air we breathe.

This messaging guide is based directly on the Bay Area “Seize the Narrative” [Campaign Playbook \(September 2020\)](#), which provides underlying strategies for framing the moment, goals, and issues. A solid understanding of the Playbook is important context to ground the recommendations of this messaging guide, including insights into audience beliefs and behaviors.

The purpose of this guide is to provide specific language that can be used to put those Playbook strategies into action whenever they are developing or distributing messaging content. That might mean a fundraising email to existing supporters, a call for volunteers, a press release in support of a particular piece of legislation, a public statement at a city council meeting, or any other time and place where effective messaging is needed.

The wide variety of possible needs and uses requires us to develop a messaging guide that can be flexible enough to meet any moment. In order to focus on what we are saying, we need to closely consider who is listening. Effective messaging depends on understanding our audience.

This messaging guide will rely on the audiences described in the Campaign Playbook:

- Our Base (Supporting)
- New Champions (Persuadable)
- Contrarians (Opposed)

The guide provides specific language to use (and language to avoid) when addressing each of these audiences.

These audiences are not static — doing our work well will move some portion of the Persuadable to Supporting. And, we will not always have the luxury of communicating with only one audience at a time. That may be the case sometimes — when speaking at a volunteer event or sending an email

to your own list, we can be confident that *most* of the people we are speaking to are supportive. But most moments will be more mixed, which means you may need to use a blend of messaging points, or prioritize one set of points in that particular moment.

A good practice before drafting any messaging is to ask three questions:

1. What do you want the audience to *feel*?
2. What do you want the audience to *know*?
3. What do you want the audience to *do*?

The answers to these questions will be different for different audiences, and will change depending on circumstances, timing, and your own strategic needs. But for any given messaging, they should be clearly understood and interwoven with each other. Once you've established this foundation, you can pull appropriate pieces from the messaging guide to support your goals.

Our Base

Messaging Overview:

This audience is already aligned with the basic goals of the movement for housing justice. They believe that having a decent place to live is a basic human right. They see the challenges facing many Bay Area residents who are struggling to manage the rising cost of housing (and in many cases, are directly experiencing these challenges themselves).

While preservation and production approaches to addressing housing injustice enjoy very widespread support, protection received lower levels of support. Messaging that centers the protection frame should mostly be kept to this Base audience, and can be used to identify short-term and long-term goals and opportunities for action. Preservation and production frames are also suitable for Base audiences.

Our primary messaging goals for the Base are to:

1. Elevate the salience of housing justice. While this audience basically agrees with us on general principles, housing justice may not yet be a top-level priority for them.
2. Strengthen the connection between housing justice and racial justice. We want this audience to see that the fight for housing justice is essential to advancing other core values.
3. Move them to action. Our messaging must overcome the sense of inevitability or intractability that many people have adopted when it comes to the Bay Area housing crisis, and show that change is achievable.

To advance these goals, messaging that is intended to reach the Base audience should emphasize the reality of **current inequity**, the importance of **advancing racial justice**, and the **urgent need for action**.

For more context and messaging examples for the Base audience, see Campaign Playbook page 38.

“ DO SAY

We all deserve a decent place to live. That's a matter of basic justice, of who we are as a community. Housing is essential, just like food, health care, and an education.

Our whole community does better when everyone has good, safe housing options. We all benefit from housing justice. And so it's up to all of us to fight for it.

DON'T SAY

We must provide access to affordable housing for everyone in the Bay Area.

WHY?

There is no “us” and “them” — we all need housing.

The goal with this language is to move away from “affordable housing” as something that is provided by one group for another. Instead, we talk about housing as a value, and as a benefit for the whole community.

And, we consistently draw connections with other basic needs and the fundamental value of justice, to remind our audiences that they are inseparable.

For most audiences, we’ll avoid “housing is a right” messaging. This can trigger opposition, as it focuses attention on the individual, and will push many people to question whether each person “really” has a right to housing. Justice is collective, community is collective — so we focus on those shared values rather than individual rights.

For further context, see Campaign Playbook page 17, “Amplify.”

DO SAY

Diversity has always been a part of what makes the Bay Area special, vibrant, and successful. People from every background are joined together to forge communities. The diversity of restaurants, parks and outdoor activities, cultures, art, neighborhoods is what makes the Bay Area like nowhere else in our nation.

Protecting that unique legacy and building the future our children deserve means strengthening our communities. We need to work together to build a Bay Area that moves all of us forward.

WHY?

Even among our base, we can’t assume that every audience has already made the connection between housing justice and values of diversity, inclusion, and racial justice. We need to lead them there and build that resonance.

Our research has shown widespread identification with these shared values. Diversity should be positioned as a positive good, and a source of strength for the community — and connected explicitly to calls for housing justice.

For further context, see Campaign Playbook page 22, “Center Equity & System Change.”

“DO SAY

You can't separate racial justice from housing justice. Generations of exclusionary policies and institutional racism have created an unjust housing system which falls hardest on communities of color [or name specific communities].

Strengthening those communities is how we move the whole Bay Area forward. And getting it right means being honest about how we got here, so we can take on the underlying problems. It means taking on the way that bigotry, racism, and inequity are baked into the structure of how housing is developed and delivered in our communities.

Promoting justice and equity starts at home. The fight against white supremacy starts at home. A diverse, equal, thriving Bay Area starts at home.

Let's build those homes and strengthen our neighborhoods so that residents don't face displacement. Let's make sure all of us, especially those who have been locked out for generations, have a decent place to come home to. That's the future our community deserves.

WHY?

For base audiences who have a better understanding of the connections between racial justice and housing justice, including direct experience with these inequities, we can be more direct in embracing justice as a cause, in addition to the broader language about diversity noted above.

For further context, see Campaign Playbook page 23, "Center Equity & System Change."

“DO SAY

Wherever we look to lift up our community, having a safe place to call home is a crucial part of the solution.

Investing in diverse housing solutions helps us address issues like hunger, opioid dependence, homelessness, and the pandemic response.

We all want safe and healthy neighborhoods, for ourselves and our children. Building a diverse mix of housing across the Bay Area helps us create safer communities and work together to address any challenge.

DON'T SAY

"Housing first" is the best way to address homelessness.

WHY?

Emphasize that housing justice strengthens the entire community.

This is another way to tie housing justice to other core values, including access to health care and public health.

"Housing first" is an effective mechanism for change, that doesn't mean it should be our message. Homelessness is a fraught subject, and research from EMC shows that many people see it primarily as a drug, mental health, or public health issue rather than a housing issue. So this messaging aims to avoid swimming against this current, instead putting homelessness in the context of housing justice, as a critical component of public health and stronger communities.

For further context, see Campaign Playbook page 25, "Attach."

DO SAY

We know housing justice is a priority in our community. Now, we need to make it a priority for businesses, community organizations, and government/lawmakers. *[Substitute specific people or bodies wherever possible. Name the governor, or refer to the Board of Supervisors.]*

We need everyone to join in. For [decision-makers], that means investing in the future of our neighborhoods so that families today and the next generation can have a decent place to live. And it's up to you and me to make sure they hear that message loud and clear.

DON'T SAY

We need more government spending on housing.

WHY?

Our research uncovered some negative disruptors around the role of government. Some people assume that the government already has enough money, or spends enough money, to address housing needs. Many others believe that the system is rigged by lobbyists and others, making change impossible. *(See Campaign Playbook page 35.)*

We want to pivot to the idea that this is about priorities and political will, and about investing in the future.

Language about "our neighborhoods" and "families today and the next generation" is meant to

create a direct human connection and remind audiences about the value of providing a better place for our children.

We can also use this messaging to motivate specific action — naming the decision makers who have the power to improve conditions, and addressing our own power to move them.

DO SAY

Residents and small businesses are being displaced all over the Bay Area — and once they're gone, they may never come back.

We need to act now to keep people [young families, our community, people of color] from getting ejected from the places they call home.

DON'T SAY

We need to stop gentrification.

WHY?

This frame keeps the focus on those people who have something to lose. Depending on the speaker and the audience, it may make sense to be more specific about which communities we are talking about.

Keeping the focus on current residents rather than problematic gentrifiers also helps avoid treating wealth as a problem in the Bay, or pushing people away.

Loss aversion language like this can be a powerful tool for motivating action. It can create a sense of urgency and remind people of the stakes for themselves and their community.

For more discussion on this approach, see the Campaign Playbook page 18, "Reframe."

For more on avoiding developers or gentrifiers as villains, see page 13, "Name the Power of this Moment."

“DO SAY

The Bay Area [or “Our community”] is at its best when people from all backgrounds can start a life here, raise a family here, and thrive here.

Many of us who grew up here, or who came here seeking a better life, have been able to build something meaningful. Let’s not close that door of opportunity to our neighbors who are struggling. Let’s not slam it shut to the next generation of Bay Area residents.

Creating that opportunity and building the future they deserve depends on having a decent place to live.

DON’T SAY

There is enough room in the Bay Area for everyone.

We need to make room for everyone.

WHY?

“Everyone” can fit here suggest crowding, which may turn people away. “Anyone” should be able to thrive here puts the needs for housing front and center for each person, including the audience.

This framing also brings in a prosperous vision of the future, and connects to values of family and making the Bay affordable for the next generation.

“DO SAY

COVID-19 has made the challenges facing our neighbors even more difficult and exposed the racial disparities in [Place].

The structural problems we had before COVID-19 put safe, stable housing out of reach for so many people in the Bay Area. Decades of racial segregation, injustice in housing policy, and unequal access to health care meant the pandemic hit our Black and Latinx communities hardest.

To recover from this crisis and make sure the Bay Area is resilient enough to face the future, we need to redesign those unjust policies and invest in housing.

DON'T SAY

COVID-19 has created a housing crisis. We hope that we can get back to normal once we deal with the pandemic.

WHY?

The housing crisis was already there, which means that developing a vaccine or otherwise addressing COVID-19 won't solve that problem.

We want to put the current moment in the context of structural problems that brought us here.

For more on centering equity and system change, see the Campaign Playbook, page 23.

New Champions

Messaging Overview:

This audience has the potential to become enthusiastic supporters of the movement for housing justice — but they aren't there yet.

Many in this audience may feel conflicted, or complacent. They support the general idea of housing justice, but worry about the impact of change on themselves or people they care about. Or they are bystanders — they either don't see housing justice as a priority issue for themselves or their community, or don't believe that their own involvement is important.

Our primary messaging goals for New Champions are to:

1. Make the personal stakes clear, so that the audience understands that they have a stake in housing justice.
2. Emphasize the urgency of the housing crisis and demonstrate the central importance of housing justice.
3. Strengthen the connection between housing justice and racial justice. We want this audience to see that the fight for housing justice also advances other core values.
4. Move them to agreement. This audience may not be ready to take direct action for housing justice outside of an electoral context. Giving them opportunities to agree with the principles of housing and racial justice will help them to identify with the movement.

While there is significant overlap with messaging that is also suitable for the Base, messaging that is intended to reach the New Champions audience should emphasize **personal stakes** and the **consequences of inaction**.

For more context and messaging examples for the New Champions audience, see Campaign Playbook page 39.

“DO SAY

We all deserve a decent place to live. That's a matter of basic justice, of who we are as a community. Housing is essential, just like food, health care, and an education.

Our whole community does better when everyone has good, safe housing options. We all benefit from housing justice. And so it's up to all of us to fight for it.

DON'T SAY

We must provide access to affordable housing for everyone in the Bay Area.

WHY?

There is no “us” and “them” — *we* all need housing.

The goal with this language is to move away from “affordable housing” as something that is provided by one group for another. Instead, we talk about housing as a value, and as a benefit for the whole community.

And, we consistently draw connections with other basic needs and fundamental values like justice, to remind our audiences that they are inseparable.

For most audiences, we’ll avoid “housing is a right” messaging. This can trigger opposition, as it focuses attention on the individual, and will push many people to question whether each person “really” has a right to housing. Justice is collective, community is collective — so we focus on those shared values rather than individual rights.

For further context, see Campaign Playbook page 17, “Amplify.”

DO SAY

Diversity has always been a part of what makes the Bay Area special, vibrant, and successful.

People from every background are joined together to forge communities. The diversity of restaurants, parks and outdoor activities, cultures, art, neighborhoods is what makes the Bay Area like nowhere else in our nation.

Protecting that unique legacy and building the future our children deserve means strengthening our communities. We need to work together to build a Bay Area that moves all of us forward.

WHY?

Survey research has shown that embracing diversity as a positive value has widespread support. This language can be effective for Base audiences who may not already be centering racial justice in their viewpoint, and is also appropriate for New Champions who can be responsive when diversity is positioned as a positive good, and a source of strength for the community.

For further context, see Campaign Playbook page 22, “Center Equity & System Change.”

“DO SAY

A lot of people in the Bay Area were lucky enough to buy homes when costs were lower, and they've been able to thrive.

But many current Bay Area residents are being displaced from their homes by rising costs no matter how hard they work.

Young families and the next generation deserve a decent place to live, and we create opportunities for more of us to be “lucky.”

DON'T SAY

It's not fair that housing prices are so much higher now than in the past.

WHY?

Persuadable audiences will include some people for whom housing affordability is not a personal problem — they have a rent-controlled apartment, or bought a house in 1978. This messaging approach lets them acknowledge their relative luck without putting them against those who are not so fortunate.

At the same time, we clarify that there are stakes even for those who are “lucky.” The community you care about, or your own children, may not be lucky the way you were.

“DO SAY

The vibrant, thriving neighborhoods in the Bay Area have always been powered by diverse communities. Families and small businesses of all kinds have been able to make their way here. We want to preserve what makes our neighborhoods special, and make sure that the next generation has a chance to make it here.

Residents and small businesses are being displaced all over the Bay Area — and once they're gone, they may never come back.

We need to act now to keep people [young families, our community, people of color] from getting ejected from the places they call home.

DON'T SAY

We need to stop gentrification.

WHY?

This frame keeps the focus on those people who have something to lose. Depending on the speaker and the audience, it may make sense to be more specific about which communities we are talking about.

Keeping the focus on current residents rather than problematic gentrifiers also helps avoid treating wealth as a problem in the Bay, or pushing people away.

Loss aversion language like this can be a powerful tool for motivating action. It can create a sense of urgency and remind people of the stakes for themselves and their community.

For more discussion on this approach, see the Campaign Playbook page 18, "Reframe."

For more on avoiding developers or gentrifiers as villains, see page 13, "Name the Power of this Moment."

DO SAY

A safe, stable place to call home is essential to give kids a chance to succeed. They need housing justice just like they need good schools and safe communities.

And their future here in the Bay Area depends on investing in housing justice now. If we want young people to be able to build a life here and stay in the communities they were raised in, we need to produce and preserve housing options.

WHY?

This is another way to connect housing justice with core values, including education, safe communities, and caring for children.

It also provides another way to raise the stakes for the comfortable, who still have much to lose if their children can't afford to stay in the Bay Area.

DO SAY

Our community is stronger when we rise up together to meet our collective challenges — and housing is right at the top of that list. Investing in diverse housing solutions helps us address issues like hunger, opioid dependence, homelessness, and the pandemic response. Wherever we look to lift up our community, having a safe place to call home is a crucial part of the solution.

DON'T SAY

"Housing first" is the best way to address homelessness.

WHY?

Emphasize that housing justice strengthens the entire community.

This is another way to tie housing justice to other core values, including access to health care and public health.

"Housing first" is an effective mechanism for change, but that doesn't mean it should be our message. Homelessness is a fraught subject, and survey research shows that many people see it primarily as a drug, mental health, or public health issue rather than a housing issue. Instead of swimming against this current, we can embrace housing justice as a critical component of public health and stronger communities.

For further context, see Campaign Playbook page 13, "Name the Power of this Moment."

DO SAY

The Bay Area [or "Our community"] is at its best when people from all backgrounds can start a life here, raise a family here, and thrive here.

Many of us who grew up here, or who came here seeking a better life, have been able to build something meaningful. Let's not close that door of opportunity for our neighbors who are struggling. Let's not slam it shut to the next generation of Bay Area residents.

Creating that opportunity and building that kind of future we all deserve depends on having a decent place to live.

DON'T SAY

There is enough room in the Bay Area for everyone. We need to make room for everyone.

WHY?

"Everyone" can fit here suggest crowding, which may turn people away. "Anyone" should be able to thrive here puts the needs for housing front and center for each person, including the audience.

This framing also brings in a prosperous visions of the future, and connects to values of family and making the Bay affordable for the next generation.

For more on positive vision and coalition-building, see the Campaign Playbook page 28, "Mobilize."

“ DO SAY

We all know that the Bay Area has been getting harder and harder to afford. If we don't start to make changes now, we'll lose the diversity, vibrancy, and strong community that makes this place so special.

We also know that the Bay Area has an incredible record of innovation and problem-solving. We can lead the way to a future where people have stable homes and are free to pursue their dreams, raise their families, and build the lives they want to live.

We won't get there right away, but we have to start now. That's why we need [specific policy] — it's a step toward building the kind of housing that more people can afford.

DON'T SAY

This problem is huge. Lawmakers have failed us. We need to make up for lost time.

WHY?

There is a careful balance we need to strike here, to emphasize the urgent need for action without demoralizing people by making the problems seem too big to fix.

This approach acknowledges the history, but pivots quickly to an aspirational vision for the future. It also puts particular calls for change within the context of a broader movement, one step in the right direction rather than a panacea.

DO SAY

COVID-19 has made the challenges facing our neighbors even more difficult and exposed the racial disparities in [Place].

The structural problems we had before COVID-19 put safe, stable housing out of reach for so many people in the Bay Area. Decades of racial segregation, injustice in housing policy, and unequal access to health care meant the pandemic hit our Black and Latinx communities hardest.

To recover from this crisis and make sure the Bay Area is resilient enough to face the future, we need to redesign those unjust policies and invest in housing.

DON'T SAY

COVID-19 has created a housing crisis. We hope that we can get back to normal once we deal with the pandemic.

WHY?

We want to put the current moment in the context of structural problems that brought us here.

For more on centering equity and system change, see the Campaign Playbook, page 23.

Contrarians

Messaging Overview:

This audience is opposed to some or all of the goals of the housing justice movement. They are unlikely to be a primary target of most messaging, but will inevitably be a part of the conversation as community members, voters, or decision makers.

Contrarians may be heavily invested in a narrative of personal virtue that rejects the need for collective action and structural change. They may see change as a threat to their own success, prosperity, or stability. They may simply be convinced that positive change is not possible.

This doesn't mean that nobody in this audience will ever support any of the policy or cultural changes we are working toward. Some proposals may have crossover appeal to this audience, and we should use messaging frames that include them in our vision for the future. But in many cases, Contrarians are truly not reachable — and in those cases our best option may be to try to move them away from active resistance.

Our primary messaging goals for Contrarians are to:

1. Demonstrate that housing justice strengthens the entire community.
2. Present a positive vision for the future that depends on housing justice.
3. Avoid messaging that is mostly likely to trigger active opposition, such as the need to correct historical injustice, the idea that there is “enough room” for all, or the issue of homelessness.

To advance these goals, messaging that is intended to reach the Contrarian audience should emphasize a **positive, aspirational vision**.

For more context and messaging examples for the Contrarians audience, see Campaign Playbook page 40.

“DO SAY

Making sure that people in our community can afford a decent, safe place to live is essential for a strong, healthy, vibrant Bay Area.

Our homes and the people in them provide the foundation for success and progress. The longer we put off the need for a diverse mix of housing, the worse off our whole community will be. It's time to make this issue a priority for all of us.

DON'T SAY

We must make sure everyone in the Bay Area has access to affordable housing.

WHY?

There is no “us” and “them” — *we* all need housing.

The goal with this language is to move away from “affordable housing” as something that is provided by one group for another. Instead, we talk about housing as a value, as a right.

And, we consistently draw connections with other goals and values, to remind our audiences that they are inseparable.

With this group, we use loss aversion in our favor by reminding people of what THEY lose if they do not support our work to advance this issue.

For more on telling stories about interdependence, see Campaign Playbook page 25, “Attach.”

DO SAY

Your kids deserve a chance to succeed. That’s why we invest in schools, that’s why supporting businesses and job opportunities matters. But without a safe, stable place to call home, a future in the Bay Area will be out of reach for the next generation. If we price the next generation out of the Bay Area, we are putting the future of our community at risk.

And their future here in the Bay Area depends on investing in housing now. If we want young people to be able to build a life here and stay in the communities they were raised in, we need to produce and preserve housing options.

WHY?

This is another way to connect housing justice with core values, including education, safe communities, and caring for children.

It also provides another way to raise the stakes for the comfortable, who still have much to lose if their children can’t afford to stay in the Bay Area.

DO SAY

Safe, stable homes are the foundation for strong communities.

Good schools, good jobs, safe neighborhoods — those all depend on housing. And for the thousands of small businesses struggling to stay afloat, to attract customers and skilled employees, making housing more affordable is critical.

DON'T SAY

Housing is the biggest crisis facing the Bay Area.

WHY?

Even if someone who does not see housing as an important problem, we can attach it to other priorities in simple terms. The goal is not necessarily to make this audience actively support housing justice, but to at least accept affordable housing as the “price” of getting other things they value.

Focus group responses show that community small businesses are a widely-shared priority, especially for more conservative audiences. Connecting housing justice not just to shared goods like education and community, but also to economic interests like jobs and small businesses, can help connect with the priorities these audiences already hold.

DO SAY

The Bay Area has an incredible record of innovation and problem-solving, and we have a chance right now to lead the way on housing.

It's up to us to build the future we want — one where people have stable homes and are free to pursue their dreams, raise their families, and keep the Bay Area thriving.

DON'T SAY

We can't afford to ignore the housing crisis any longer.

Government leaders must do more to increase access to affordable housing.

WHY?

Again, this messaging may connect with audiences who feel no particular urgency to address housing affordability on its own. This message connects to ideas of individual and community identify as innovators/leaders, gives a reason to be proud of the work that already exists, and puts them in the right disposition to do more.

We also avoid placing responsibility on government, treating the vision of housing justice as one that is centered within the broader community.

For more information, visit ShifttheBay.org.

