

PASSING THE MESSAGE STICK

Messages that build widespread public support for transformative change on First Nations justice, now and beyond the referendum.

This is a historic moment, with transformative change for First Nations communities – like treaties, truth-telling and self-determination – all within our grasp.

If we build a groundswell of public support and win a resounding Yes in the referendum, then a wave of transformative change will follow – because public momentum and demand gives governments a political mandate to act on bold policy reform.

To get us there, we need to win the narrative and we need to be ambitious – and to do that, we need to tell our story, our way.

Together, we can shift the narrative and bring about the change our communities have been fighting for, for generations.

Passing the Message Stick is led by Dr Jackie Huggins AM, Larissa Baldwin, Millie Telford and Kirsty Albion, supported by GetUp and Australian Progress.

To find out more and read the full report head to passingthemessagestick.org



PROVEN MESSAGE STRUCTURE

Shaping stories with this structure helps to ground messages in strength, draw attention to the institutions and people who cause us harm, share our expert solutions and paint a picture of how we can create better future for all of us.

Start with a shared **VALUE** - these typically appeal to all audiences. Using a common sense statement most people agree with is a strong way to open.

Then describe the **VILLAIN** who causes us harm - typically an institution, government policy or decision maker on the issue. Be as specific as possible - who is involved, what they are doing, and what's their motive?

Next, share your **VICTORY**, or a clear ask and solution. We know what's best for our communities, so ground your victory in our strength, expertise and capability.

Close with a positive **VISION**, painting a picture of a better future for everyone. This provides hope to our base and persuadables who genuinely want things to be better for First Nations people, in a society that respects and values everyone.

VALUE "In our democracy, the voting public has the final say and the Government must respect the will of the people.

VILLAIN

First Nations people have been calling for change for decades but governments only act if they feel pressure from voters.

VICTORY

With a resounding Yes vote in the referendum, we will have the momentum for big reforms and could see huge changes including treaties, land rights, truth telling and justice.

Over the next decade, we can work together to leave future generations more united, where First Nations people are respected, listened to and treated with dignity.

VISION

OUR MESSAGING RECOMMENDATIONS

When writing messages to build support for transformative change, and winning a resounding Yes, we recommend you include:

1. Shared values

↓ Values are how we build alignment across audiences, helping us reach people with different backgrounds, experiences and political persuasions. The research shows when we share values like equity, listening and respect, not only are people more likely to support us, but their support stays strong in the face of the racist 'No' messages.

2. A clear vision

↓ Most people see this moment as bigger than the referendum, and an opportunity to bring about more meaningful change. When we connect this moment to our bigger vision and our solutions, more people support us.

3. A credible theory of change

↓ A theory of change is a story of how we can get from where we are to where we want to be. A simple formula for writing a theory of change is: *If we do this, then this will happen (better outcome), because (explaining our reasoning).* To be shared widely, a theory of change must have two key ingredients: it must be credible and compelling.

4. First Nations strength and leadership

↓ People are more supportive when they hear messages of strength, optimism and capability. Because the referendum is ultimately a vote about how people perceive us – we need to flood the airwaves and conversations with stories of our strength, leadership and solutions.

5. A clear sequence - first we vote for a representative body, then we decide the model

↓ *First*, we vote and everyone has a say on the principle of whether we should have a representative body. *Secondly*, through a consultation process, First Nations people will shape the model to ensure it is representative.



APPLYING THE ADVICE

Our base and persuadables overwhelmingly agree that listening to First Nations people when making laws and policies that impact us will lead to better laws and policies.

This is a great message to share, because it taps into a universal value of listening and respect, and is underpinned by the expertise of our communities.



Here's an example of how it could look in your messaging:

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“When we listen to each other, share our knowledge and work together, we all benefit. Aboriginal people have a valuable contribution to make on land and fire management and much more.

But governments have often refused to hear or take up this advice.

Writing Yes in the referendum is a way to say that we want to hear the wisdom of the oldest living culture on earth. **We can all benefit when we listen to the knowledge of Aboriginal communities.**

We will have a fairer and better future when we include First Nations expertise in our democratic process.”

EMBRACE

REPLACE

Values statements, like “everyone deserves to be treated with respect” and “when we listen to those most affected, we get the best outcomes”.

Statistics and jargon.

Strength, like “our people are strong and resilient and when we are free to choose our own path, the whole country benefits”.

Deficit language, such as: “we are vulnerable” and “we are the most incarcerated people”.

“Whether we’ve been here for five years, five generations or 5,000 generations, everyone has an important role to play.”

“A separate race-based representative body will divide us.”

Vision statements, like: “together we can build a future where First Nations people are respected, listened to and valued as the oldest living culture in the world”.

Statements that undersell, such as: “this is just a small, simple change”. Messages like this tell people representation is a toothless tiger.

“If First Nations people are represented in shaping national policies, we will get better outcomes in health, housing and more, because we know what’s best for our communities.”

Statements that oversell without a credible theory of change, such as: “the Voice will create a better future for First Nations people” - people simply don’t believe this.

“Representation” or “representative body”.

“Constitutional recognition” or “advisory body”.

Yes statements, like: “write Yes in the referendum” or “we are saying Yes for First Nations justice”.

Statements that tell people how to ‘vote’, such as: “Vote for the Voice”.

“First, we vote and everyone has a say on the principle of whether we should have a representative body. Secondly, through a consultation process, First Nations people will shape the model to ensure it is representative.”

Statements about the detail, such as: “don’t worry about the details, the Voice is harmless” or “the detail will be revealed in due course” (which suggests that we are withholding details).

“I’m writing Yes to send a message that we respect First Nations people and we want to hear and learn from the oldest living culture in the world”.

“Voting Yes to the Voice is the right thing to do.”

Yes and... “We are saying ‘Yes’ in the referendum, ‘Yes’ to treaties, ‘Yes’ to truth-telling, ‘Yes’ to ending black deaths in custody and ‘Yes’ to justice for First Nations people”.

“The Voice is a first step” (saying first step disregards the years of advocacy of First Nations Elders and community, instead we can embrace ‘next step’ or ‘step in the right direction’).

OUR RESEARCH



The single **most important** thing we can do in this moment is to speak to shared **values** and our **collective vision for our future**, using messages grounded in **First Nations strength, knowledge and expertise**.



The **most damaging** thing we can do right now is to explain in-depth details, rebut opposition arguments which repeat their message, or attack other First Nations people calling for more ambitious change.

Our goal is to find the best messages to mobilise the base, persuade the middle and repel our opponents.

The base are people who strongly support First Nations self-determination and justice. The most important part of the base is us, First Nations people - although it's important to note that on the issue of the referendum, First Nations people sit across all three audiences.

Persuadables are the majority of people in the middle who don't have firm views on First Nations people, or self-determination and justice. They toggle between conflicting ideas and usually support the ideas they hear most in public discourse. Persuadables are 65% of the population, so we can only win transformative change with their support.

Opponents are people who strongly oppose self-determination and justice. They'll never support us, and we don't need them to.

Our methodology consisted of a thorough language analysis, followed by qualitative and quantitative research, including 15 focus groups and a dial test survey with a 3,000 person sample of the general population.