



# Promoting positive opinion about refugees: Toolkit basics

## Introduction

Welcoming refugees benefits both communities where they settle and the people who are able to escape persecution and build new lives. Those involved in welcoming refugees know this well, but not everyone does. There is a constant need to counter misperceptions and promote better understanding about refugees.

This toolkit is intended to help us get better at sharing stories, initiating better conversations and driving more productive community narratives that involve those who came to Canada to seek refuge from persecution.

## Objectives

This toolkit aims to help us to :

- Initiate more effective conversations with people in the middle (persuadables).
- Drive more productive community narratives that involve those who came to Canada to seek refuge from persecution.
- Share stories that can influence people in the middle (persuadables).

## Values underlying messages

Communications are more effective when they are based on values that are shared by those with whom we are communicating.

The following are relevant values that are widely held and can underlie our messages:

- Building community together.
- Improving opportunities for us all, including the most vulnerable.
- Upholding human rights.
- Acting for humanitarian reasons.

## Key messages

- People who have come to Canada as refugees renew and benefit our communities in many ways. We are better together economically, socially and culturally.
- Communities across Canada work with and are energized by newcomers who arrived here as refugees. When we work together, we are creating a better future for all of us.

## Cautions

- **Put forward shared values and positive messages, don't 'bust myths':** Research shows that 'busting myths' may serve to legitimize the point we are debunking. Myth-busting is also only effective to people who are already convinced. We need to respond to concerns by offering solutions in a positive and values-based way.
- **Don't focus on those who can't be persuaded:** Once you've established you are speaking with someone who's opposing, negative views of refugee contributions are entrenched, move on. We cannot hope to change everyone's mind.

## Using the toolkit

The elements in the toolkit are intended to help communities collect and share local stories in order to connect with and encourage the support of people who are more interested in constructive conversations.

This toolkit offers a mix of resources: from collecting stories, to creating portraits to share in your community, to sharing one another's stories respectfully, to creating messages that shift people's perception of those who seek refuge here, by defining them less by their struggles and more by their triumphs (also known as "reframing" in communications theory). You will notice that the messaging themes are pragmatic and are designed to draw out stories about all the ways communities benefit economically through welcoming refugees. What should be emphasized, though, is that at the core of these messages, is the belief that communities across Canada are much better off when everyone feels like they are a part of it. That is why the storytelling activities also include a call to share stories of those who are working (either in the sector or through community volunteering). 'Persuadables,' need to see themselves reflected and find a point of entry into the larger positive narrative that we are all better together.

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