

100% Campaign: Messaging Guidance



Overview: This messaging guide is meant to offer tangible, Minnesota-specific guidance on how to talk about climate change in Minnesota. It has three parts: 1) Do's & Don'ts, 2) Constructing a Message, and 3) Sample Messages on Minnesota-specific Topics.

1) Do's & Don'ts: These are a few of our best practices for communicating about climate.

Do's	Don'ts
<p>Use first-person plural pronouns. Use the pronouns 'we', 'us', and 'our' when talking about climate change. It's a shared problem that will require shared solutions. It's affecting us now and here. We need to take it on together. Minnesota-ize it.</p>	<p>Don't third-party the issue. Climate change is affecting Minnesotans in 2020. It's happening here. It's happening to people. Don't talk about other species (ex. polar bears) or places (ex. the Arctic) without first talking tangibly, specifically about Minnesota or relating those impacts back to Minnesota.</p>
<p>Talk in the present tense and about our future together. Pick a few Minnesota-specific stories that paint the picture of the impacts here and tell them over and over. Personalize them. Include yourself in them. Talk about the future by talking about what we can do together to improve the future. Don't talk about the future as an impending disaster.</p>	<p>Don't talk about climate change as a problem in the future. Climate change is affecting Minnesotans tangibly in 2020. Floods, droughts, wildfires, hotter hot temperatures, colder cold temperatures, vector-borne illnesses, economic disruptions, in-migration from impacted places, etc. Don't talk about it as only a problem for the next generation.</p>
<p>Be race explicit. Minnesota is transitioning toward being a fully inclusive, multi-racial democracy. Over the next decade, we're going to decide together if we're a state where everyone belongs or a state where some people count & some people don't. It's important to name race, and to include everyone, without creating a huge list. 'Black, brown, and white, indigenous and immigrant' is an effective a short-hand.</p>	<p>Don't be race absent. When you're not talking about race, other political actors still are. By avoiding it, you're ceding the debate to those who would use race to divide us. They will use explicitly or implicitly racist dog-whistles in order to stoke fear and create division. You can inoculate against this by proactively talking about race and painting a picture that includes everyone: Black or white, Latino or Asian, native or newcomer.</p>
<p>Assign motivations to the dividers. This is crucial. You can inoculate against 'othering' dog-whistles by proactively naming the tactic and explaining why it's being used: 'Some politicians want to use our differences to divide us. It's their strategy to win an election.'</p>	<p>Don't just call people 'racist' and assume that people know what you mean. It's okay to pushback on racist words and action. You should do that. But calling someone categorically 'racist' often triggers an 'Is he?' or 'Isn't he?' debate in people's heads. (cont.)</p>

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	<p>(cont.) It can be more effective to offer an explanation for an act by assigning a motivation to it: ‘He’s trying to use race to divide us in order to build his own power. He’s trying to distract us from the what really matters: how we’re all going to live together. What’s his policy plan for health care, climate change, or a quality education?’</p> <p>A politician may be racist or not, but people can find it easier to agree that he’s using race to manipulate people and serve his own interests.</p>
<p>Talk about responsibility vs. irresponsibility. Assume climate change is real and move forward from there. Make the debate about who’s taking responsibility and who’s NOT taking responsibility. Climate deniers are irresponsible; they’re refusing to their position of power to act for the common good. Often, they know climate change is real & human-caused, but they can’t say so without alienating their donors in the fossil fuel industry.</p>	<p>Don’t debate if climate change is real or rely too much on fact-checking. Climate change and its causes are a settled matter of science. Doubts are driven by a campaign of deception by the fossil fuel industry. Politicians who doubt that climate change is real are often putting on a show for their donors. Fact-checks are tricky. Too often they leave you talking about your opponent’s argument. If used, they should be brief and used to pivot back to talking about our values and vision.</p>
<p>Talk about climate as a nonpartisan issue. Climate change and clean energy issues are nonpartisan issues. The majority of voters in both parties support clean energy solutions (even if some elected representatives in both parties don’t). A safe, clean, healthy Minnesota is something people value regardless of party. Clean energy solutions are something Minnesotans want regardless of party. Climate impacts are being experience by everyone, regardless of party. This very popular issue is being blocked by powerful industries and the handful of politicians they support.</p>	<p>Don’t treat bipartisanship like it’s the goal. Fifteen years ago, climate and clean energy solutions were a more bipartisan issue. Unfortunately, after decades of fossil fuel industry-funded disinformation and political spending, there are fewer conservative politicians in favor of climate change solutions. However, the majority of voters in both parties accept that climate change is human-caused and support clean energy solutions. It’s a popular issue being blocked by powerful industries and the handful of politicians they support.</p>
<p>Acknowledge there are multiple crisis happening this year. You can talk about climate change during a pandemic and after civil unrest. In fact, you use these concurrent crises as a way to talk about how climate intersects with many parts of our lives. Climate change is a crisis accelerator. It deepens existing inequalities and makes emergencies more frequent and more consequential. What living through crisis is showing us is that we need each other. When we act together, we make a difference. When we go it alone, we fail. That’s why we need leadership that bridges across our differences rather than making them deeper.</p>	<p>Don’t avoid or minimize any crisis. We’ll need to address them all. It’s a false choice that we can’t act on climate and address the pandemic, recover our economy, reform policing, or protect our democracy. We need to do all of them at the same time. We’ve done it before and we can do it again.</p>

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<p>Offer tangible solutions. Solutions need to pass the sniff test. This means they need to be credible in two ways. They need to address the problems at the scale as we've defined them and they need to feel tangible & do-able in the State of Minnesota in 2021. That's why you should prepare a few easy-to-communicate, at-scale solutions that are deeper than a slogan.</p>	<p>Only get wonky when you're asked to. We love to get wonky. But many people get lost if you go too deep too quick. People need to feel like co-owners of the problems of and the solutions to climate change. Going right to statistics often makes people feel like they aren't expert enough to have an opinion. Have tangible solutions ready, but lead with values.</p>
<p>Talk about economic inclusion. If you want to talk about green jobs or a clean economy, talk about how they will benefit all of us by including everyone. Start from the assumption that the transition to a clean economy is already happening: 'As we transition, we have a once-in-a-generation chance to make our economy both more clean and more fair. But we need to make sure everyone has access to these new jobs and that no one's left behind.'</p>	<p>Don't only talk about the economy, or economic prosperity. People care less about 'the economy' than about their own economic situation. When you only make an economic argument you can trigger zero-sum thinking: who are going to be the economic winners & losers?</p> <p>Likewise, the 'green jobs are good for the economy' rhetoric is often used as an argument to try to move people who are unmoved by the climate crisis itself. You can persuade more people by sticking with a values-based approach and defining the problem the way you see it: as a climate crisis.</p> <p>Finally, macroeconomic arguments do not work well with people who either want better employment, or who are concerned about losing their existing employment. It can read as technocratic and out of touch, rather than relating directly to their lived experience.</p>

2) Constructing a Message: We have a recommended framework for talking about equitable climate solutions.

Step 1: Values – Start by grounding you and your audience in your shared values. The values should be those you feel and believe in: inclusiveness, equality, fairness, etc. Use language that shows, rather than tells. Go beyond naming the value. Show it in action. Be specific, concrete, localized. Name race, and the other ways we are unique. But resist the urge to make a super-long list. People tune out after three items in a series.

Step 2: Villain – It's essential that you name those standing in the way and that you name their motivation. In climate work, this is usual politicians and the fossil fuel industries that support them. Avoid sweeping language like 'all politicians. Say 'some' politicians. Qualify your language. Distinguish small businesses from large corporations, and from the oil, coal, and natural gas industries, specifically. Then describe what motivates some politicians to divide us: to build their own power, win an election, or please their corporate donors.

Step 3: Vision – End by painting a picture of what we want. Try to balance being both visionary and tangible. Your vision needs to be both credible and feel like it matches the scale of the problem. Use nouns. Name policy ideas. Focus on a Minnesota-specific future. Refer back to who we are.

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3) Sample Messages on Minnesota-specific Topics: Here are a few examples of this guidance in action:

	Climate Change & Crisis	Equitable Clean Energy	Talking w/ Conservatives	Green New Deal	Clean Cars	Atty Gen Lawsuit
Values	When times are tough, we stick together. In pandemics or blizzards, after riots or floods, we know we do better when we care for one another.	Black, brown, or white, indigenous, or immigrant, we all want a state that's cleaner and more fair.	We all want Minnesota to be a leader. We can produce our own energy locally with our in-state entrepreneurs who are developing wind and solar power here.	We know we need to change: to transition to clean, renewable energy. As we do that, we need to make sure we don't leave anyone behind: Black, brown, or white.	We believe in a Minnesota where we're all connected. That means we all need more options, cleaner options for getting to work, to school, or to our grandparents' house.	Black, brown, or white, indigenous or immigrant, we all expect to be treated fairly and dealt with honestly.
Villain	Still, some politicians try to divide us when we need each other the most. It's an election year, so rather than bring us together they want to point fingers, assign blame, and turn us against each other. But we aren't going to fall for it.	Unfortunately, some politicians and the fossil fuel industries that back them, want to stand in the way. To do that, they try to divide us by our skin color, our zip code, or how we worship. That's not okay.	Big oil and coal companies are standing in the way of homegrown solutions. We need them to get out of the way so we can level the playing field for Minnesotans.	Unfortunately, some politicians try to make a 'Green New Deal' sound scary by distorting what it's about, making it a political football or a personality contest. They should stop pointing fingers and start taking responsibility.	The big oil companies oppose clean cars because they make money from gasoline. So, the politicians they fund with those profits oppose clean cars too. It's that simple.	Over the last few decades, the fossil fuel industry has paid for a multi-billion dollar campaign of deception to create doubt about climate change. It's a way to protect their profits by blocking legislation and warping the democratic process.
Vision	When these crises are over, we can build back together. Black, brown, and white, we can come together to prepare for our climate crisis, reform our institutions, and create the state we want: one where everyone is cared for and everyone belongs.	We can create a Minnesota where we protect our air and water, share in our economic prosperity, and build bridges, rather than divide each other up. New jobs, good jobs in clean industries are something we all can agree on.	We can build a clean energy industry in Minnesota that leads the nation and protects our air and water. It's good jobs. It's common sense. It's work we can all be proud of.	We can build a future for Minnesota where all of us belong. Call it whatever you want: it's a future without fossil fuels, where everybody has access to good jobs, where we protect our air and water for generations to come.	The Governor's Clean Cars initiative is one good way to make sure every Minnesotan has the options they want for staying connected: clean cars, public transit, and bike-able streets. Black, brown, or white, we all want a state that's connected.	The Attorney General's lawsuit is one way to set things straight. We can have a state where powerful industries work for us, not against us, where they follow the rules, and tell the truth.