

Balance Our Tax Code

2022 Messaging Guide





How to Use This Guide

All too often, progressives are asked to keep issues of racial justice and economic well-being separate — or to remain silent about race at the risk of alienating the mythical middle we’re told we must appease.

But national and state-based research shows that the way to persuade the middle is to mobilize our base of supporters to relentless repetition of our messages. To do that, we must tell values-based, human-centered stories that also effectively articulate issues of race, class, and gender.

The purpose of this guide is to provide a ready-made messaging framework and talking points that convey to lawmakers and the public why balancing our tax code is vital to the health of all our communities, no matter the color of our skin, what’s in our wallets, or what neighborhood we live in. **Informed by six years of messaging research and strategies that have shifted how Washingtonians think about government and taxes, this guide is built using elements of the empirically tested Race-Class Narrative.**

It includes:

- BOTC Vision Statement
- BOTC Core Values
- Our Core Narrative
- Message Triangle
- Words to Embrace and Replace
- Copy Blocks

BOTC Vision Statement

To build a more just and equitable tax code for Washington state that creates a strong future where all our communities have the resources we need to thrive.

BOTC Core Values

In order to lead with values in our storytelling, we must understand what our shared values are as a coalition and how they inform our messages. These are the values that guide us toward a future that we are responsible for creating.

Racial Justice: Equitable access to a high quality of life and outcomes for communities of color.

Intersectionality: Advancing policies that address historic injustices and inequities experienced by marginalized communities.

Inclusivity: Bringing to the table and centering those most impacted, particularly communities of color, low-income communities, and other impacted communities.

Transparency and accountability: Clear understanding and communication of coalition decisions, decision-making, and dynamics that inform coalition work.

Chipping in your share: Not everyone or every organization has equal resources or time to contribute; we all strive to provide the bandwidth and energy we each, respectively, have to do the collective work.

Stepping back: Acknowledging the privilege and structural advantages any person or organization has and be aware of the space we take up in discussion and decision-making.

Our Core Narrative

In Washington, we want to be able to pursue our dreams and be treated with respect, no matter what we look like or what's in our wallets.

But for decades, white and wealthy politicians of our past who have been influenced by wealthy corporations have designed and maintained a tax code that allows a powerful few to build unimaginable amounts of concentrated wealth. While the rest of us foot the bill for the schools where our kids learn, the parks we play in, and the roads we drive on, they are able to live on this wealth and pass it on to their descendants nearly tax-free.

The repeated decisions to maintain a tax code that benefits the rich and powerful have prevented many Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) communities, working families, and small business owners from enjoying the stability of financial well-being, accessing opportunities for better lives, and building wealth for our families' futures. The COVID-19 health and economic crises have magnified those existing and deeply rooted inequities - and the consequences are far from over. In 2021, one-in-ten households and one-in-three small businesses were behind on rent. One-in-three Washingtonians went hungry. Meanwhile, Washington's 19 billionaires sat back and watched their wealth grow by \$181 billion - or 56% - nearly tax free.

In 2021, thousands of us joined together and ensured that our legislators took steps towards balancing our tax code with the passage of a capital gains tax on the ultra-wealthy and by funding a cash rebate for working families. But there's still work to do. Our lowest-income residents are still paying the highest share of their income in taxes, while the wealthiest pay the least. Our tax code is still the most upside-down in the nation. This year, we are coming together again to hold state elected leaders accountable for building a tax system that requires the wealthy to pay what they owe to our communities in taxes, and equitably funds what we all need to thrive, no exceptions.

Message Triangle

The Message Triangle is made up of the three major elements of the Core Narrative. When talking about the progressive revenue story, you can start with any of these, but our research shows it is most effective to tell a complete story by using all three elements of the triangle whenever possible.

Quest

The world we are building. Our shared value(s).

In Washington, we want to be able to pursue our dreams and be treated with respect, no matter what we look like or what's in our wallets. Most of us pitch in for our communities because we know that when our communities have everything we need to truly thrive, we all do better. We want to live in a state where all of us can find a home we can afford, our kids have a safe place to learn and play, we can see a doctor when we're sick, and we're paid for the true value of our work.



Solution

How we're going to achieve our quest.

In 2021, thousands of us joined together and ensured that our legislators took steps towards balancing our tax code with the passage of a capital gains tax on the ultra-wealthy and by funding a cash rebate for working families. But there's still work to do. When we go all in for all of us together, we can make sure the wealthiest Washingtonians and large corporations pay what they truly owe through taxes so we can fully fund our schools, ensure quality healthcare for anyone who needs it, and provide stability for our families.

Threat

The big problem that prevents us from achieving our quest.

But today, working families in Washington pay seven times more of their income in taxes than the wealthiest. Politicians of our past - who have been mostly white and wealthy - have designed and maintained a tax code that lets the wealthy few pay less than they truly owe in taxes. Their greed holds the rest of us back from being able to make ends meet. Our upside-down tax code has prevented many communities of color, working families, and small business owners from enjoying the stability of financial well-being, accessing opportunities for better lives, and building wealth for our future families.

Words to Embrace and Replace

| Say This | Instead of This | Notes |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| People of different races and from different places; white, Black or brown; native or newcomer; No matter where we live or what we look like | All people; everyone; all of us | Explicit reference to race engages people of color while keeping white listeners on board. |
| Join together across our differences of gender, income, and race | Join together in our communities | Making reference to our differences increases interest of our base and persuadables. |
| Wealthy few who rig the rules; billionaires | Elites; the wealthy | It's critical to specify we mean only certain people, thus adding "few," and to name by behavior. Elites can be categorized to mean educated or progressive and can alienate our base. |
| Wealthy Corporations | Companies; businesses | Company evokes small and local; people are measurably more hostile toward "corporations". |
| Working people; working families | Workers | Calling people workers reduces them to the role they play and eclipses their basic needs and desires as humans. |
| Shared contribution; contribute our share; responsibility | Tax burden; tax relief | "Burden" and "relief" reinforce the notion of taxes as an affliction we all suffer from. |
| Neighbors; community members | Taxpayers | Labeling people taxpayers foregrounds finances and anti-government biases. |
| Providing; funding | Investing | Instead of addressing human and community needs, "invest" conjures thoughts of the stock market, money, and ROI. |
| Schools where our kids learn; roads we drive on; buses we take to work; the parks we play in; the homes where we cook our meals and make our memories | Public education; infrastructure; public transit; housing | Changing systems has to sound possible. The more our messages convey tangible experiences the more people are drawn to and motivated by them. |
| Take resources from our communities; undermine our schools; free ride off what we contribute | Tax breaks; avoid paying taxes; get away with not paying taxes | People resent taxes and thus understand desire to avoid them; in all of our messages we must connect what taxes buy to enrich our lives, not the taxes themselves. |
| Compensation for the true value of our work; Fair return on our work | Wages; wage gap; wage gouging | Wealthy corporations see us as numbers in a spreadsheet, not as humans with full lives and talent. We have to center the value of our talent. |
| Families' economic well-being; Our financial well-being; Jobs; Ability to put food on the table and support our families | The economy | There is no independent being named The Economy — it is merely a way we measure human activity. When we personify 'the economy' as capable of acting or being acted upon, feeling pain or being revived, we fuel opposition framing that positions the well-being of 'the economy' as separate from and more important than the well-being of actual human beings. Instead, we should specify what we mean, whether that's jobs, families being able to put food on the table, or people's broader economic well-being. |

Copy Blocks

The following can be used as stand alone messages or in combination with each other. They are designed to be used in a variety of ways such as public statements, op-eds and LTE's, interviews and speeches, social media, or in conversation with friends and family. They can be used verbatim, or adapted to fit particular needs and circumstances.

Quest & Shared Values

In Washington, we want to be able to pursue our dreams and be treated with respect, no matter what we look like or what's in our wallets. Most of us pitch in for our communities because we know that when our communities have everything we need to truly thrive, we all do better. We want to live in a state where all of us can find a home we can afford, our kids have a safe place to learn and play, we can see a doctor when we're sick, and we're paid for the true value of our work.

No matter where we live in Washington, most of us want similar things - a stable place to live, a nurturing place for our kids, a reliable income to support our families, and to see a doctor when we need to without worrying about the size of the bill.

In Washington, we believe that all of our neighborhoods — no matter the zip code or racial makeup — are worthy of nurture and care.

No matter what we look like, where we come from, or how much we earn, most of us believe in pitching in to take care of our communities.

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Threat & Defining Villains

Working families in Washington pay seven times more of their income in taxes than the wealthiest. Politicians of our past - who have been mostly white and wealthy - have designed and maintained a tax code that lets the wealthy few pay less than they truly owe in taxes, and it holds the rest of us back from being able to make ends meet. Our upside-down tax code has prevented many communities of color, working families, and small business owners from enjoying the stability of financial well-being, accessing opportunities for better lives, and building wealth for our future families.

Our tax code is upside-down. Legislators in our past designed and still maintain a system that requires those of us with the lowest incomes to pay 17% of our income in taxes, while the wealthiest get to pay just 3%. Our communities are starved of the funding we need to maintain the schools where our kids learn, see doctors when we're sick, or provide home options we can afford. Then, certain politicians want to shame and blame those of us who use social services so we don't come together to demand they make the wealthiest few contribute what they truly owe in taxes to our communities.

We can all find ourselves struggling to make ends meet no matter our color, background, or zip code, but some politicians fuel lies about people who use social services to keep us from coming together to demand that the wealthiest pay taxes that would fully fund what all of us, white, Black and brown, need.

The wealthy and powerful few benefit when we fall for the lies certain politicians peddle to get us to oppose government programs and policies that would deliver what all of us need.

Large corporations take the wealth that working people create by holding down wages and denying benefits, no matter their profits.

Solutions & Heroes

In 2021, thousands of us joined together and ensured that our legislators took steps towards balancing our tax code with the passage of a capital gains tax on the ultra-wealthy and by funding a cash rebate for working families. But there's still work to do. When we go all in for all of us together, we can make sure the wealthiest Washingtonians and large corporations pay what they owe through taxes so we can fully fund our schools, ensure quality healthcare for anyone who needs it, and provide stability for our families.

If we make sure Washington billionaires pay what they truly owe in taxes through a wealth tax, working families would have what they need like healthcare, housing, and food.

If we make sure Washington's wealthiest pay what they truly owe in taxes through a more progressive estate tax, our families and communities would have what we need.

If we make sure the rich contribute as much as they take, we can create a more just, prosperous, and healthy future for all.

When we put cash back in the pockets of working families, we can all have what we need to thrive while also creating and maintaining healthy communities.

We need to make sure the wealthiest Washingtonians and large corporations pay what they owe through taxes so we can fully fund our schools, ensure quality healthcare for anyone who needs it, and provide stability for our families.

When our elected leaders make wealthy corporations pay people for the true value of their work, our families will have what we need.

