



# Voices for Healthy Kids Message Manual

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## ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This manual is designed to help advocates communicate effectively and efficiently with conservative policymakers and policy influencers about the misuse of state-level preemption and the importance of allowing communities to make decisions that make sense for them.

The approach taken to create this manual draws on science-based models and best practices for persuading and motivating people through language that informs and inspires. The messages were developed through extensive engagement with staff from Voices For Healthy Kids, an initiative of the American Heart Association, advocates, and conservative policymakers and policy influencers.

### How to Use This Manual

We can draw on the themes, language, and ideas in this manual to engage current and potential audiences, compelling them to support local decision-making in new and exciting ways. The messages in this document can be repeated word for word and can be adapted to suit advocate needs.



## METHODOLOGY

The insights and messages in this manual were developed based on a research process that included:

- **Three roundtables with Voices for Healthy Kids advocates** from target states (including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, and Texas) to understand advocates' experiences with preemption-related issues, challenges with engaging state-level conservative lawmakers, and their needs for supportive resources moving forward.
- **Messaging workshops with the Voices for Healthy Kids team and their advocates** to help us understand how well our messages address the challenges you face with different archetypes of conservative policymakers and ensure that the messages felt authentic to your voice yet still resonated with conservative audiences.
- **Sixteen in-depth interviews with state-level conservative policymakers and policy influencers, including four in each archetype**, to explore how state-level conservative policymakers and influencers make decisions on key issues, understand their views on preemption broadly, and pressure test our formula and tailored guidance for each archetype along with a few additional new frames.

Policymakers and influencers included staff of federal and local representatives, state government agencies, mayor and governor offices, think tanks and other research institutions, and advocacy organizations.

The archetypes we spoke to were based on research commissioned by Voices for Healthy Kids about conservative policymaker archetypes, which can be found [here](#).

The four archetypes include:



### **Church & Country**

Uphold faith, family, and community as their guiding principles, advocating for policies that support those in need while ensuring economic and social stability and remaining cautious of government overreach that may disrupt traditional values



### **Economic Influenced**

Prioritize economic growth, efficiency, and fiscal responsibility, favoring market-driven solutions and limited government intervention while supporting policies that demonstrate clear economic benefits and promote upward mobility



### **Legacy Republican**

Prioritize stability, responsibility, and conservative economic principles, advocating for pragmatic, research-driven solutions while remaining cautious of policies they see as overly progressive or disruptive to established institutions



### **Populist Aligned**

Champion grassroots decision-making, economic fairness, and limited government, advocating for policies that protect working-class interests and local control while resisting government expansion and one-size-fits-all solutions





# Audience Insights

# Aspirational Communication Model

Our messaging is informed by the Aspirational Communication Model, which provides a science-based framework to help communicate with maximum motivating power.

Drawing from motivational, cognitive, and social psychology, the model suggests that you achieve greater levels of interest and engagement when you connect with people on multiple levels: appealing to their hopes and values (**aspirational**), putting people in the picture (**social**), speaking to both the heart and the head (**emotional**), and offering benefits that people understand and value (**functional**).

Our communications research and development explored questions such as these:



**Aspirational:** What aspirations might motivate state-level conservative policymakers and influencers to support the right of local communities to pursue their own priorities?

**Social:** What personal traits and values define state-level conservative policymakers and influencers who support local communities in pursuing their priorities?

**Emotional:** How does engaging with these issues make state-level conservative policymakers and influencers feel?

**Functional:** What value is delivered for policymakers and constituents by allowing communities to advance their priorities?



# Audience Insights Formula

This formula identifies the key motivations of our audience of **pragmatic and persuadable conservative policymakers**. It describes the way they see themselves in the context of state and local policymaking and the topic of preemption. Understanding our audiences' mindsets can help us effectively communicate about our work and people to work with us.

Persuadable policymakers see themselves as problem-solvers, not partisans—they want to create practical solutions that serve their constituents well. The first question they ask is: ***Does this make sense for the people I serve?***

## ASPIRATIONAL



### Solutions-Oriented Public Servants

Conservative state policy influencers see themselves as dedicated public servants who prioritize good policy solutions that benefit everyone in their state—regardless of political party or identity.

## SOCIAL



### Productive Partnerships

Conservative state policy influencers see an important role for many stakeholders in decision-making, including important partnerships between state and local governments. When it comes to local decisions, state leaders should set broad protections, while local leaders should provide vital insights to shape policies that meet a community's needs.

## EMOTIONAL



### Cautious About Local Leaders, but Sound Policy Builds Trust

Conservative state policy influencers feel cautious about some local decisions, believing local leaders can earn trust by proving their competence and commitment to policies that serve all communities without consequences.

## FUNCTIONAL



### Tailored Solutions Backed by Unique Communities

While the context and issue matters, conservative state policy influencers recognize that local decision-making can be essential for tailoring solutions to unique community needs and ensuring well-supported policies reflect the priorities of residents, businesses, and local leaders alike.



## ASPIRATIONAL



# Solutions-Oriented Public Servants

Conservative state policy influencers see themselves as dedicated public servants who prioritize good policy solutions that benefit everyone in their state—regardless of political party or identity.

## Why It Works

The conservative state policy influencers we spoke with entered public service or advocacy to identify and implement solutions they believe will help all people thrive. While some may question whether lawmakers always prioritize their constituents' best interests, the influencers we interviewed were clear in their commitment to serving their communities. They focus on what they see as the best outcomes for their constituents rather than catering to national political agendas or contributing to polarization. Any hint of negativity or politicization in messaging immediately turns them off.

As a result, they support policies they believe benefit the entire state or population rather than favoring specific groups or regions. While they don't explicitly frame their work in terms of equity, they aim to address the needs of those they see as most in need of support.

## In Their Own Words

"We would like to see policies that would overwhelmingly help less fortunate kids ... who are typically left behind. I'm not interested in advocating for policies that would seek to further benefit those who already are benefited by the system." —Church & Country

"We're going to look for a need that's been expressed by somebody locally, because we want to make sure that we're serving our constituents' needs and desires." —Economic Influenced

"We want to make sure that when we formulate a policy, that it considers ... the child and the family, the whole child philosophy, and that whatever policies we recommend, we don't have unintended consequences. That's a big one, because as the political environment has gotten more contentious over the last couple of years, you really have to be careful about how you phrase things." —Legacy Republican

"How are we benefiting individuals? And does it benefit a broad subset? ... Does it have any negative impact on anyone? And then, I think it is difficult in our culture, but I also look at what the future impacts of it may be. ... [When] I retire 20 years from now, I [want to] look back and say, 'I did these good things, and they still stand the test of time of those [in] 20 years, or they've helped advance my community to get to where it is 20 years later.'" —Populist Aligned

## SOCIAL



# Productive Partnerships

Conservative state policy influencers see an important role for many stakeholders in decision-making, including important partnerships between state and local governments. When it comes to local decisions, state leaders should set broad protections, while local leaders should provide vital insights to shape policies that meet a community's needs.



## Why It Works

Conservative policy influencers see both state and local leaders as essential to decision-making, recognizing that each offers valuable perspectives on what's best for their communities and the state as a whole.

From their viewpoint, the state provides a broad framework to protect all residents and ensure policies in one region don't negatively impact others. However, they also acknowledge the diverse needs and cultures across communities. As such, they believe local leaders—including advocates and grassroots organizers—should offer critical insights and have the flexibility to tailor policies accordingly.

When shaping policy, these policy influencers prioritize a range of voices, ensuring a broad swath of stakeholders, experiences, and perspectives are considered. They are open to collaboration with advocates and others to design effective policies and programs. A cooperative approach, especially on issues where persuadable conservative lawmakers share common goals, can help build alliances for meaningful policy advancements and even push back against preemption.

## In Their Own Words

“In my view, you want [the state] to set guardrails, so you don't have people falling off the cliff. But what they do within those lanes is up to them. How they want to traverse it, how fast they want to go, how slow they want to go, which lane—that is up to them. What we care about is making sure that everyone is getting there safely.” —Church & Country

“This is the way that [the state has] always done issues. But the locality might be able to say ‘Hey? Well, this is why we innovated. This is why this is better for the locality,’ and then hopefully, they can translate that issue up to the state or at least have a process to resolve the issue.” —Economic Influenced

“They want to exert that autonomy and make it right for their communities. Because if you live in Amarillo, you don't want to live in Austin. And that's kind of challenging for the state. Because, you know, the state has a bigger paintbrush. They're going to create a law that impacts everybody. And Amarillo, they may not want to have conversations about environmental issues. So, at what point do you make it consistent for the community which you live in?” —Legacy Republican

“It's a challenge, but it's that we sit down and just meet with people to help shape the policy to meet the need, and that it is always an iterative process. Just because we say we're done with something, it's not like you plant a flag on a hill and call it a day. It's always open engagement that seems to be the way to go.” —Populist Aligned

## EMOTIONAL



# Cautious of Local Leaders, but Sound Policy Builds Trust

Conservative state policy influencers feel cautious about some local decisions, believing local leaders can earn trust by proving their competence and commitment to creating policies that serve all communities without consequences.

## Why It Works

The conservative state policy influencers we spoke with do not automatically assume that local leaders are best positioned to make policy decisions for their communities. Some question whether all local leaders truly act in their community's best interests, while others doubt their knowledge and competence. They also recognize that local leaders are not immune to corporate influence or partisan agendas—and, in some cases, may be even more vulnerable than state leaders.

While they support giving local leaders flexibility to tailor decisions to their communities, they are also concerned about the potential consequences—both intended and unintended—if those decisions go unchecked. As a result, they believe local leaders can build trust by demonstrating sound decision-making and ensuring that policies do not negatively impact certain community members or the state as a whole.

## In Their Own Words

“Your local decision-making is by people who are the least expert in a lot of these issues, and that’s the rub.” —Church & Country

“I don’t think that local in and of itself is a value that supersedes preemption. So when decisions are made close to home, we can make fair, fiscally responsible choices that put our neighbors first—perhaps. But if we’re putting our neighbors first only to risk those not in our particular political segment, it seems irresponsible.” —Economic Influenced

“[Local decision-making] can also get out of control at the local level. I’ve seen it happen with municipalities within Texas. There’s overspending. There’s mismanagement of the programs. It can be very difficult sometimes for businesses to meet or comply with the regulatory environment. ... It really can go both ways, and it just depends, in my opinion, on the type of actor that the municipality and the state want to be.” —Legacy Republican

“I think [the solution is] getting the right people in office. Elections have consequences. And a lot of times on the community level, especially in small communities, [an elected official] is known in the community for whatever reason—they’re a big farmer influencer, or whatever in the community. And that’s how they end up getting elected. And it’s not always the best leader. I think it’s really recruiting and supporting good candidates.” —Populist Aligned



## FUNCTIONAL



# Tailored Solutions Backed by Unique Communities

While the context and issue matters, conservative state policy influencers recognize that local decision-making can be essential for tailoring solutions to unique community needs and ensuring well-supported policies reflect the priorities of residents, businesses, and local leaders alike.

## Why It Works

Despite some concerns, the conservative state policy influencers we spoke with strongly value local decision-making, as it empowers communities to shape their way of life and allows local leaders to apply their firsthand knowledge.

While their support for local control depends on the issue and context, they do not want to see the state overturn well-supported policies that have the backing of local residents, businesses, and leaders. They recognize that every community is unique and requires tailored solutions to fit their “flavor.” When local people work together with the state and other experts for good policy, local decision-making gives communities the flexibility to respond effectively to challenges, address residents’ needs, and develop innovative solutions that can benefit the state in the long run.

## In their Own Words

“In a governing democracy, your ability to craft policies that make sense for your local community is going to matter. Across 180 school districts, needs and abilities are going to be wildly different. The needs of administrators in a district like Atlanta are going to be very different from those in Tattnell County. The offerings are going to be different. There’s a lot that needs the flavor of the community—and decision-making—that happens there.”  
—Church & Country

“There was a bill this past session that we were trying to pass. ... But even in our own communities, ... we had [one city] which we represent saying ‘This will be great.’ And we had a beach community that’s not five miles away saying, ‘No, this is terrible.’ But what the law was trying to do was to create an even playing field. But I guess the argument is: If you make that rule for all of Florida, well, central Florida, or even Gainesville is not the same as the beach communities, or Miami is certainly not the same as any other part of the state. So it gets a little tricky.” —Economic Influenced

“One of the benefits [of local decision-making] is allowing people to really understand the local context of what the community needs. How it defines the balance between, you know, equity and other values. And sometimes you hear, ‘Let a thousand blossoms bloom so that you can figure out which ones are the ones that you want to cultivate and use.’” —Legacy Republican

“Having been a county commissioner, I have always tried to push for more local control. Because in a state as diverse as ours, with 17 different counties, with only two of them that have populations over 300,000, we’re not a one-size-fits all state, yet they try to do that.” —Populist Aligned



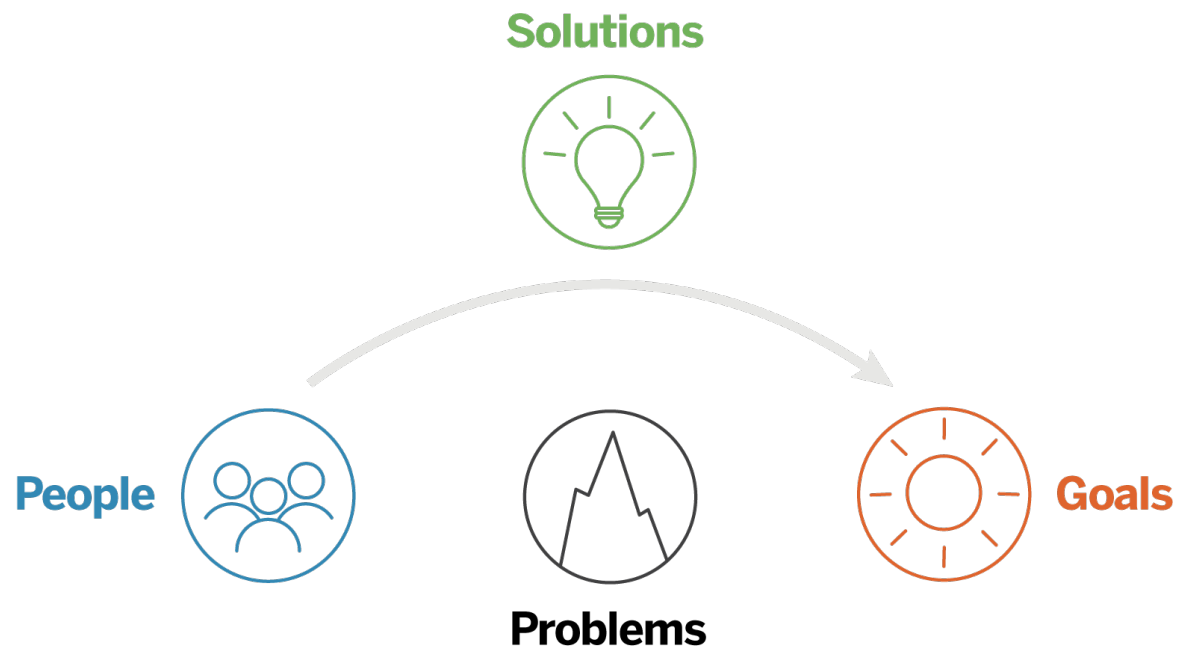
**Aspirational Narrative**



# Introduction to the Narrative Framework

Our message is organized in a simple but powerful Narrative Framework, based on multicultural studies, motivational psychology, and other fields of research. This framework reflects a common way that people across many cultures think about the world and communicate their ideas.

It creates a complete, coherent narrative that motivates people to support this work by putting our audience in the role of the protagonist, so they “see themselves” reflected (people). The goals are their aspirations, and the problems are challenges or needs they face in realizing those aspirations. The solutions are the things we do to meet those needs and help people achieve their goals. This framework will help you develop communications that emphasize how local decision-making helps practical policymakers deliver results.



# Narrative Framework: Advocating for Local Decision-Making

The conservative policymakers we spoke with see themselves as pragmatic problem-solvers, focused on finding practical, effective solutions on most issues rather than engaging in political battles. They are ready to hear realistic approaches that acknowledge the roles of both state and local governments in creating policies that work. This framework can help you build trust across the aisle and advocate for local decision-making.



## **Goal: People-Focused Policy**

*Practical policymakers at the state and local levels share the same goal: To make government work well for the people they serve. They're driven to create a better life for all their constituents.*



## **Problem: Policy Without Partnership**

*When policymakers at the state and local level don't work together—and especially when local policies are overturned—we can end up with unworkable policies and unintended consequences.*



## **People: A Role for Everyone**

*State and local government leaders each have important roles to play in effective policymaking. Local governments know their people and problems—and solutions—best, while the state can bolster those efforts by providing expertise and advice.*



## **Solution: Strike the Right Balance**

*There must be a balance between state leadership and local flexibility. A collaborative, balanced approach can foster innovation, save money, and ultimately deliver smarter solutions that work for real people.*

# Annotated Message Examples

The conservative lawmakers we spoke with wanted specificity in messages about preemption, so it's important to apply and adapt the Narrative Framework to the issue for which you're advocating. This section provides three examples.

## Tobacco and E-Cigarette Regulation

Keeping our communities healthy means tackling the rise in e-cigarette use among young people. Vaping among teens continues to be a concern. In 2024, more than 1.6 million U.S. middle and high school students used e-cigarettes, and many don't realize these products contain nicotine.

Local governments need the freedom to respond in ways that work best for their communities. That might mean raising the minimum sales age or adding local taxes. The people closest to the problem should have the power to help solve it.

State leaders need to play important roles too—sharing information, bringing communities together, and making sure we're learning from what works. When we work together, we can create better policies that protect the health of the next generation.



**Goal:**  
**People-Focused Policy**



**Problem:**  
**Policy Without Partnership**



**People:**  
**A Role for Everyone**



**Solution:**  
**Strike the Right Balance**



## Taxing Sugary Drinks

We all want to create communities where our kids grow up healthy. But sugary drinks are fueling increasing risks for chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and tooth decay. Some local governments are ready to respond with solutions such as implementing a drink tax.

Local leaders should have the flexibility to make these decisions based on what works for their residents—and studies show that drink taxes lead to lower consumption and create a new funding source for critical community programs. We also need help from state experts to understand what's working across counties.

By working together, we can create practical solutions that support healthier choices and stronger communities.



**Goal:**  
**People-Focused Policy**



**Problem:**  
**Policy Without Partnership**



**People:**  
**A Role for Everyone**



**Solution:**  
**Strike the Right Balance**

## Support for Prenatal-to-Three Period

Families thrive when parents have time to be there. The first days and months after birth or adoption are an essential time of development. A baby's early relationships nurture brain connections that form the foundation for all learning and relationships that follow.

Too many workers are forced to sacrifice their savings or their jobs when they need time off to bond with a new child or to care for themselves or their families. All workers, no matter where they live or who their employers are, should have access to paid family and medical leave. Paid leave helps children and families thrive, which improves their overall health and benefits the economy.

Only 15% of working people in the United States have access to paid leave through their employers. Paid family and medical leave programs provide proven, practical support for new parents, helping them navigate challenges, connect to mental health care, and build a strong foundation for their children. We can work on the local level to expand what these programs offer, and we'd be eager to work with state leaders to hear what's working in other communities.

When state and local leaders work together, we can give every child the best start in life.



**Goal:**  
**People-Focused Policy**



**Problem:**  
**Policy Without Partnership**







**People:**  
**A Role for Everyone**



**Solution:**  
**Strike the Right Balance**

# Winning Words

Winning Words are crafted to evoke emotional responses and be easily understood, so people can easily retain and repeat them. You can use them in almost any context to tell the story of our work.

Narrative Framework	Say This	Not That	Why It Works
 <p><b>Goal: People-Focused Policy</b></p>	<p>Make government work well for all constituents</p>	<p>Community's right to self-governance</p> <p>Traditional American values</p>	<p>Acknowledges policy influencers' aspirations to create good policy for everyone they serve, not just certain groups</p>
 <p><b>Problem: Policy Without Partnership</b></p>	<p>Overtake local policies</p> <p>Unworkable policies</p> <p>Unintended consequences</p>	<p>Top-down or one-size-fits all mandates</p> <p>Corporate and political agendas</p>	<p>Takes away the blame for negative consequences while stating plainly the potential impacts when states do not account for the needs of local communities</p>
 <p><b>People: A Role for Everyone</b></p>	<p>State and local government leaders</p>	<p>State interference</p>	<p>Acknowledges roles for both state and local leaders</p>
 <p><b>Solution: Strike the Right Balance</b></p>	<p>A collaborative, balanced approach</p> <p>Smart solutions that work for real people</p>	<p>Local leaders know how to find the best solutions</p> <p>Local leaders know best</p>	<p>Recognizes that state policymakers believe that best solutions come when state and leaders work together to apply their unique perspectives</p>



# Tailoring for Each Archetype



## **Church & Country**

Church & Country policy influencers are guided by faith, family, and a deep sense of duty to protect their communities. As stewards of traditional values, they prioritize policies that support those in need while fostering collaboration and ensuring economic and community stability. However, they remain skeptical of policies they see as federal overreach or disruptive to the moral and economic fabric of their communities.

# Core Values

Faith, caring, helping families

## Message

While they may be motivated by Christian values, this archetype wants to see distance between church and state and are eager to hear the practical reasons a policy will work. Be specific when you do talk about values—family autonomy, helping families, and community freedom resonate particularly well.

### Sample Tailored Message

*Protecting our children from the harms of nicotine means giving local communities the freedom to adopt practical solutions that help families thrive and keep kids safe from vaping.*

## Proof Point or Stories

- Stories about families being able to make decisions that work best for them
- Stories about hard-working community members that illustrate how a policy will help them

## Messengers and Allies

- Local faith leaders
- Local parents
- Local small business owners
- Issue area advocacy organizations or nonprofits

## Questions to Consider

- Who benefits from this policy? Does it provide support to those who need it most? Could it cause harm to anyone?
- How does this policy impact children? How does it empower family decision-making?
- Have a variety of perspectives been considered? What are they saying?
- What political calculations are at play? Who will be an ally in this fight, and who will be an opponent?
- Could engaging in this issue cost them allies on other matters? How will their organization perceive their involvement?



## **Economic Influenced**

Economic Influenced policy influencers are financially secure, highly educated decision-makers who prioritize economic growth, efficiency, and fiscal responsibility. They view policymaking through a pragmatic, data-driven lens, emphasizing return on investment, market-driven solutions, and limited government intervention. They are skeptical of government programs they perceive as inefficient or overly bureaucratic. However, they are open to policies that demonstrate clear economic benefits, enhance workforce participation, and create opportunities for upward mobility.

# Core Values

Economic strength, innovation, efficiency

## Message

Highlight local decision-making as a driver of economic growth and efficiency—but be specific about what that means in the context of your policy idea. Frame local flexibility as a way to foster innovation, attract businesses, and tailor solutions to community needs.

### Sample Tailored Message

*Local control over vaping policies reduces long-term health costs and creates tailored solutions that protect youth without burdening businesses.*

## Proof Point or Stories

- Data that shows how this policy will save taxpayer money
- Data or stories that specifically illustrate how your idea can grow the local economy, instead of speaking in broad terms
- Data paired with stories that highlight those impacted can be very effective

## Messengers and Allies

- Business leaders
- Chamber of commerce, trade associations, or other business groups
- Issue area researchers and experts
- Legislators, legislative committees, or committee staff

## Questions to Consider

- What does the data reveal about this policy? What are its impacts and potential unintended consequences?

*Note: Influencers recognize that data can be difficult to gather. In addition to polling and statistics, they would also like to see anecdotal stories from impacted individuals, constituent outreach (such as calls and emails), and outcomes from other regions with similar policies.*

- What are the reputational risks of supporting or opposing this policy? How might it affect the influencer's relationships with key individuals and organizations?
- Who is advocating for this policy, and who is opposing it? What are the key arguments on each side?
- What are the economic benefits and potential risks? How might this policy impact local businesses?





## Legacy Republican

Legacy Republican policy influencers are experienced leaders focused on pragmatic solutions to governance challenges. They prioritize stability, responsible governance, and policies that reflect conservative economic principles. Their decision-making is rooted in research, fiscal responsibility, and long-term viability. While open to policy changes that improve systems, they remain skeptical of initiatives perceived as overly progressive, government overreach, or disruptive to established institutions.

# Core Values

Expertise, contribution, respect

## Message

The concept of public service, paired with values like integrity, respect, and honor can really resonate with this archetype. Show how local decision-making can lead to good governance without unnecessary overreach.

### Sample Tailored Message

*Smart tobacco policies, such as local taxes on vaping products, protect young people while respecting local needs. State and local leaders working together can ensure that these policies are effective and fiscally responsible.*

## Proof Point or Stories

- Success stories about leaders who were empowered to stand up for their community's needs
- Data that shows why you're presenting a practical policy idea—show numbers that clearly illustrate the benefits

## Messengers and Allies

- Bipartisan issue area researchers and experts (especially those at research institutions or policy organizations tuned in to legislative and policy research)
- Stakeholders (including trade associations, nonprofits, and grassroots groups)
- The public, especially impacted parties
- Business leaders
- Local parents

## Questions to Consider

- What does the data reveal about this policy? What are its impacts and potential unintended consequences?  
*Note: Influencers recognize that data can be difficult to gather. In addition to polling and statistics, they would also like to see anecdotal stories from impacted individuals, constituent outreach (such as calls and emails), and outcomes from other regions with similar policies.*
- What are the reputational risks of supporting or opposing this policy? How might it affect the influencer's relationships with key individuals and organizations?
- Who benefits from this policy? Does it provide support to those who need it most? Could it cause harm to anyone?
- Is this a polarizing issue? If so, why? Can they support this policy without becoming entangled in political polarization?



## Populist Aligned

Populist Aligned policy influencers prioritize grassroots decision-making, economic fairness, and limiting government intervention. They value policies that protect working-class interests, promote local control, and challenge institutions they see as unresponsive to everyday people. Their decision-making process is highly strategic, often focused on coalition-building and leveraging influence to advance key priorities. While open to policies that empower communities, they are skeptical of those that expand federal authority, favor corporate elites, or impose top-down mandates.

# Core Values

Hard work, freedom, limited government

## Message

Messages that emphasize hard work, freedom, responsibility, and independence resonate strongly. Be clear on the values you use—ideas like “traditional American values” feel too broad because some think that traditional values are changing or mean different things to different people.

### Sample Tailored Message

*Communities know best how to tackle youth vaping, and local tobacco taxes give them the freedom to act. This approach protects families while keeping the government small and responsive.*

## Proof Point or Stories

- Stories that highlight responsibility when decision-making is allowed at the local level
- Data that shows why the community supports your policy idea

## Messengers and Allies

- Mayors, county commissioners, and their staff
- Constituents and impacted parties

## Questions to Consider

- What is the government’s role in this issue? How does this policy or intervention address a need while remaining as minimally invasive as possible?
- How is this policy being funded? Does it require a tax increase, and if so, is the increase supported by community members, businesses, and leaders?
- How does this policy protect or enhance home values? Will it make the community a more desirable place to live?
- How does this policy support those in the community with the greatest need?



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