Recommendations

These findings present several important implications for messaging and audience engagement around sanctuary cities, deportation, and related immigration policies.

Narrative, Messaging & Storytelling Recommendations

Frame sanctuary cities in terms of strong, safe, and connected communities, while avoiding associations with crime and violence: Both public opinion research and social media data indicate that the administration’s conflation of immigration with issues of crime and public safety gained traction in 2017, particularly following the introduction of SB4 by Texas Governor Greg Abbott. It is important to challenge and reframe the discussion, and reframe public attention on commonsense policies that already have high levels of public support. It is also necessary for immigrant rights advocates to educate persuadable audiences about pathways to citizenship, uplifting the many successes of programs like DACA. At the same time, advocates should avoid myth-busting, which may simply reinforce the connection between crime and sanctuary policies in people’s minds. There are subtler ways to reframe, such as focusing on what happens when immigrants can more fully participate and contribute. This requires talking about immigrants as more than just “immigrants,” but as parents, students, neighbors, etc., in order to give an alternative idea to move to.

SAMPLE LANGUAGE INCLUDES:

VALUE: Our country is changing, getting more and more diverse. It might make some of us uncomfortable, but it is our reality, and a constant throughout our history.

PROBLEM: Politicians play on this fear, trying to divide us. They push unwise and divisive ideas like ending deferred action, defunding states which provide legal protection to undocumented immigrants, or singling out Muslim Americans because of their religion.
**SOLUTION:** If we take the bait on these issues, it makes our country weaker, not stronger. Our nation is stronger when every one of us can contribute and share ideas, and when everyone’s basic rights and dignity are respected.

**ACTION:** We need to embrace ideas that unify us as a diverse people and make our country stronger, and we need to speak out against discrimination and prejudice when we see it.

**Define for your audience what sanctuary policies are and do:** In order to effectively communicate the importance of sanctuary jurisdictions, we must define what such communities are, and what they provide for their residents. Sanctuaries are the last refuge of the hunted. While we want to be careful about evoking that, the connection to that place of safety when a person is hunted and exhausted is an emotionally powerful one. Drawing on these themes of safety and refuge can help audiences better understand the critical role sanctuary jurisdictions play.

**Use other descriptors to describe sanctuary policies:** “Sanctuary cities” has become something of a buzzword in media coverage and political discourse, but it often goes undefined and does not speak to the variety of ways that sanctuary policies are implemented in communities and institutions across the country. Findings from our public opinion analysis also indicate that members of the public are more likely to support policies like DACA, DAPA, and a pathway to citizenship when the services the programs provide are clearly defined. Advocates should use sanctuary with other descriptors that add on to that word, like “places where everyone, including our immigrant neighbors, can contribute and participate.”

**Explain how sanctuary policies benefit all residents:** Our analysis of public opinion data shows strong public support for pro-immigration policies such as DACA, and opposition to widespread deportation. However, public opinion data also reveals that low-income Americans are less likely to want to reside in sanctuary jurisdictions than their higher income counterparts. This disparity is likely a product of anxieties related to competition for jobs—a source of anxiety that the new Administration has leveraged to sow fear and distrust. It is necessary to address these concerns, while also not perpetuating stereotypes about the types of jobs undocumented immigrants usually occupy. Advocates should talk about the importance of communities sticking together and not letting corporate interests and politicians divide us.

**Promote sanctuary policies with other solutions that expand opportunity for all:** In the survey research examined, respondents were significantly more likely to support an immigration policy when they were given the details about what the program would provide, or examples of the real-world impact on immigrant communities. Explaining in plain terms what a policy entails is a vital part of telling an affirmative story that is specific, but also a systemic.

**Connect sanctuary policies to policies your audience support:** A number of pro-immigrant policies receive high levels of support from the public. Lifting up these popular solutions while explaining and promoting more complex or less popular ones can help to build broader and more lasting support. Solutions with the greatest support include:

- Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).
- A pathway for citizenship for undocumented immigrants already in the country.

**Include racial profiling among the problems that sanctuary cities are designed to address:** Audiences engaging in online discussions about sanctuary cities and related issues are not generally connecting immigration enforcement by police to increased racial profiling. These topics currently occupy distinct clusters within our monitor, indicating that the current conversation of racial profiling (in relation to sanctuary cities and deportation) occupies a less prominent space within the overall discourse. In addition, our analysis of media coverage revealed that reporting on racial profiling in relation to anti-immigration legislation only occupied a fraction of media reports. In order to better educate the public on the dangers of legislation such as Texas SB4, is it necessary to connect the dots for engaged audiences and detail the intersection between heightened policing of immigrant communities and racial profiling.

**Racial profiling harms all Americans:** It violates the American value of equal justice that we all depend on. It disrespects and discriminates against millions of young people and others around the country. It threatens public safety and can ruin people’s lives. It is time to end racial profiling and focus law enforcement on evidence and public safety.

We need to be clear: it is unacceptable for those who enforce our laws to stereotype people based on the color of their skin, religion, or nation of origin. Law enforcement should act on facts and evidence, not racial bias. If one group can be singled out based on race or ethnicity or religion, none of us will be safe to enjoy the rights that the United States stands for. The administration's attacks on counties and cities that provide support to undocumented immigrants and their families, and policies such as Texas’ SB4, threaten the freedom of all of us.
Engaging Strategic Audiences

Key to building wider public support for pro-immigration policies is activating the base of existing supporters while persuading undecided groups over time. That, in turn, requires prioritizing strategic audiences by:

Activating the base: Our analysis of existing public opinion research indicates that Latinx Americans, Black Americans, and self-identified Democrats are highly supportive of the continuation of policies intended to protect undocumented immigrant communities, as well as efforts to challenge the Trump’s anti-immigrant actions. These audiences should be prioritized in outreach.

Incorporating the perspectives of faith communities: Faith leaders/communities have emerged as an important pro-immigrant voice in the media and in social media discourse. Drawing on the religious roots of the concept of sanctuary and highlighting the important role faith-based communities continue to play in providing safety and refuge to immigrant communities is a strategy to reach new audiences within faith communities.
APPENDIX I

Works Cited Public Opinion Analysis


APPENDIX II

Articles Cited: Media Content Analysis

NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS/BROADCASTERS

- The Boston Herald
- The San Francisco Chronicle
- CNN
- Los Angeles Times

REGIONAL/LOCAL PUBLICATIONS

- The Arizona Republic
- Tribune Review Greensboro
- Tribune Review PA
- Star Tribune Minneapolis
- Metro Edition Minnesota
- Akron Beacon Journal
- The Dallas Morning News
- Voice of America News
- The Hatchet: George Washington University
- The Santa Clara
- Register Star (Hudson, NY)
- The Press Enterprise (Riverside, CA)
- Time-Picayune New Orleans
- Fort Worth Star-Telegram
- St. Louis Post-Dispatch
- The Washington Times

- The Miami Herald
- FSView & Florida Flambeau: Florida State University
- The Daily Pennsylvanian: University of Pennsylvania
- The Philadelphia Daily News
- The Daily Review (Morgan City, Louisiana)
- Morning Call (Allentown, Pennsylvania)
- Daily World (Opelousas, Louisiana)
- Pittsburgh Tribune Review
- Public Opinion (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania)
- WFIN - 1330 AM (Findlay, Ohio)
- The Washington Times
- Metro - Philadelphia
- Winston-Salem Journal (North Carolina)
- The Recorder (Greenfield, Massachusetts)
- The Houston Chronicle