



photo: Steve Pavey

GUIDE AT A GLANCE

Summary of Key Recommendations

See Detailed Findings and Recommendations on page 30 for more information on these recommendations, including examples of what this looks like in practice.



Recommendation: Utilize diverse immigrant and non-immigrant messengers. Many in our persuasion audience have limited personal relationships with immigrants or understanding of their experiences—especially with regard to detention. The challenges faced by immigrants, the aspirations held by people who immigrate and their families, and especially experiences around detention, are not well understood. This lack of personal context has a direct impact on how our audience perceives the world around them and the news and messaging they consume. It can heighten the perception of immigrants as an “other,” rather than a part of families, communities, workplaces, and neighborhoods. This lack of context also means that many in our audience hold or develop flawed beliefs or perceptions around immigrants generally and those in detention that can interfere with, rather than foster, support. By featuring diverse immigrant messengers telling

their own stories and embedding them in community we can disrupt these flawed beliefs and replace them with a fuller, more nuanced understanding of the lives and experiences of people who immigrate to the U.S. This can also help to root people in the real-world relationships they have with immigrants whom they want to protect from harm. In doing so, we can help to build connection and empathy that is essential to persuasion and, ultimately, move people to action.



Recommendation: Lead with shared values. Many in our would-be supporter audience have conflicting values and beliefs when it comes to immigrants and immigration that can interfere with support (for example, values around safety or the rule of law). Yet, they also share many core values that can lead them to be supportive (wanting to protect others from harm, being a good neighbor, love of family). However, when these values feel in conflict with one another, audiences can experience our messaging and our goals as inconsistent or in conflict with who they are and what they believe. By elevating shared values that lead them to be more supportive, we can help them to put less weight on those that can interfere with support. Shared values can also help to foster connection and identification with immigrants who audiences might sometimes view as “other” or as holding different values. By starting with shared values, we can help audiences situate everything that comes next in the context of values and intentions we all share so they experience our issue and our ask as in line with, rather than in conflict with, their own values.



Recommendation: Foster wholesome conflict. To make progress on our goal of ending detention, people must first believe there is actually a problem—and that problem must create an internal conflict for them. On the one hand, this research clearly demonstrated that our would-be early adopter and early majority audiences do believe that there are problems around detention that need to be solved. However, the concern they have over detention today does not yet cause them enough internal conflict to act or to act in service of ending detention. This means that we need to help our audiences begin to reflect on the ways in which maintaining the status quo is out of step with their positive and aspirational values, identity, and beliefs in a way that generates conflict inside them. This “wholesome” inner conflict is an opportunity—and a necessary precursor to change. By inviting audiences to grapple with who they are and what they value—and whether they are living those intentions through their actions—we sow fertile soil for change. We can do this most effectively by using psychological cues in our messaging that encourage reflection and through storytelling that model how people like those in our audience who may once have been conflicted, unaware, uninformed, or indifferent came to feel differently—and act differently—through their life experiences.



Recommendation: Tell “journey stories” that center shared American ideals and values. Our research shows that people are persuaded through “journey stories,” in which they can identify with a main character who changes over the course of the story. The most effective journey stories feature both immigrant and non-immigrant messengers, are carefully sequenced and constructed to center shared ideals and values, and help guide people through social modeling.



Recommendation: Use key facts to create openness. On the whole, this research revealed a profound lack of awareness about the scope and scale of detention, recent surges in detention and deportations, how these facilities and the system work, the reasons people are in detention, and the role of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Yet, many in our audience also have a high level of confidence in what they think they know about how the system works. Their flawed ideas about the problem, as they see it, can lead many to reject the solution we are proposing and be closed to hearing more. We need to use key facts to disrupt these entrenched beliefs so audiences will be open to considering this issue differently and supporting our efforts to end detention. Key facts also cue audiences to consider that perhaps they do not know all they need to know about detention—or the proposed solutions to address the problems in the system. [see pages 51 - 53 for examples of Key Facts]



Recommendation: Paint a credible picture of harm. The aspirational values that people hold may make them inclined to be supportive of ending detention, but they are often not enough for them to take action. The need to end or prevent harm—now—is what moves most to act on this issue. When many in our audience hear news reports about conditions and the experiences of people in immigrant detention, they become disturbed and concerned. Yet, many are also skeptical about how widespread these events are and wonder if detention might still be better than many of the circumstances from which immigrants came. They hold on to a belief that these stories of harm are mostly anomalies, rather than endemic to the system. These beliefs can alleviate, for many, the urgent need to act on their moral impulse to protect others. To move audiences to action, we need to paint a very vivid picture of what is at stake and the potential and current harm caused by detention. This is most powerfully accomplished by “showing” and describing through stories rather than “telling” or explaining. When we paint a credible picture of harm impacting real people, we activate a sense of emotional and moral urgency to protect other people and to care about what happens to them.



Recommendation: Indict the system. Given our audience’s flawed beliefs about immigrants and immigration and about the detention system itself and the intensive attention on conditions of detention, most are initially less concerned with the existence of detention itself (or ICE or CBP) than with the *way* they see it playing out in the news. Most tend to view these events as aberrations in the system or the results of bad actors rather than

a problem with the system itself. When confronted with the various problems with detention or these agencies, many express a strong desire to help or address these issues. Yet, their flawed beliefs mean they are often initially inclined to want to fix or “improve” the current system rather than to dismantle it. An important part of indicting the system is to talk about the abuses and conditions in the system. However, if we only talk about those things, without contextualizing this as an intractable and systemic problem, it leads many to see the solution as addressing *conditions* rather than ending detention. To build support for ending detention we need to communicate in ways that indict the system itself, not just how it is currently being run.



Recommendation: Paint a proactive vision. When our would-be audience hears movement calls to “Abolish ICE” or “End Detention,” what they hear is what we are *against*—not what we are *for* or what they can do. This raises significant anxiety for many around changes that they imagine (in part because of intense priming from the right) could create chaos, unintended consequences, and risk to public safety as well as lead to not knowing who is coming into the country. Reflecting this dynamic, when we asked survey respondents about whether they favored or opposed a range of policy proposals related to detention, just 38 percent (62 percent total favor) said they strongly favored ending detention and just 25 percent (44 percent total favor) said they strongly favored abolishing ICE, when asked about these policies individually. However, our research found that when we do paint a proactive vision of the world that we want, our audience gravitates toward that vision—to the exclusion of other more incremental or “better detention” approaches. These dynamics are reflected in the much stronger support for this approach than the individual policies discussed above. Fully 51 percent of survey respondents strongly favored and 79 percent in total favored ending detention and creating a new case management approach to immigration when it was articulated as part of a comprehensive vision.



Recommendation: Provide opportunities for action. Once we make our case, the research suggests audiences are ready to take action yet do not know what to do or whether they can have an impact. This heightened urgency is positive when we can harness it. But if we do not provide a place for them to direct this energy now, it can lead to discouragement, helplessness, and ultimately disengagement. So, it is important to connect concrete action now in service of both short-term and long-term goals and in ways that deepen their connection to the issue. In addition, it is important to remember that many—perhaps most—in our would-be base do not see themselves as activists or part of a movement. They may come to in time, but they need both invitations to take action and activities to participate in that meet them where they are. That is, a range of ways to engage and make a difference will be important for moving audiences along a ladder of engagement.