"I love that in America I have the opportunity to achieve my full potential."

"My parents came to this country to make a better life for our family."

"I was born and raised as a Muslim here in America."

MESSAGE MANUAL

TALKING TO AMERICA ABOUT AMERICAN MUSLIMS

A Resource for Advocates

About This Manual

This manual is a content guide for advocates, media watchdogs, religious organizations and others who seek to improve perceptions of American Muslims and counter anti-Muslim sentiment in the media and public discourse. The language in this manual can be used as a reference or template to help you when writing for, or speaking to, a wide range of audiences.

The approach taken in this manual draws on research-based models and best practices for persuading and motivating people through language that both informs and inspires. The language has been developed through extensive research and consultation with the public, advocates, policymakers and other stakeholders.

To change hearts and minds on any issue, advocates must deliver a consistent and compelling message. When we're all on the same page, our message is more likely to break through, reach more people and have greater impact.

This icon indicates language that you can copy & paste when preparing documents & presentations

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RESEARCH

To develop the messages presented in this manual, specialists in message research and development reviewed extensive public opinion research, interviewed a wide variety of advocates and policymakers, conducted focus group discussions across the country, and surveyed 1,200 members of the general public. These insights inform the messages recommended in this manual.

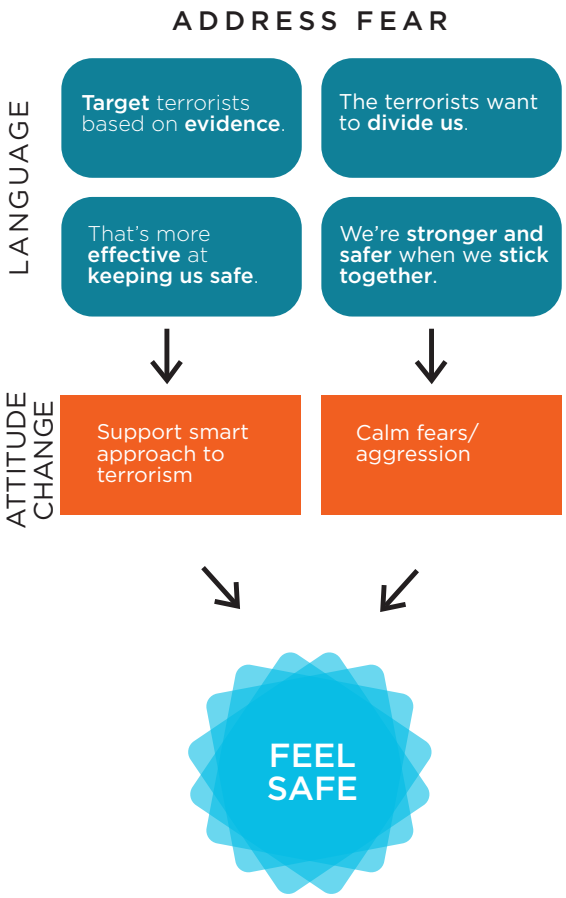
CONTEXT

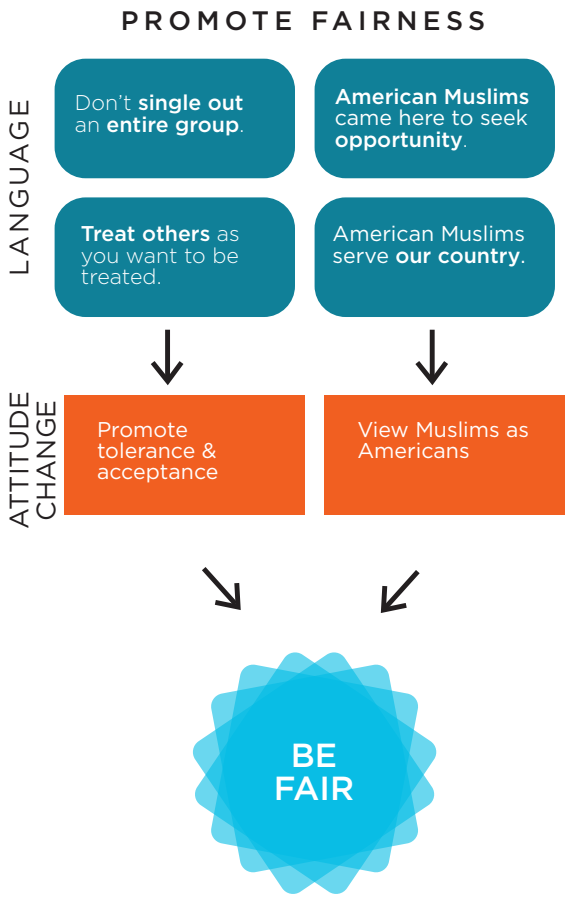
Perceptions of American Muslims are more negative than perceptions of other religious groups, or of other minority groups in America. This negativity is driven by multiple factors. Only four in ten Americans know a Muslim personally, and most Americans acknowledge that they know little about Islam. Lacking personal knowledge or experience with Muslims, opinion is largely formed by media coverage on related topics. Extensive media analysis reveals that two-thirds of media coverage about Muslims is negative.

To counter this negative coverage, we need to tell the right stories. This manual will help you.

MESSAGE MATRIX

The primary emotion driving negativity toward American Muslims is fear. Research has found that many people associate Muslims with terrorism and perceive Muslims as an "other," believing that American Muslims are foreign and don't share American values. These feelings can be addressed by: presenting a smart solution that calms fears of terrorism and does not involve singling out American Muslims; and telling stories about American Muslims' heritage, shared American values and important contributions to the country.





ADDRESSING FEAR

Messages aimed at addressing fear fall flat if they suggest that preserving important values, such as civil liberties, should take precedence over keeping America safe. Instead, we must deliver messages that:

01 Offer an approach to dealing with terrorism that doesn't unfairly target American Muslims

02 Show that American Muslims—like other Americans—help to address terrorism

The three messages below use carefully crafted language to drive these important themes.

LET'S DO WHAT WORKS

We should target terrorists based on evidence, not single out an entire group of people based on their religion. That's more effective at keeping us safe than discriminating against American Muslims.

WE'RE STRONGER TOGETHER

The terrorists want to scare Americans and divide us against each other. We are stronger and safer in the face of this threat when we stick together. We shouldn't discriminate against people who haven't done anything wrong, including American Muslims.

WE'RE ALL ON THE SAME TEAM

Dozens of terrorist attacks have been prevented in the U.S. since 9/11 because American Muslims worked with the FBI to catch terrorists.

PROMOTING FAIRNESS

To address misperceptions that American Muslims are "foreign" or don't share American values, we must:

01 Tell stories about American Muslims that describe heritage, shared American values and contributions to the country

02 Consistently use the term "American Muslim"

03 Promote tolerance of people who are different

MESSAGES ON TOLERANCE

Most Americans cherish the value of equal treatment for all. Two messages proved highly effective in evoking this value in relation to American Muslims:

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

America was founded on the idea of religious freedom, and we shouldn't discriminate against people based on their religion.

GOLDEN RULE

We should treat others the way we want to be treated—that includes people who are different from us.

MESSAGES ON HERITAGE & CONTRIBUTIONS

Many Americans assume that American Muslims are immigrants, which drives some of the negative feeling toward American Muslims. To address this concern, we must highlight the positive reasons that Muslims come to America (or explain that many have been here for generations), and show that American Muslims make important contributions to our country.

HERITAGE NARRATIVE

Like many Americans, generations of American Muslims have come to our country seeking opportunity and to make a better life for their families.

CONTRIBUTION TO COUNTRY

American Muslims contribute to our communities and country in important ways: they are firefighters, doctors and teachers.

SAMPLE STORIES

Telling stories about people is an effective way to create an emotional connection with your audience and appeal to shared values. Below are three examples of stories about American Muslims' heritage, shared values and contributions to the country.

SERVING OUR COUNTRY

I was born and raised as a Muslim here in America. I grew up in Texas, and today I work for the **U.S. Border Patrol**. Every day, I help protect our country by keeping our borders secure. Despite these tough economic times, I still think America is a land of opportunity.

FOLLOWING OUR DREAMS & SERVING OUR COMMMUNITIES

I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and my family has lived in America for generations. I graduated from college last year and am now in my first year of medical school. I've always wanted to be a doctor, so I can **help others** in need. I love that in America I have the opportunity to achieve my full potential as a professional—and still have the freedom to practice my faith, Islam.

MAKING A BETTER LIFE FOR OUR FAMILIES

Like other immigrants in American history, my parents came to this country to **make a better life** for our family. I was born in Amman, Jordan in the Middle East and came to America with my parents when I was nine. I'm now a proud citizen of the United States, trying to live the American Dream—and provide for my wife and daughter as best I can. I'm an American Muslim. I'm proud of my faith, and I'm proud of my country.

STORY TEMPLATE

You can use the following template to help guide you in telling stories about American Muslims. Note that the most effective stories include all three elements outlined below.

01 What's your **heritage**? Were you born here? If you immigrated, why did you come to the U.S.?

Examples:

I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and my family has lived in America for generations.

My parents came to this country to make a better life for our family. I was born in Amman, Jordan in the Middle East and came to America with my parents when I was nine.

02 How are you making a **contribution** that benefits other Americans?

Examples:

I work for the U.S. Border Patrol and help protect our country by keeping our borders secure.

I've always wanted to be a doctor, so I can help others in need.

03 What American **values** are important to you?

Examples:

I believe America is a land of opportunity.

I love that in America I have the opportunity to achieve my full potential as a professional—and still have the freedom to practice my faith, Islam.

We must pass a constitutional amendment to ban Sharia law in the United States.

That's ridiculous. Those who suggest this are trying to divide Americans against each other and scare up votes by scaring people. Our Constitution already enshrines the separation of church and state, and that will never change. Our Constitution also guarantees religious freedom, and we shouldn't discriminate against people based on their religion.

Muslims pose a threat to our national security. We must find the terrorists among us because if we sit on our hands, they will attack us again.

We should target terrorists based on evidence, not single out an entire group of people based on their religion. That's more effective at keeping us safe than discriminating against all American Muslims.

American Muslims in our military are a threat. They could carry out another attack, like at Fort Hood.

American Muslims have given their lives in service to our country. It's an insult to their families and dishonors their sacrifice to say their fellow American Muslims should be singled out because of their religion. We should target terrorists based on evidence. That's more effective at keeping us safe than discriminating against all American Muslims.

We should administer a loyalty test to American Muslims who want to serve in the U.S. government.

That's modern-day McCarthyism. We should not single out an entire group of people and treat them differently just because of their religion.

It's OK to profile American Muslims at airports because they pose a threat to our national security. It's just a minor inconvenience to save lives.

Law enforcement officials have said that profiling an entire group of people is ineffective. We should target terrorists based on evidence, not single out a group of people based on their religion.

Acknowledgments

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