Applying the Pro-Democracy and Public Health Narrative Pillars to Vaccine Messaging

The examples in this tipsheet are intended to inspire—not prescribe—how public health communicators can apply pro-democracy and public health narrative values and pillars when talking about vaccines. Use them as starting points to develop messages that fit your own voice, community, and communications goals. Thank you to Protect Our Care for collaborating on this tipsheet.

You'll find the full list of values and pillars at the end. For more information, please see the Pro-Democracy and Public Health Narrative Playbook.

How to use each pillar to create a message for audiences with different perspectives and levels of engagement

PILLAR	Message examples to build trust with SKEPTICAL AUDIENCES	Message examples to inspire and activate SUPPORTIVE AUDIENCES
1. Center values	*"**Every** parent wants and **deserves** the **freedom** to **make the best decisions** they can for themselves and **their families**. That **freedom** depends on having information they can **trust** and confidence that they—and **the people they care about**—can be **protected** from **preventable** diseases like measles."*	*"When it comes to **health** and **safety**, **freedom** isn't just about the **choices we make** for ourselves. It's also about the **responsibility all of us share** to **protect our children, schools, and communities** from **preventable** diseases like measles."*
Why this works	Leads with the widely shared value of freedom. Connects freedom with fairness of having trustworthy information. Builds trust by referencing informed choice.	Expands freedom value to include shared responsibility. Shows that protecting others strengthens (vs. limits) freedom.

COORDINATING PARTNER Metropolitan Group the power of voice
CORE PARTNER PACE Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement
PARTNER APHA American Public Health Association For science. For action. For health.
SUPPORT PROVIDED IN PART BY eyes on health MacArthur Foundation

PILLAR	Message examples to build trust with SKEPTICAL AUDIENCES	Message examples to inspire and activate SUPPORTIVE AUDIENCES
2. Say what we're for.	A **healthy** democracy is about more than casting a ballot. It's about creating **communities** where **everyone** has the **opportunity** to live **healthy**, **safe** lives. That includes making sure **families** have **trustworthy** information, vaccines are accessible, and local health departments and **community partners** can **prevent outbreaks** before they spread.	Democracy is about more than elections. It's about creating the conditions for **everyone** to **participate fully in community life**. That means investing in actions that **prevent diseases** like measles, **expanding access** to vaccines, and **ensuring leaders** make decisions **transparently**, follow the best available evidence, and remain **accountable to the people they serve**.
Why this works	Broadens democracy beyond elections. Focuses on people and families, not government or institutions. Frames public health as helping people achieve their goals, not telling them what to do. Shows how vaccines support everyday freedoms people value.	Broadens democracy beyond elections. Connects vaccines and public health to participation, opportunity, and civic well-being. Links public health to accountability and evidence-based leadership. Ends with a positive vision of what democracy should make possible.
3. Amplify benefits.	When **families** have confidence in vaccines and access to **trusted local** health services in their **communities**, **children** are **healthier**, schools experience fewer **disruptions**, **parents** miss less work, and **communities** are **better prepared** to **prevent outbreaks** before they spread.	**Strong** vaccination programs **protect the people most at risk**, keep schools and businesses open, and help **communities thrive**. Investing in **prevention strengthens** democracy and public health systems at all levels by helping **everyone participate more fully in community life**.
Why this works	Focuses on practical, everyday benefits. Centers families, communities, and well-being.	Broadens benefits from individual families to the whole community. Connects prevention to prosperity and participation.
4. Connect to everyday life.	For **generations**, vaccines have **protected children** from **diseases** that once took many lives. Today, they help **parents** worry less, **children** stay in school, and **families live their lives** instead of dealing with **preventable** illness.	**Healthy communities** are built one **family**, classroom, and **neighborhood** at a time. For **generations**, vaccines have kept schools open, **protected** our **friends and neighbors most at risk**, and given **everyone** confidence to **live**, **work**, and **be together**.
Why this works	Connects past wins to present-day benefits. Uses familiar and relatable experiences, not technical language.	Connects community well-being to daily life. Creates a sense of shared purpose. Paints a positive vision rather than crisis.

PILLAR	FOR SKEPTICAL AUDIENCES (trust-building and persuasion)	FOR SUPPORTIVE AUDIENCES (inspiration and activation)
5. Show shared responsibility to improve public health and democracy.	**Protecting communities** from **diseases** like measles works best when **parents, doctors, schools, and local health leaders all do their part**. People **deserve** clear information, **honest** communication about what is known and what is still being learned, and **leaders who explain the reasons** behind important health decisions. That kind of **transparency** helps **people make informed choices** and builds **trust** over time. **We all have a role to play** by **asking questions**, **sharing reliable information**, and **helping keep one another safe**.	**We** know how to **prevent diseases** like measles. When leaders or other influential voices **deliberately undermine confidence** in scientific evidence or the institutions that **protect our communities**, **trust** erodes and **preventable diseases** become **harder to control**. **Protecting** the public's health means **supporting local health departments, sharing accurate information**, **expecting leaders to make evidence-based decisions**, and **holding them accountable** for **protecting our communities**.
Why this works	Builds trust through honest communication, transparency, and informed decision-making. Frames protecting communities as a shared responsibility across families, health professionals, schools, and leaders. Invites people to ask questions, share reliable information, and help protect one another.	Calls attention to leaders who undermine public health protections without naming names, keeping the focus on behaviors and democratic accountability. Acknowledges how misinformation breaks trust and makes communities more vulnerable. Ends with clear actions people can take.
6. Lead with humility and authenticity.	No public health system is perfect. When a new **disease appears**—or an old one like **measles comes back**—no one has every answer on day one. Scientists **ask questions, test ideas, learn from evidence**, and **improve recommendations as they learn more**. **Trust** grows when these **questions are welcomed**, **decisions are explained clearly**, and people can see how new evidence and **their own input shape those decisions**.	Like our democracy, no public health system is perfect. **Strong** democracies and **strong** public health systems both improve by **asking hard questions**, **testing new evidence**, and **being willing to change course** when the facts warrant it. **By supporting transparent**, **evidence-based decision-making**, we **strengthen** both public **trust** and **our** ability to **respond together** to **meet future challenges**.
Why this works	Models humility rather than certainty. Invites dialogue and continuous learning. Builds credibility through openness.	Ends on optimism and shared progress. Reinforces accountability without cynicism. Leaves supporters with a hopeful vision worth working toward.

Core pro-democracy and public health values

PROSPERITY thriving	**FAIRNESS** Equity and justice, dignity	**RESPONSIBILITY**
FAMILY / BELONGING Interdependence, compassion, respect	**FEARLESSNESS / STRENGTH** courageousness	**SAFETY / SECURITY**
HONESTY authenticity	**FREEDOM**	**REPRESENTATION**

Pro-democracy and public health narrative pillars

- Center evidence-based values that resonate across a broad audience—especially freedom, which is the top value seen as core to democracy across all major demographic groups.
- Say what we're for: Prioritizing the public's health as a core element of an inclusive and participatory democracy—being clear that a democracy is about more than elections.
- Amplify benefits that the public health sector best advances in a democracy.
- Connect public health and democracy to people's everyday lives; use relatable language and keep the public's health centered (at equal or higher focus than systems, dollars, workforce).
- Remind people that both democracy and public health are a shared responsibility—and we can improve them together.
    - Name the forces intentionally harming the public's health and why this is happening.
    - Show a role for sectors and individuals in strengthening the public's health and democracy.
    - Convey we can improve the public's health and democracy together.
- Acknowledge that democracy and the public health system aren't perfect. Lead with humility and authenticity, and convey that we can improve both together.