

Audience Strategy:

Because the General Public Isn't a Thing

When you understand your audience, you can design messaging that truly connects. But that means moving beyond vague ideas like “the general public.” Trying to speak to everyone often means your message won't land with anyone, and it can even backfire by reinforcing dominant **Fear Narratives**.

Broad messaging might feel safer, but it rarely moves people. Identifying specific audiences allows us to speak to real values, lived experiences, and emotional drivers. It brings precision to our communications and cultural strategies, helping us move people from passive agreement to inspired action.

That takes intention, strategy, and a deep understanding of the people you're trying to reach—not just where they live or how they vote, but what they care about, what stories they already believe, and what possibilities they're ready to imagine.

By grounding your strategy in nuanced audience insight, you gain the power to craft messages and cultural interventions that resonate, motivate, and build toward the future we're all working to realize.

Audience Segmentation:

Finding Your Target Audience

Every issue lives in a landscape of opinions, beliefs, and emotions. People fall across a wide spectrum in how closely they align with your—or your opposition's—vision. But that alignment isn't fixed; people's mindsets can and do shift. Your messaging strategy should meet people where they are and move them toward your narrative goals.

Traditionally, organizations have segmented audiences by broad categories like political affiliation. But that approach often overlooks the complexity of real people. Audiences are shaped by intersecting cultural, political, social, and economic factors—and many hold multiple, even contradictory, beliefs at once. No group is a monolith. That's why narrative change calls for a more nuanced strategy, one grounded in what truly motivates and inspires specific people.

When this toolkit refers to audiences, we're not pointing to fixed groups. Who counts as base, persuadable, or opposition depends entirely on your context—your narrative vision, your campaign goals, and your assessment of who can be moved. We provide the tools, but identifying your target audience is up to you.



REMEMBER:

This toolkit doesn't define your audience for you. Instead, it offers adaptable tools to help you identify and reach the people who matter most to your issue and goals. Your target audience depends on the specific change you're working toward—and who holds influence in making that change real.



TOA PRO TIP:

Every message should be tailored to the needs of a specific audience. One narrative can reach multiple groups with customized messages. Adjust the language, tone, and cultural references while keeping the core themes consistent.

Audience segmentation means understanding who you're trying to reach, what change you want to inspire, and how receptive they are.

The Opportunity Agenda maps audiences from 1 (strongly aligned) to 5 (strongly opposed) to help tailor messaging strategies.

This isn't just labeling—it's a guide for action. By knowing where people stand, you can better choose themes, messages, and trusted messengers to mobilize allies, persuade the moveable middle, and neutralize the opposition.

Here's a breakdown of the 1-to-5 scale we use for audience segmentation

1 Base

These are your people. They already share your values and are excited about your vision. They don't need persuading—they need support, tools, and opportunities to help amplify the work. Center their voices.

Mobilize and energize them.

2 Base-Leaning Persuadables

These folks need reinforcement. Show them how your narrative aligns with their values and give them language and framing they can repeat with confidence.

Let them help carry the narrative.

3 Persuadables

These are the "moveable middle." When you lead with shared values and offer concrete solutions, you can move them closer to alignment. Help them overcome compassion fatigue by focusing on what's possible—not just what's broken.

Invite them into a story they believe in and can take part in.

4 Opposition-Leaning Persuadables

These people lean away from your narrative but aren't fully closed off. They may share some of your values and can be reached—especially through trusted messengers or strategic entry points.

Themes, metaphors, and influencers can help move them closer to being allies.

5 Opposition

This group actively resists your vision—and they're trying to spread their opposing narrative. The goal is not to win them over, but to neutralize their influence on everyone else. Remember: this group is completely immovable; if there is hope to persuade them, they're not a 5. This is important because we can actively undermine our strategy and exhaust our resources trying to reach people whose minds can never be changed.

Know their tactics so you can inoculate the rest.

Know 'Em to Move 'Em: Understanding Your Target Audience

Once you know where different audiences fall on the scale, it's time to identify your **target audience**—the people you're aiming to reach and move. Sometimes you're choosing your target audience based on your goals and strategies. Other times, you're tailoring your strategy to a specific audience based on opportunity.

For example, if you've been asked to speak at an event, you should spend some time understanding who will be in attendance so you can tailor your message to them. On the other hand, if you're launching a social media campaign, you have an opportunity to choose who you want to target based on the message you want to share. Think about who has the most potential to help shift a narrative, who are you trying to activate through your work, and who will take your message and amplify it within their own networks.



Photo Credit: Clay Banks

Once you've identified your target audience, it's time to dig deeper. This is where strategy meets curiosity. Think like a researcher, organizer, or storyteller. Your job is to understand not just who they are, but what makes them tick.



ASK YOURSELF:

- > Where do they spend time online and in real life?
- > What media are they consuming?
- > Who do they listen to—community leaders, cultural figures, faith leaders, digital influencers, etc.?
- > What inspires them—stories, histories, traditions, movements, ideologies, etc.?
- > What do they currently think about your issue?
- > What do you want them to do?

Every campaign or cultural intervention requires its own audience research.

You know your field best—use these tools to explore, test, and refine who your message is really for. For example, if you're trying to influence a policymaker, your actual audience might be the constituents they listen to.

These insights give you the building blocks to refine your communications and cultural strategies to activate your

audience with clarity, intention, and impact. The more clearly you know who your target audiences are, what they care about, and where they're coming from, the more powerfully you can craft messages and cultural strategies that resonate. Remember: you're not just trying to reach people—you're trying to move them.