



## **Framing/Messaging Guidance: Housing/Asylum-seekers and migrants**

December 2023

These messages aim to support your communications about homelessness, housing, asylum seekers and migrants. With many communities facing a sudden influx of asylum seekers we are seeing vulnerable groups being pitted against one another, and blamed for increases in unsheltered homelessness. We need to shift the narrative and call out this blame game.

Below are messages that can be used in conversations, written communications, press statements and more. They focus on **shared values**, discuss the current moment as an **opportunity** for elected leaders to come together, **call out** the blame game and invite people to focus on **solutions**.

They can be used in local, state and federal work and adjusted based on key priorities and audiences.

These are a guide not a script – some messages will resonate more than others. Use what is helpful and add your own specifics after leaning into the shared values we want to highlight. We are all working to ensure everyone – no matter how long they have lived here – has a safe and affordable place to live and thrive.

For more information see our [narrative essentials](#) and [message guide](#).

## Examples of narrative change in action

This [video](#) from [@MaketheRoadNY](#)



- Names root causes (rising RENT)
- Establishes shared values
- Shows lived experience
- Leans in to community
- Focuses on solutions and their vision for the future
- Has a clear call to action

### **PIT Count messaging: In the event of increases in the count due in part to increases in asylum seekers**

- More people experiencing homelessness shows that our [city / town / state] hasn't built or preserved enough affordable housing. Finding a place to live is like a game of musical chairs. There aren't enough chairs and people who are older, sick, unable to work or struggling to get by are the first to lose out. Instead of blaming people for having nowhere to live, we have an opportunity to do what we know works - create more housing and get people authorized to work quickly so they can get the help they need.
- Rents are sky-high, regardless of whether a community has enough apartments or houses, so a lot of people are living on the brink – newcomers and native residents. That's why homelessness is on the rise. Our elected leaders have an opportunity now to fix the problems they created by pushing for more housing, increasing rental assistance and supporting newcomers by letting them work.

## **General housing/immigration messaging**

- [A world-class city / an amazing town / a truly great state] is one where everyone has a place to live, but our [city] is feeling a housing crunch right now, leaving asylum seekers / immigrants and people who are homeless struggling to find homes. Local and state leaders have an opportunity to implement solutions that ensure we all have safe and stable housing as a foundation to succeed. Instead, some local leaders are blaming each other or pitting vulnerable groups against each other to distract us. Homelessness – for people who have lived here for years or people who have just arrived – is solvable WHEN our local and state leaders work together to ensure everyone has a safe and affordable place to live.
- Blaming asylum seekers and people sleeping on the streets for our housing problems is like blaming someone with cancer for needing medical care. Instead of playing the blame game, local and state leaders have an opportunity to find solutions that give everyone – regardless of how long they've been here – a chance to succeed.
- In such a powerful and wealthy country, we have the resources to provide everyone who needs it a safe and affordable home. When we focus on solutions and demand that our local and state leaders work together, we can solve homelessness for people who have lived here for years AND for people who just arrived.
- Nearly all of us have family stories about coming to [City or State name / this country] to make a better life. It's no different now. People coming here want the chance to be safe and that starts with having a place to live. Housing is the foundation. It lets people get on their feet and live with dignity and opportunity, so they can rebuild their lives and give back to the community that welcomed them.
- Immigrants make our communities stronger; they grow our economy and give back – if they have the chance to succeed here. That requires our local, state, and federal leaders to meet the moment so that everyone, regardless of how long they've been here, has a chance to thrive.
- We know what works to make sure everyone – longtime residents and asylum-seekers – have a place to call home. We can expand rental assistance, build and preserve the supply of homes affordable and accessible to people with the lowest incomes, provide emergency rental assistance to help households experiencing a crisis, and strengthen and enforce renter protections.

- Homelessness is not a (Your City/State) value. We should all have the freedom to thrive and have a safe place to live in the [city] we love. We know homelessness is solvable – for people who have lived here for years and people who have just arrived – when our elected, business, faith and nonprofit leaders work together to ensure everyone has a safe and affordable place to live.

### **I'm not fooled by politicians**

- Housing is too expensive for all of us. People living on the streets or doubled up in tiny apartments didn't make it expensive. And neither did asylum seekers coming to the city. The housing crunch we have today is because our city and state and federal leaders haven't built or preserved enough housing for decades, so now everyone is pressed for a place to stay. Don't be fooled by politicians who blame migrants for our problems.
- I have a problem with politicians who blame asylum seekers for our [city's] challenges. Whether you spend way too much of your paycheck on rent or see members of our community with no place to live, we all know that housing is too expensive and there's not enough of it. I'm tired of the blame game. City Hall and [state capital] should work together to build and renovate housing and expand rental vouchers so everyone has a safe and affordable place to call home.
- Our [city / town/ state] hasn't built or preserved enough housing for decades and now too many corporate landlords are hiking up rents, getting rich and leaving many of us out in the cold. Literally. That's what's causing the homelessness problem, not asylum-seekers. We need our elected leaders to work together to create more housing people can afford – and stop blaming those who need more support.

## **New York specific (model for other places, using city-specific themes)**

### **New York is the place:**

- New York is the place people come to make a better life for themselves. We've been a hub for immigrants since this country was founded so don't tell me we can't make room for new people. Our local, state and federal leaders have an opportunity to focus on solutions so that all New Yorkers, regardless of how long they've been here, have the chance to succeed.
- New Yorkers are creative and innovative. We invented coal-fired pizza, air conditioning and hip hop. Now we have an opportunity to invent real solutions to our housing problems. Let your local and state leaders know you want them to work together to find solutions that ensure every New Yorker, whether native or newcomer, has a safe and affordable place to live.
- We're New Yorkers and we don't shy away from what's hard. Right now, there aren't enough places to live for all the people in our community who need a home, whether they are native New Yorkers experiencing homelessness or asylum seekers needing safety. Now's the time for all of us to do what we do best – find solutions and do the hard work that makes sure everyone has a place to live.
- The best city in the world is a city where everyone has a place to live. Our local, state and federal leaders have an opportunity to shine in this moment, stop blaming each other (and pitting people in need against one another) and find solutions so that all New Yorkers, regardless of how long they've been here, have the chance to succeed.

### **I heart NY:**

- I love NY because everyone belongs here. People come here to launch their lives, chase opportunities and dream big. Blaming people who come here needing asylum and safety isn't the New York I know and love.
- I love NY because we get things done. Like getting everyone housed.
- I love NY because my (relative) came here with nothing. They made it because the city gave them a chance. Our stories are the same – people just need a little help to get settled, whether they've just arrived or needed some help for years.
- Invest in the people who make NYC great – everyone. Now is the time for our local, state, and federal leaders to meet the moment, stop blaming each other (and pitting people in need against one another) and focus on solutions so that all New Yorkers, regardless of how long they've been here, have the chance to thrive.

## **Here's how:**

- Taxing the wealthiest New Yorkers and corporations based in New York so they pay their fair share so we can grow the public resources we need to address many of our challenges.
- Expediting work authorization where possible (*note: federal, and potentially state if we feel the new state proposal withstands scrutiny*).
- Expanding state and city funded immigration legal services to help asylum seekers apply for asylum and work permits. (*Note: they can only get work authorization if they apply, and virtually none have lawyers to date.*)
- Making sure all New Yorkers are housed: This means implementing the city's new housing voucher bills that make it easier for people to move from shelters into permanent housing (which Mayor Adams has been stalling on), passing state legislation that protects renters from unfair evictions and building more truly affordable housing.
- Expanding state and city adult literacy and workforce development programs so that our newest New Yorkers can work in the many unfilled jobs in our state.

Other examples of policy recommendations from state and local partners:

- [Immigration Research Institute Roundtable with Partners in NYC](#)
- [Women in Need \(WIN\) and the New York Immigrant Coalition \(NYIC\)'s report on permanently housing asylum seekers](#)
- [The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights \(ICIRR\)'s federal, state, and local policy demands](#)
- Center for American Progress's "[Practical Solutions To Assist Cities and States Receiving Asylum-Seekers Across the U.S.](#)"
- [Federal Policy Recommendations from the Mayor's Offices in Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, and New York](#)

If you or your state partners have examples of messaging or policy recommendations that you'd be willing to share as a tool for your peers, please add to this file.