

Balance Our Tax Code

2025 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 ten 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:**

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



Our Core Narrative

No matter what we look like or how we make a living, most of us pitch in for each other. We want to live, work, and play in vibrant communities, and leave things better off for those to come.

But you know who doesn't pitch in? The wealthy few. Some of them have spent decades helping to maintain an upside-down tax code that requires us to pay a higher share of our income in state and local taxes than they do. While working people foot the bill for the schools where our kids learn, the parks we play in, and the roads we all drive on, they are able to avoid paying what they truly owe to our shared communities.

In recent years, we've moved the needle on balancing our tax code with the passage of a capital gains tax and a working families tax credit. But there's still work to do. If we make sure Washington's wealthiest people and corporations pay what they truly owe in taxes, the rest of us will have what we need - like affordable healthcare and housing, healthy food, and high quality schools in every neighborhood.



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 letters to the editor, 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

No matter what we look like or how we make a living, most of us pitch in for each other. We want to live, work, and play in vibrant communities, and leave things better off for those to come.

In Washington, we believe everyone deserves an equal opportunity to thrive, no matter what we look like or what's in our wallets.

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

No matter what's in our wallets, we should all have the freedom to provide for our families, contribute to our communities, and have enough left over to make meaningful choices about our lives.

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



Copy Blocks *continued*

Threat & Defining Villains

The wealthy few do not pay what they truly owe to our shared communities. Some of them have spent decades helping to maintain an upside-down tax code that requires us to pay a higher share of our income in state and local taxes than they do. While the rest of us foot the bill for the schools where our kids learn, the parks we play in, and the roads we all drive on, they are getting a free ride off of what we contribute.

For decades, some politicians have maintained a tax code that favors the wealthy and corporations, allowing them to build unimaginable amounts of concentrated wealth. While they enjoy their fortunes and pass it on to their descendants nearly tax-free, the rest of us foot the bill for our public schools, our healthcare, and the social services our communities share.

When wealthy people and corporations refuse to pay what they truly owe to our communities by blocking progressive tax policies, they add another barrier to the wealth-building power of immigrants, Indigenous peoples, Black Americans, and all working people.

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 14% of our income in taxes, while the wealthiest get to pay just 4%.

The wealthy few starve our communities 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 owe.

In Washington, working families pay more than three times more of our income in taxes than the wealthiest. For decades, white and wealthy corporations have lobbied to maintain a tax code that enables a powerful few to build unimaginable amounts of 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 their wealth and avoid paying what they truly owe in taxes to our communities.

Our lowest-income residents are still paying the highest share of their incomes in taxes, while the wealthiest pay the least. Our tax code is the second most upside-down in the nation.

Solutions & Heroes

In recent years, we've moved the needle on balancing our tax code with the passage of a capital gains tax and a working families tax credit. But there's still work to do. If we make sure Washington's wealthiest people and corporations pay what they truly owe in taxes, the rest of us will have what we need - like affordable healthcare and housing, healthy food, and high quality schools in every neighborhood.

In recent years, we've moved the needle on balancing our tax code with the passage of a capital gains tax and a working families tax credit. But there's still work to do. That's why we're coming together to build an equitable tax system that ensures opportunity for all Washingtonians, no exceptions.

In recent years, thousands of us have joined together to hold our legislators accountable for bringing justice to our tax code and funding our future.

If we make Washington multimillionaires and billionaires pay what they truly owe in taxes through a wealth tax, we can fund all the programs that working families have been asking for - like community supports for people with disabilities, affordable homes, and tax credits.

If we make the rich contribute as much as they take, we can create a 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.



Words to Embrace and Replace

Say This	Instead of This	Notes
<p>Whatever your...(race, income, zip code, etc) No matter...(how much money is in our wallets, where in Washington we live, the color of our skin, etc) Black, brown, or white Whether you were born here or just arrived here</p>	<p>All people Everyone All of us</p>	<p>Race-, gender-, and class-blind language speaks largely to cis, white, male audiences. We are telling stories about policy work that includes all of us, and we must name who we are and demonstrate that even though we have differences, we are working together toward a future we can all share.</p>
<p>Wealthy few who rig the rules Billionaires who hoard their wealth</p>	<p>The wealthy The rich Elites</p>	<p>To credibly name a villain, it's critical to make clear that you're implicating specific individuals (e.g., the wealthy few or some politicians) as opposed to vilifying whole categories of people.</p>
<p>Pay what they truly owe our communities in taxes</p>	<p>Tax the rich Pay their fair share</p>	<p>Tax the Rich frames taxes as a punishment, rather than something we all contribute to our communities. "Owe" hints at a broader unmet and overdue responsibility that can encompass not only taxes but also wages and compensation for the wealth corporations and the rich take from our collective efforts. It is also more engaging for our base. "Fairness" is a contested concept. For many, fairness means a flat tax, and "paying your fair share" reinforces that everyone pitches in the same thing: money.</p>
<p>Free ride off of what we contribute Take resources from our communities Undermine our schools</p>	<p>Tax breaks Avoid paying taxes Get away with not paying taxes</p>	<p>A "free ride" makes it clear that the wealthy few harm the rest of us when they dodge paying what they owe in taxes.</p>
<p>Wealthy Corporations</p>	<p>Companies Big businesses</p>	<p>Size is less relevant of a descriptor than wealth, which corporations accumulate by refusing to pay people the true value of their work, and by not paying what they owe through taxes. And, people are measurably more hostile toward "corporations" than businesses.</p>
<p>Shared contribution Contribute our share; responsibility</p>	<p>Tax burden Tax relief</p>	<p>People resent taxes and thus understand the desire to avoid them; we must foreground what taxes buy, not the taxes themselves.</p>



Words to Embrace and *Replace continued*

Say This	Instead of This	Notes
<p>Families' economic well-being Our financial well-being Jobs Ability to put food on the table and support our families</p>	<p>The <i>economy</i></p>	<p>The Economy is merely a way we measure human activity, it does not account for our everyday life experiences. When we personify 'the economy' we position it 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.</p>
<p>Working people Working families</p>	<p><i>Workers</i></p>	<p>Calling people workers reduces them to the role they play and eclipses their basic needs and desires as humans.</p>
<p>Funding shortfall Budget shortfall Lack of funds</p>	<p><i>Budget crisis</i> <i>State debt</i></p>	<p>A crisis is too big to solve and paralyzes our advocates to inaction. Centering the idea that our state needs \$X in funding to maintain our schools and services puts the real person impacts in the foreground and unites us around the problem to solve. You can emphasize that a few peoples' wealth-hoarding has put us in this situation, to avoid scapegoating "government spending."</p>
<p>Providing...(outcomes like better schools, quality health care, etc) Fully fund Make sure...(children can learn in nurturing environments, we can see a doctor when we're sick, Black people can feel safe in our communities)</p>	<p><i>Investing</i> <i>Invest in</i></p>	<p>"Providing" is immediate and direct. Investing implies a delay in realizing positive outcomes and primes expectations of a financial return. By talking about funding roads, schools, or our communities, we make the argument about our own wellbeing, rather than about a financial return.</p>
<p>Schools where our kids learn Roads we drive on Buses we take to work Parks we play in Homes where we cook our meals and make our memories</p>	<p><i>Public education</i> <i>Infrastructure</i> <i>Public transit</i> <i>Housing</i></p>	<p>Changing systems has to sound possible. The more our messages convey tangible experiences the more people are drawn to and motivated by them.</p>



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 for underserved communities of color—especially Black and brown communities

Intersectionality: Advancing policies that raise revenue from ultra-rich individuals and corporations, re-build wealth in marginalized communities, and repair historic injustices and inequities experienced by these 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

Meeting community where they're at: Not every individual or every organization has equal resources or time to contribute—providing the bandwidth and energy we each have, respectively, to do the collective work

Creating a culture of mindfulness: Acknowledging the privilege and structural advantages any person or organization has and be aware of the space they take up in discussion and decision-making

