

RESEARCH-BASED TALKING POINTS & RESPONSES TO COMMON QUESTIONS

While we believe that long-term and lasting change related to immigrants and immigrant detention will require a range of communications strategies and an emphasis on strategic narratives and storytelling, we also know that advocates every day are asked tough questions by media that can be hard to answer in the moment. This research suggests that we should not move away from the tough questions or pivot to another talking point. Our audiences experience it as evasive, and it can undermine our credibility. It also leaves genuine concerns and questions unaddressed or unanswered in their minds—questions that when we do answer, can help lead them to be more supportive of our efforts. However, addressing these tough questions must be done strategically.

Below are a few of the key questions we heard from advocates that are especially common and research-based answers to help you respond. Some of these talking points may not resonate with you personally or may be different than how you are accustomed to answering these questions. Later in this guide, we describe more in detail about how these messages were developed, but offer them to you here as a quick resource for future communications.

Question: Why are you calling to end immigration detention? Don't we just need to address some of the problems with the system and make the conditions better?

- The United States should be a place of refuge for people around the world seeking a better life or who face violence, starvation, poverty, war, or persecution. We haven't yet lived up to that ideal, but we continue to strive to meet it. That means learning from past mistakes in which groups of people were unfairly targeted and deprived of liberty by our government.
- Fairness, freedom, opportunity, responsibility, and respect for human rights should be at the core of our immigration system. But our current system isn't set up to uphold these values, instead, people are deprived of their liberty, separated from their loved ones, and excluded from their communities.
- More detention beds, facilities, and money hasn't made things better. It has only meant that more people who are immigrants are suffering and, in some cases, dying in U.S. custody than ever before.
- We believe that all people need the freedom to move and live freely in community and with their family and to seek opportunity, safety, and freedom without the fear of the U.S. government depriving them of liberty, separating them from their loved ones, subjecting them to abuse and dehumanization, or forcing them from their homes and communities. In this country, every person from every walk of life—including people who are immigrants—should be treated with dignity and respect under the law and by our government institutions. The detention of people who are immigrants is fundamentally incompatible with this ideal. We need to radically transform the way we address immigration. Together, community members and our elected officials can create a world in which our immigration system can fairly and efficiently welcome and support the resettlement of people who want to make a life here, without detention centers and prisons.

Question: Who is in detention? How are they getting there?

- In ways that would shock the conscience of most Americans, the United States locks up survivors of torture, people seeking asylum, people who have been granted the permanent right to live in the United States, visa holders, people who have lived here for years and may have American citizen spouses and children, individuals with mental health and medical conditions and other vulnerable groups including pregnant women and families with children—even babies.
- There are many ways people may be forced into detention by U.S. authorities. Some people are being forced into detention at the border while awaiting hearings as they legally seek asylum in the U.S. Others are unfairly profiled, rounded up, and detained by border patrol, ICE agents, or local law enforcement across the country simply for being suspected of being an immigrant without legal residency in the U.S., including in communities and states all across our nation. Any non-U.S. citizen, including long-term legal permanent residents or those previously granted protection to live here, can be detained and deported for old crimes, even if people have long ago served

sentences, paid fines, or otherwise been held accountable and had little or no contact with law enforcement since.

- Whether called “detention center,” “facility,” “jail,” or “prison,” these systems, though they may seem different, share the same unjust impact: disproportionately incarcerating people who are Black or brown through racial profiling and targeting, stripping them of their liberty and basic human rights, and separating them from their families, loved ones, and community.

Question: Isn't detention necessary for vetting and processing?

- We know that detaining people who are immigrants is not necessary for a fair and efficient immigration system that allows people the freedom to move and seek safety and opportunity for themselves and their family and upholds dignity for all people.
- It hasn't always been this way. Just a few decades ago, the United States did not put immigrants and people seeking asylum in detention like it does today. The government was able to allow people to enter and leave the United States without jeopardizing the safety, liberty, or basic human rights of those seeking to immigrate here or those people who have always called U.S. home.
- We are not the only country to sometimes see large numbers of immigrants and refugees fleeing to our borders to seek safety here. But we are the only country in the world that detains immigrants in camps and jails upon arrival at this scope and scale.

Question: Why abolish ICE rather than just reform it?

- In recent years, ICE's budget has grown by 31 percent to more than \$7.6 billion per year. ICE's budget continues to grow, and yet more money and more detention beds has only meant more people are suffering at the hands of the U.S. government in detention facilities than ever before. The system itself is unjust, abusive, and a gross violation of human rights. It simply isn't set up to uphold our values of freedom, fairness and safety for all people.
- Many Americans are shocked to learn that hundreds of thousands of immigrants and people seeking asylum in the U.S.—including many who have called the U.S. home for years—are being deprived of their liberty, denied access to lawyers, separated from their families and loved ones, denied access to basic hygiene and medical attention, and indefinitely detained in prison-like conditions. The alarming death toll in ICE custody underscores that an immigration system focused on enforcement is plagued by broad, unchecked authority, a lack of transparency and accountability, and a culture that results in system-wide abuses, including death.
- Every day, we hear more and more stories of people being imprisoned or sent to a country they don't even know, loved ones being torn apart, ICE raids, and children being detained in immigration camps. Our current detention system operated by ICE does nothing to fix the problems with our immigration system or provide a pathway to legal status. Detention is a key part of the machinery of deportation.

Question: What about people who are “criminals” or who are “dangerous”?

- All people, including people who are immigrants and people seeking asylum, care about safety for individuals, families, and communities. But detention does nothing to keep our communities safe and, in fact, puts many of our friends and neighbors who are immigrants at risk of being targeted by the government’s deportation machine.
- When someone seeks to harm another person in our community, that’s never ok. We can hold people accountable and protect one another when that happens without depriving hundreds of thousands of people of their liberty, subjecting them to trauma and abuse, and separating them from loved ones.

Question: What would happen if immigration detention didn’t exist? Wouldn’t that mean chaos and open borders?

- Put simply, no. We can have fairness and order without abuse, unfair targeting, and incarceration of people seeking to build a life here in the United States. There are many different ways to reimagine our immigration system, in a way that upholds our highest ideals and values and reflects the reality of today’s migration patterns.
- For example, we can redirect some of the billions of dollars currently spent on the detention of immigrants and people seeking asylum and replace it with a system of community-based case management that studies show can work much better for those that need support. A five-year U.S. pilot program paired arriving immigrants with a case manager who could guide them through the immigration process. This program achieved a 99 percent compliance rate with immigration court requirements and more effectively supported immigrants’ transitions into the country and local communities.*
- Simply put, people navigating their immigration case should be able to do so with their families and in community—not behind bars in immigration detention. For those who need support, they can access it through community-based groups. A majority of people in detention have been living in the country for years and are established members of their communities with families. Moreover, people seeking asylum often have strong community ties with loved ones waiting to welcome them to the United States.
- Under this approach, the U.S. government would partner with qualified nonprofit, faith-based or community organizations that have experience and expertise in serving and resettling immigrants and refugees in local communities to assist immigrant families with medical, social, employment, housing, and legal needs.
- Instead of putting billions of taxpayer dollars in the pockets of private prison companies, while our schools, infrastructure, and communities suffer, these reforms could redirect more than \$3 billion in federal tax dollars that can be used to fund education, healthcare, housing, and other programs that support our collective wellbeing and prosperity.

* Facts in this message are an example only; please use current data in your own messaging.

Language Tips and Considerations

To help our audiences better understand, these are terminology tips to consider.

Instead of, or in addition to...	Consider using	Why it matters
<p>Undocumented, without legal status, fell out of status</p>	<p>People whose immigration status is not current, is expired, is under review; People without current immigration status</p>	<p>The audience's lack of familiarity with this issue means that they do not know what it means to be without legal status or to fall out of legal status so the terms are confusing. They do not understand how that might happen so connecting the dots—that something was current, but expired, etc. is helpful. In addition, the term “undocumented immigrant” takes on new meaning in the context of detention. Many in our audience do not understand “undocumented” to mean that one does not have legal papers to be in the U.S. Instead, they imagine it means that these immigrants have no documents whatsoever to prove their identity—that they can claim to be anyone from anywhere and there is no way to verify the truth of those claims. In this context, they imagine that without the “vetting and processing” of detention, anyone would be able to walk up to the border with whatever name they claim—legitimizing a potentially false identity to hide who they really are—heightening fears and concerns and reinforcing the need for detention in their minds.</p>
<p>Concentration camp, prison, jail</p>	<p>Detention center, detention facility, detention camp</p>	<p>While many in our audience recognize that there are similarities in the conditions between detention and prison, their lack of understanding of detention means that when we conflate the terms it suggests to them that the purpose of detention is to punish or to protect others from harm imposed by immigrants. While audiences also voluntarily make connections on their own to concentration camps and Japanese internment camps, when we do so without great care (see more about this on page XXX), it can be experienced as hyperbolic and raise questions about our credibility. Detention center, detention camp, or detention facility accurately describes what we mean without confusing our audiences.</p>
<p>This is another example of ICE abuse Once again, ICE has...</p>	<p>Many people are shocked to learn... It's shocking but true that ... It may be hard to imagine [in this country], yet....</p>	<p>Often when talking about ICE and CBP abuses, we are aware of the deep history of abuse in these organizations and institutions. Yet, our audience is not. When we talk about these things as common place or “normal,” it is outside of our audience’s lived experience and emotionally incongruent. We inadvertently treat it as common place, when their emotional reaction to it is shock, surprise, and disbelief. To be effective, we need to mirror our audience’s emotional experience with key words and phrases.</p>

Instead of, or in addition to...	Consider using	Why it matters
Immigrants, asylum seekers, detainees, unaccompanied minors, permanent residents	People who are immigrants, people seeking asylum, our neighbors who are immigrants, people migrating to the U.S., people who are moving to the U.S., people who are seeking a better life, people who are seeking safety/opportunity in the U.S.	<p>Audiences tend to think of this issue at a national and “category” level. That is, they do not initially think of real people and individuals in their workplaces, communities, schools, and places of worship that are impacted by these policies and practices. We need to cue audiences to think about the issue locally to humanize it and to root them in their experiences of people they know and want to protect. These are just a few examples of how you can do this effectively. You may come up with others—and so long as they put the “people” in the discussion, it will be more effective than “category” labels.</p> <p>In addition, while the distinctions between groups of immigrants may be legally meaningful to those of us doing this work, it is important to know that people often conflate these terms and do not understand the distinctions between them. These terms also tend to move people into a “head” space rather than a “heart” space—toward law and policy and process and away from humanity. Focusing on the why versus categorizing the what can help to foster more connection and reduce otherness.</p>
CBP, ICE, TPS, legal residency, DACA, and all other jargon	Use plain language—spell out acronyms, provide simple explanations of what terms mean or what agencies do, avoid complex legal terms, resist the urge to over explain	Most people are unfamiliar with the terminology and jargon related to immigrant detention. Yet, it is routinely used without explanation by advocates, which leaves our audiences to fill in the blanks in ways that often aren’t helpful or to miss our meaning all together.
Targets, targeting	Unfair profiling, racial profiling, targeting merely because someone is suspected of being an immigrant, because of the color of their skin or the language they speak	Many in our would-be base audience simply do not believe that our institutions or agencies were designed to or intentionally target specific communities with malice and bias in mind. At least not yet. However, they are aware that the IMPACT of these systems has been disproportionate and unjust and that there are cultures within these systems that allow for bias and profiling. When we talk about impact, versus intent, we can be more persuasive and foster openness to hearing more.
Deserve, rights, are entitled to	Should have/need freedom, liberty, opportunity, safety	When we use words like deserve or rights or entitled, audiences tend to get triggered. For some, it feels as though people who immigrate expect special treatment or exceptions. For others, it triggers zero sum thinking, in which rights or things deserved by an immigrant come at their expense. Yet when we focus on core needs, freedom, opportunity, etc., we move people away from that anxiety and into a positive values-based space that leads them to be more supportive.