

COMMUNICATING FOR CONNECTION

VALUES-BASED MESSAGING FOR
PRIMARY PREVENTION IN MULTICULTURAL
AND FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS

Acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Safe and Equal and *Multicultural Centre for Women's Health* are based on Wurundjeri Country.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional and ongoing custodians of the lands on which we live and work, and we pay respects to Elders past and present.

We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded, and recognise First Nations peoples' rights to self-determination and continuing connections to land, waters and community.



Connecting Communities is supported by the Victorian Government

CONTENTS

What is values-based messaging?	5
Key skills for practitioners	9
Exploring values	9
Priming.....	9
Vision-Barrier-Action messaging.....	10
Naming a barrier.....	11
Inspiring action.....	11
Network building and organising	12
Values-based messaging in practice	13
Conclusion	15
Training organisations.....	15
Further reading	16
About <i>Connecting Communities</i>	16

Whatever our background, our faith, or our gender, we all want healthy relationships, thriving families and connected communities.

But family and gender-based violence makes this difficult for far too many of us.

Primary prevention is all about stopping violence before it starts. When we craft powerful messages about prevention which resonate with the communities we work with and for, it helps empower communities to work with us towards a shared vision of the future.

Practitioners from the *Connecting Communities* network — who all work in multicultural and faith-based communities — have shared that tailored, strengths-based messaging is the most effective way to engage with communities, a crucial part of prevention work.

This resource has been developed to grow the understanding of values-based messaging for prevention practitioners working with multicultural and faith-based communities. In particular, it aims to highlight the role of values-based messaging as a tool to engage community, build trust, and address backlash and resistance by creating messages that resonate with communities.

WHAT IS VALUES-BASED MESSAGING?

Values-based messaging is a communications approach that relies on identifying, activating and centering the core values of a community. By connecting with a community's aspirations, we can empower them to join us on the path to social change.

Values-based messaging asks us to consult with communities on their vision for the future, think about how we can tailor messaging to collaborate on achieving these visions, and build agency for community advocates to amplify these messages.



Values represent our guiding principles: our broadest motivations, influencing the attitudes we hold and how we act.

COMMON CAUSE HANDBOOK¹

1— Holmes, T., Blackmore, E., Hawkins, R & Wakeford, T. (2011). *The Common Cause Handbook*. United Kingdom: Public Interest Research Centre

WHY USE VALUES-BASED MESSAGING FOR PREVENTION IN MULTICULTURAL AND FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES?

The [*Common Cause Handbook*](#) is essential reading for anyone wanting to utilise this approach. The resource empowers individuals to explore how their values connect and relate to those they are working with, and how we can use messaging to empower multicultural and faith-based communities to enact social change.

Values-based messaging enables communities to speak about their hopes for the future and draw clear links between primary prevention and making these hopes a reality. It can also efficiently and creatively address many of the specific issues facing prevention practice in multicultural and faith-based communities. Issues identified by the *Connecting Communities* network include:

- reduced community trust in prevention programs and mainstream organisations;
- limited cultural safety with mainstream messaging around family violence; and
- inconsistent support for prevention programs from community, organisations and funders.

The ways in which values-based messaging can help practitioners address these issues, build engagement and pre-empt backlash are discussed below.

All cultures and faiths value respect and equality

Connecting Communities practitioners have shared that while values around caring for and promoting the welfare of others exist in all cultures, these themes are particularly explicit in faith texts across religions. *Connecting Communities* practitioners have had success tailoring messaging and prevention initiatives so that they align with pre-existing values and highlight the links between these and violence prevention, which supports effective program delivery.

Values-based messaging also highlights how healthy relationships align with multicultural and faith-based views, values and practices. We can support community members to build confidence in becoming prevention advocates by demonstrating how creating safe and respectful relationships - and therefore preventing family violence - strengthens their community's connections to their culture and faith.

Using strengths-based language in describing our vision for the future

Traditional messaging around gender equality and family violence has often described the scale and urgency of the issue as a way of spurring people into action. This framing can be intimidating, causing communities to reject the idea of change or deter them for attempting to create change at the outset.

For messaging to be effective with multicultural and faith-based communities, deficit-based language needs to be avoided, as this only serves to uphold racist, paternalistic and colonial stereotypes. Culture can be viewed by mainstream services as "a problem to be solved"² or as a barrier to gender equality, rather than an enabling factor for prevention practice and a strengthening factor for family violence response work.

2— Connecting Communities participant. (2023). Transforming cultural resistance workshop. March 2023

Values-based messaging allows us to flip the script and present culture and faith as sources of strength, determination and pride. Messaging can both spur people into action and highlight the role of culture as an essential element to building safer communities. This is aided by using the Vision-Barrier-Action messaging structure, discussed in the Key Skills for Practitioners section of this resource:

- provide a clear vision of the future;
- outline the steps that people can take to get there; and
- frame community members as people with power and agency to be change-makers.

Addressing structural inequality

Identifying specific barriers to change provides the opportunity to name the structural and systemic issues that we know create and maintain the conditions that enable family violence and gender inequality to exist.

These structures include the gendered drivers of violence against women, and racist and colonial power dynamics that can impact service access, perpetuate harm, reduce access to information and support, and reinforce inequality. Identifying these evidence-based barriers in our messaging helps multicultural and faith-based communities communicate clear strength-based messages for change addressing the structural and systemic inequalities across gender as well as anti-racism and decolonisation.



Race Class Narratives

Race Class Narrative messaging is a form of value-based messaging which has emerged out of the United States that uses an intersectional lens to craft messages that address both race and class at the same time, as a way of pushing back against racist narratives.³ Research indicates that addressing race, class and gender enhances our capacity to mobilize our base, persuade those in the middle, and effectively challenge opposing views. Much of the language and approaches in Race Class Narratives can be useful in prevention messaging to multicultural and faith-based communities as well.

For more on Race Class Narrative messaging in the U.S. see the Further Reading section at the end of this resource.

Building trust

Practitioners from the *Connecting Communities* network found that mistrust in mainstream services and family violence organisations sometimes resulted in reduced participation and instances of resistance to primary prevention initiatives.

This lack of trust is rooted in:

- inaccessible or culturally unsafe service provision;
- negative and harmful experiences with services and organisations; and
- prevention programs and messaging that have misunderstood or misrepresented the values and needs of the communities

Prevention practitioners and funders must move towards genuine community consultation and ownership of prevention programs as part of a meaningful co-design approach throughout program design, delivery and evaluation. Consulting and engaging meaningfully in designing messaging can play an important role in addressing past harms and rebuilding trust, but it is just one part of a more comprehensive process.

Many programs are still delivered with tokenistic consultation, unrealistic timeframes and objectives that are not aligned with community wants or needs. *Connecting Communities* practitioners identified some additional factors that contributed to this issue:

- constraints on time to build relationships and understand the community because of short-term funding and rigid or pre-determined project deliverables;
- colonialist conceptions of 'good practice' and an undervaluing of community capacity and skills;⁴ and
- power imbalances between funders and organisations working with community.

In work with multicultural communities, prevention practitioners are often not separate from the community, and are rather a part of the community, assisting to amplify viable community solutions. Organisations need time to establish these relationships and build trust that ensure successful project deliver both in the perspectives of the funder and the community themselves.

3— We Make The Future & ASO Communications. (2023). Guide to Messaging Our Freedoms. We Make The Future.

4— Gollan, S. & Stacey, K. (2021). Australian Evaluation Society First Nations Cultural Safety Framework. Melbourne: Australian Evaluation Society (AES)

Make the revolution irresistible

TONI CADE BAMBARA⁵

Key tips for practice include:

- Tailoring messaging (and by extension, program design) to align with community values will create more culturally safe, relevant and resonant spaces.
- Using strengths-based language empowers community to act and reclaim agency to address harms perpetuated by discriminatory, racist and paternalistic policies and programs.
- Framing culture and faith as enabling and reinforcing factors challenges racist and gendered stereotypes about the relationship between culture and violence.

Good consultation and trust-building practices take time, resources and a commitment to understanding your own positional power as a prevention practitioner (you can read more about this in our [Improving our approach to community-led prevention Brief Guide](#)) but is essential in prevention work with multicultural and faith-based communities.

While messaging is only a part of the picture, it is an important one. It is how we build support for and engagement in our work, which can in turn be leveraged into more sustainable social change.



5— Bambara, T.C. & Lewis, T. (2014).
An Interview with Toni Cade Bambara/
Edited by Thabiti Lewis. Jackson:
University of Press of Mississippi

KEY SKILLS FOR PRACTITIONERS



When developing prevention messaging with and for communities, it's important that you are familiar with and draw on existing key primary prevention frameworks and messaging guides around primary prevention, gender equality and the gendered drivers of violence against women.

These frameworks and evidence are always evolving, though some key sources include; Our Watch's [Change the Story](#), [Changing the Picture](#) and [Changing the Landscape](#) resources; VicHealth's [Framing gender equality Message Guide](#) and [Framing masculinities Message Guide](#); Rainbow Health Australia's [Pride in Prevention Messaging Guide](#); and research and guides on the [Respect Victoria](#) and [Safe and Equal](#) websites and other organisations which have developed evidence in primary prevention of family violence, such as local governments and women's health services.

You can then use the processes outlines in this guide to take a community-led, values-based approach to tailoring your messaging, informed and supported by this evidence-based research.

EXPLORING VALUES

The first step for values-based messaging is identifying the values most important to the community we want to engage. Research from hundreds of cross-cultural studies over the decades have identified several consistently occurring human values.⁶ Referencing the [Common Cause values map](#),

we know that all people and communities hold a variety of different values — in fact, likely all the values shown in the values map — but to varying degrees.

In many cases, benevolent values like forgiveness, universal values like equality, and self-direction values like creativity and choice are more important to communities than power values like wealth and influence, and stimulation values like excitement or novelty.⁷

When exploring the values of a community, simply observing isn't enough to comprehensively understand what is driving behaviours and we may unintentionally end up relying on stereotypes and assumptions to make sense of them. This is why taking the time to establish trust and relationships with the community is so important - we need to listen to and be led by the community so we can develop a truer understanding of their values and needs on their terms.

PRIMING

Once we have tuned into the core values of the community, we can identify which values make people receptive to messaging — in progressive social change work, these are usually values around kindness, community wellbeing and caring for others. The values can be engaged or triggered by using key words, images, or more subtly through metaphors. This is called priming.

6— Holmes, T., Blackmore, E., Hawkins, R & Wakeford, T. (2011). *The Common Cause Handbook*. United Kingdom: Public Interest Research Centre. pp. 12

7— Holmes, T., Blackmore, E., Hawkins, R & Wakeford, T. (2011). *The Common Cause Handbook*. United Kingdom: Public Interest Research Centre. pp. 18

VISION-BARRIER-ACTION MESSAGING

When structuring your messaging, you may find a Vision-Barrier-Action model helpful.

	VISION	BARRIER	ACTION
Aim	State your shared value and describe the ideal future situation.	Name what is currently blocking our vision from being reality. Be specific!	Outline what needs to happen to remove the barrier. Include a specific call to action if possible.
Questions to ask	<p>What is our vision? What does the world look like once we've "won"?</p> <p>What shared values do we want to evoke?</p>	<p>Who or what is blocking this vision? What are they doing to block the vision?</p> <p>Be specific about the barrier and how it is being created.</p> <p>What are the consequences or impacts of the barrier?</p>	<p>What action do we want the reader to take? It should be clear that the action will remove the barrier.</p> <p>Explain the outcome: how taking the action will result in the vision.</p>
Final message	Choose a frame or core metaphor and bring it all together to create a powerful, persuasive message!		

Template created by Ro Bersten, based on Common Cause Handbook.

Vision-Barrier-Action messaging can be useful for preparing training, promoting workshops, writing copy, sharing social media posts, funders reports or creating resources — any materials that are provided to people and organisations we are seeking support from or where we might want to reduce the chance of future resistance. However, it's important to note that we are often speaking beyond the resisters to the persuadable audience; the people who are strongly opposed will shift when social norms shift, and they find themselves isolated because the values of the majority have changed.

For examples relating to how to use this see VicHealth's [Framing Gender Equality Messaging Guide](#) and Rainbow Health Australia's [Pride in Prevention Messaging Guide](#), as well as many of the other resources in the Further Reading section.

THE MYTH OF MYTH BUSTING

Myth busting is a common practice in social change messaging. While it is important to think about counters to what your opposition is saying, myth busting has a tricky side effect: when naming the myth, we unintentionally bring it to mind for our audience and frame it as something commonly understood or believed.⁸ Even if we then go on to debunk it, we've still given it time and space to be considered by our audience.

Rather than naming the myth up front, we can instead construct messages that do the job of correcting it without having to mention it at all. Read more about this and other techniques to respond to resistance which may be helpful in your messaging in Safe and Equal's [Overcoming Resistance and Backlash](#) resource.

NAMING A BARRIER

Naming a barrier gives your participants a tangible avenue to direct their action towards. It helps us to recognise that the status quo doesn't need to be reinforced, that issues are not inherent, and that barriers are often a result of structures and institutions that *can* be challenged and changed.

The barrier may be a practice, approach, organisation, social movement, government policy or structure. We need to be able to talk specifically and honestly about how the barrier is hindering our work. We don't want to individualise a problem, shift blame to a specific group of people, or reinforce harmful stereotypes; however, there are situations where identifying a barrier can resolve cynical thought patterns and create motivation to overcome the barrier.

8— VicHealth. (2021). Framing gender equality messaging guide. Melbourne: VicHealth. pp 11

INSPIRING ACTION

The action section of our message is more than just a typical 'call to action' — it is about removing the barrier and realising our vision for the future.

Some tips for creating a persuasive action include:

- Reiterate that change is possible. We know that most people in communities agree with us, so our focus needs to be on showing how change can be achieved, and the role they can play.
- Make our position the norm — if the majority are in agreement, use this to leverage against opposing views. Use concrete examples if you have them (for example, 'across the country, young people are already ...').
- Use examples of past wins to bolster the power of community by building on the success of other social movements that have successfully created change.
- Clearly connect the action to the vision and the values you started with.
- Check that the consequences of the action feel like logical and achievable steps that will result in overcoming the barrier.

The power of metaphor and storytelling

Many cultures throughout history have used storytelling to make sense of the world around them and pass knowledge on to the next generation. People are often more receptive to new ideas when they are presented in a way that engages their senses and uses metaphor, imagery and visualisation.⁹

Metaphors can connect our message to existing perceptions in people's minds, reinforcing or disrupting their existing attitude to the issue. Talking about violence and gender equality through comparisons or analogies is also useful for practitioners in settings where community members may not yet feel comfortable talking explicitly about violence. *Connecting Communities* practitioners have shared that metaphorical imagery is a useful tool for both evoking supportive attitudes and creating safety and distance from lived experience, especially in face-to-face settings.¹⁰

The *Centre for Story-based Strategy* offers us a clear framework for how we can use storytelling structures and practices to analyse and counter what your opposition is saying with impactful and easy-to-understand narratives.¹¹ Aside from enabling us to talk about our work in ways that are more approachable and memorable, narratives and stories have the power to shape definitions and ideas.

We can also challenge patriarchal and colonialist norms about what evidence looks like and use storytelling and metaphor as effective tools for communication. The lived experience of communities and what they know to be true is as valuable in messaging as research and statistics. Acknowledging this is especially powerful when those stories have not been captured appropriately or accurately by existing research.¹²

Understanding communities and working alongside them to develop messages and strategies using a story-based approach can help us ensure that the stories and messages we develop are authentic and, importantly, avoid the pitfalls of reinforcing stereotypes. This will help us create stronger, more engaging pieces of work.

NETWORK BUILDING AND ORGANISING

Values-based messaging for addressing racial inequality and faith-based discrimination is a work in progress. Collaborating with community organisations and advocates to try new approaches, and share wins and challenges is one way for us to grow our collective knowledge. Working together, we can prevent unintended consequences, such as perpetuating stereotypes in our messaging or creating a false sense of competition across sectors or movements.

Network building also lets us share our messaging across multiple platforms and develop messages and stories that can cut across and mutually reinforce different but interconnected movements for social change.

Collaborating with community members to develop and test messaging is key to effective communication, as community ownership ensures targeted engagement and agency in prevention programming.

9— Centre for Story-Based Strategy. (2017). *Story-based Strategy 101*. Oakland: Centre for Story-based Strategy.

10— Connecting Communities participant. (2023). *Transforming cultural resistance workshop*. March 2023

11— Centre for Story-Based Strategy. (2024). *Story-based Strategy: Core concepts*. Oakland: Centre for Story-based Strategy.

12— Connecting Communities participant. (2023). *Intersectionality and cultural safety in evaluation workshop*. July 2023

VALUES-BASED MESSAGING IN PRACTICE

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT THE AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM WOMEN'S CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



“The power of the group is often what shifts communities, what changes the whole narrative of how people see things in light of what has been learned and ingrained through lived experience.”

FAZLINDA FAROO, AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM
WOMEN'S CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The challenge for the *Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights* (AMWCHR) in delivering family violence prevention programs often lies in the initial recruitment and engagement of Muslim women to encourage them into group spaces to discuss sensitive matters such as violence and safety. AMWCHR does this by hiring community leaders and spokespeople to deliver messaging to the community about their programs. This is because the communities face structural barriers to engaging with violence prevention programs that often can't be overcome by traditional forms of promotion like posters or flyers. Messages which are deeply relational and come directly from trusted community members and through word of mouth are more likely to be successful.

AMWCHR team members work directly with these community spokespeople to design messaging that will resonate with the community. Promotion is often done through community consultation, where the spokesperson can facilitate conversation, balancing the community's values, with the program's objectives.



“There is a general notion when people speak of the Muslim community or of Islam that there is a singular view to what that looks like – in contrast, it is actually very plural and diverse, and we speak to the diversity of the community that exists.”

FAZLINDA FAROO, AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM WOMEN'S CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The spokespeople are briefed about the programs and given guidance on the types of language to use, which are customised to different cultural and ethnic cohorts. This is particularly important for AMWCHR, whose work cuts across many religious sectarian lines and different ethnic communities across the Muslim society.

Fazlinda Faroo, Community Programs Manager at AMWCHR, shared that using language around love, family and safe relationships has resulted in strong positive feedback and increased community participation in prevention work on family violence. The strengths-based approach to their communications and messaging is utilised for strategic and contextual reasons; in Fazlinda's words, “there is a common perception in communities that anything related to government or mainstream messaging around family violence aims to split communities ... [people] tend to stay away, not because they're not interested but because of what is perceived of them if they attend these programs.” Moving away from language and framing which unintentionally reinforces this idea has been essential to creating safety and openness towards the programs.



AMCWHR is strategic in framing its programs to encourage engagement and participation; for instance, spokespeople use topics like parenting or healthy relationships as pathways to engage women in conversations about relationships and violence. This makes the program “safe” so that women can attend without receiving backlash from family and community.

Drawing community members into prevention programs constitutes almost half of the work of any public education program. AMWCHR's experience with diverse Muslim communities has shown that the process requires authentic empathy, concerned hand-holding and genuine connection to walk alongside Muslim women, without judgement individually or collectively through the journey of change.

“What is most important [with engaging community] is being present and going with them, not at them.”

FAZLINDA FAROO, AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM WOMEN'S CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Learn more about AMWCHR's approach to prevention and community engagement on their website [here](#).

CONCLUSION

The primary prevention of family and gender-based violence is inherently hopeful work. It requires us, and the communities we work with, to envision a world where all people are safe, liberated and connected: a life without violence. Prevention practitioners are guides bringing communities on a journey towards positive social change.

A values-based messaging approach allows us to construct messages that move people to action and inspire them to join us on that journey. It gives us permission to express anger and frustration by naming the very real issues multicultural and faith-based communities face, while never losing sight of the fact we *can* redesign systems to work with us.

Values-based messaging encourages us to share power with the community and let them tell their own stories, in their own words. Through consultation, we can develop stories and messages that resonate with community, that are meaningful to them and that align with their values, experiences and expectations.

Values-based messaging requires time, resources and collaboration, but when done well can help us create new narratives that build movements and counter backlash. Communities have made sense of and shaped their worlds through stories and messages for generations — values-based messaging is a way for prevention practitioners who work with multicultural and faith-based communities to do that too.

TRAINING ORGANISATIONS

There are several organisations that provide training in using values-based messaging.

Common Cause Australia

<https://www.commoncause.com.au/training>

Common Cause runs public workshops, including Fundamentals and Masterclasses, and is also available for tailored training.

Email: info@commoncause.com.au

intertwine

<http://intertwine.net.au/training>

intertwine runs tailored workshops on intersectional messaging for not-for-profit organisations, community groups and health and education providers.

Email: training@intertwine.org.au

Trans Justice Project

<https://transjustice.org.au/>

The Trans Justice Project runs training for trans folk and allies in Conversations for Trans Justice. There is also a Conversations resource available for download. Tailored training is also available for organisations.

Email: info@transjustice.org.au

FURTHER READING

ASO Communications, Transgender Law Centre & Lake Research Projects. (2022). *Transgender youth and the freedom to be ourselves Messaging Guide: Building our choir with a Race Class Gender Narrative*. Oakland: ASO Communications.

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ABOUT CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

Connecting Communities is a partnership program between the *Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH)* and *Safe and Equal* to support the learning and professional development needs of the *Connecting Communities* network, a network of organisations working with multicultural and faith-based communities to prevent violence against women. The *Connecting Communities* program is funded by the Victorian Government through the Supporting Multicultural Communities to Prevent Family Violence program.

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