

**raben**

# **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Messaging Guide**

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## Introduction

Resource Impact collaborated with Hart Research, Bellwether Research and Consulting and Raben to conduct research that would shed light on voter perspectives on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and help to develop more effective strategic communications around diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. Between April and August of 2024, the research team conducted online journals, led 13 focus groups, an online survey of 3,142 voters nationwide, and followed up with online discussions. This research is intended to help educate community leaders and advocates, business, and the broader public. The complete results can be found [here](#).

# Core Insights

- **Use Full Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Phrase:** Stop using the "DEI" abbreviation and use "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" instead, as it resonates more positively with people.
- **Universally Effective Messages:** Emphasizing respect, belonging, and individual potential resonates across party lines and racial groups, making it a rare unifying message.
- **Counter Quota Narrative Directly:** Emphasize that diversity, equity, and inclusion open doors for opportunity and support, rather than dictating hiring decisions. This message is particularly effective with older and college-educated Americans.
- **Avoid "Social Justice" Messaging:** The notion that diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and programs exist to ensure we correct past and existing injustices and unfair practices is one of the most polarizing messages.
- **Reaching the Right:** Call out diversity, equity, and inclusion opponents for using government overreach to police private entities. This message works especially well with more conservative voters who philosophically oppose a heavy-handed role for government.
- **Take Advantage of Public Distaste for Polarization:** Frame diversity, equity, and inclusion opponents as "dividers" to align with the public's fatigue with division and polarization.

# Credible Messengers

- ▶ Participants believe messengers are credible if they have personal experience with diversity, equity and inclusion, have a track record of commitment to it, and are respected/accomplished individuals in their fields.
- ▶ Messengers who speak from a place of deep and longstanding commitment to values, without any profit or corporate motives, resonate most strongly.
- ▶ While politicians and business leaders can meet these criteria of credibility, they can also be polarizing and draw skepticism from some voters who question their intentions because of the perception that politicians prioritize power, business leaders prioritize profits, and both care about appearances.

## Winning Narratives

Of the eight pro-diversity, equity and inclusion messages tested, the following messages appeared in the most convincing ranks across various voter demographics.

- 1. "Individual Potential:"** People who feel valued and respected are more engaged and more likely to contribute their best to their workplace and their colleagues. Diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives create a sense of belonging where people feel comfortable sharing their ideas, allowing everyone to reach their full potential.
- 2. "Door Opener:"** Diversity, equity and inclusion doesn't determine who gets hired or who gets admitted - that is based on qualifications. It just helps make sure the door is open wide enough so that people who have traditionally had less access to opportunities get the chance to be considered and, if chosen, feel comfortable and supported once they are there.
- 3. "American Dream:"** Diversity, equity, and inclusion are at the heart of the American Dream. They reflect our shared vision for a country where everyone, regardless of background, has a fair shot at success. These values embody our highest ideals and our shared commitment to liberty and justice for all.
- 4. "Unity:"** The more we understand each other, the easier it is to find common ground and work together. Diversity, equity and inclusion efforts and programs help foster unity by encouraging people to dig beyond the surface and find commonalities with everyone in their organization.

# Counterattack Messaging

There were a number of responses tested to counter attempts that aim to scare and divide people about diversity, equity and inclusion. Of those, the following messages were ranked as the top three most convincing across various voter demographics.

Americans reliably bemoan the country's divisions and say they want to see us find a path back toward civility and unity. A message that points to our opponents as "dividers" is the most effective across all cohorts.

**1** **"Divide Us:"** Diversity, equity and inclusion programs are about community, while the political attacks on them are about division. The people attacking these programs are looking to create a problem where one doesn't exist to benefit politically.

Additionally, an argument centered on who holds power was very effective among key audiences who may not see themselves as traditional power holders: Black voters, women, non-college educated voters, and Gen Z. It works well with Democrats and Independents, but not Republicans.

**2** **"Losing Power:"** The wealthy individuals and politicians attacking diversity, equity, and inclusion programs are accustomed to holding power and don't want to lose it. A changing world threatens them, and they are doing whatever they can to shut doors rather than to share power.

Voters make a distinction between private and public sectors and do not think a private venture capital fund, or a private company should be told that it can or cannot engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. One of the messages to counter anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion interests that was effective even among Republican voters centered on how this is the definition of overreach.

**3** **"Government Overreach:"** The same people who say they believe in limited government now want government to tell private businesses not to have diversity, equity and inclusion programs because they don't like it. Their overreach is hypocrisy.



# Words That Work

Say...	Instead of saying...	Because...
<p><b>“Diversity, equity and inclusion”</b></p>	<p>“DEI”</p>	<p>There are strong positive associations with the individual words that make up the abbreviation: “diversity, equity and inclusion.” Take advantage of these positives and avoid playing into the demonization of the acronym promulgated by opponents.</p>
<p>Diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives are about <b>respect, belonging and individual potential</b>.</p>	<p>Diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives are important to correct past and existing injustices.</p>	<p>A universally effective message across party lines in support of diversity, equity and inclusion emphasizes its focus on respect, belonging and individual potential. Correcting past injustices was the least effective of all messages tested.</p>
<p>Diversity, equity and inclusion is a <b>“door opener.”</b> It helps people who have <b>traditionally had less access to opportunities get the chance to be considered</b> and, if chosen, feel comfortable and supported once they are there.</p>	<p>Diversity, equity and inclusion efforts are good for business.</p>	<p>This framing reduces diversity, equity and inclusion to only hiring based on quotas - not qualifications or hard work. It may also make both workers and consumers feel that the efforts are performative.</p>

# Messages That Work By Target Audience

## By age:

### Gen Z:

- “Individual Potential”
- “Door Opener”
- “Unity”

### Millennial:

- “Individual Potential”
- “American Dream”
- “Unity”

### Gen X:

- “Individual Potential”
- “American Dream”
- “Door Opener”

### Boomer:

- “Individual Potential”
- “Door Opener”
- “American Dream”

## By gender and education:

### Men:

- “Individual Potential”
- “Door Opener”
- “American Dream”

### Women:

- “Individual Potential”
- “American Dream”
- “Door Opener”

### Non-College:

- “Individual Potential”
- “American Dream”
- “Door Opener”

### College:

- “Individual Potential”
- “Door Opener”
- “American Dream”

## By race:

### White Voters:

- “Individual Potential”
- “American Dream”
- “Door Opener”

### Black Voters:

- “Individual Potential”
- “American Dream”
- “Social Justice”

### Latino Voters:

- “Individual Potential”
- “Unity”
- “Door Opener”

### AAPI Voters:

- “Individual Potential”
- “Door Opener”
- “American Dream”

## By party:

**GOP, IND** and **DEM** voters ranked the following messages in the same way.

- “Individual Potential”
- “Door Opener”
- “American Dream”