



American Heart Association.



Preemption Message Manual

DECEMBER 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 3 About this Manual
- 4 Methodology
- 5 How To Use This Manual
- 6 Local Decision Making Message Formula
 - 7 Show Local Action
 - 8 Put Communities Over Corporations
 - 9 Build On Local Knowledge
- 10 **BY THE NUMBERS:**
How Messages Turn People Against Preemption
- 11 Unique Value Proposition
- 12 Introduction To The Narrative Framework
- 13 Narrative + One Minute Message
- 14 Winning Words
- 15 Crafting A Narrative About Your Work



ABOUT THIS MANUAL

This Manual, and the message research and development presented in it, are intended for advocates who need to shape a new narrative about preemption, and motivate audiences to allow local communities to make their own decisions about the issues that affect them.

To that end, this Manual includes insights on audience motivations and concerns, tested language, and recommendations for messages, images and stories to change the way people think about preemption.

The messages included here have been tested with a nationally representative sample of registered voters, and can be used verbatim if you so choose. But we anticipate that messengers will need to tailor these messages to different media, opportunities, and audiences. To facilitate adoption, we have analyzed the most motivating aspects of each message and translated them into best practices to use in your communications.



METHODOLOGY

The insights and ideas in this toolkit were developed based on an extensive research process, including:

Research Review: This review unearthed actionable insights and ideas from previous research on preemption. It also identified lessons from social psychology and cognitive science that inform how to communicate with clarity and motivational power.

In-Depth Interviews With Advocates: Interviews with 10 state-based advocates explored their challenges communicating about preemption and identified the tools, messages, and resources they would need to be more effective communicators.

Focus Groups: Eight focus groups were conducted with active citizens—defined in this case as those who vote regularly, meet a threshold of civic and community engagement, and share information about issues that are important to them. These groups were conducted with residents of Pennsylvania and Texas. Participants were recruited to represent a range of ages, genders, races and ethnicities, education levels, income levels, sexual orientations and identities, neighborhoods, and political ideologies.

Message Testing Survey: Messages were tested in a nationally representative survey of 1000 registered voters.





HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL

These tools can help you communicate more effectively about preemption. Many include language you can use verbatim if you so choose, but you can also tailor them for your work and different topics within preemption.

A Local Decisionmaking Message Formula that identifies the most motivating aspects of local decisionmaking, and the most effective contrasts with preemption. For each element of the formula, we've included recommendations for messages, images and stories.

A Unique Value Proposition you can use to describe the value delivered by local decisionmaking, and the harm done by preemption.

A Narrative Framework that organizes key ideas about local decisionmaking and preemption. This framework can be tailored to your work and used to start conversations and generate interest.

A One-Minute Message and Winning Words you can draw on as you tailor the narrative to your work.

Local Decisionmaking Message Formula

To build the case for local decisionmaking and against preemption, focus on messages that:



Show Local Action

Position local residents as problem solvers, and show the grassroots effort and action that animated local policies.



Put Communities Over Corporations

Make vivid the impact local decisions have on communities, and contrast it with the corporate interests behind preemption.



Build On Local Knowledge

Show how local knowledge inspired policies, regardless of who passed the legislation. Position local knowledge as a basis for cooperation—rather than competition—with the state.

The following pages include recommendations for messages, images and stories that bring each of these elements to life.



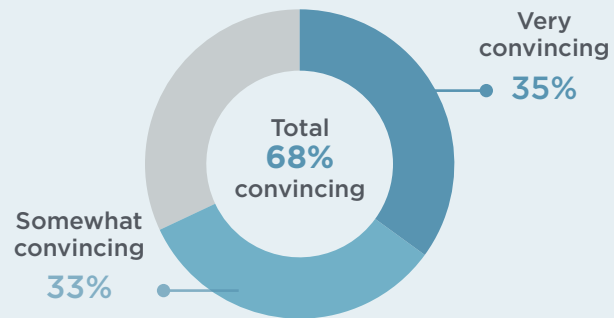
Show Local Action

Position local residents as problem solvers, and show the grassroots effort and action that animated local policies.

MESSAGE

Use positive, empowering language that emphasizes cooperation—both within the community, and between the community and the state.

“When local communities come up with a solution for their challenges and work together to put it into practice, the state government should help them to improve it—not strike it down.”



IMAGE

Show images of local residents and grassroots organizations working together, and/or collaborating with local officials. Avoid antagonistic images that show confrontation between residents and politicians—whether local or state.

STORY

Tell the “origin story” of a policy by focusing on those who are affected by the problem, and those who helped come up with the solution. This can highlight how local residents took initiative to solve a problem, or mobilized a coalition to work together.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: FOCUS GROUP RESPONDENTS DESCRIBE LOCAL ACTION

“They knew what they needed to accomplish their goal... They saw and they took the steps to make it a reality.”

—*Josannah, moderate, rural*

“Why are you penalizing us for being Trailblazers?”

—*Andy, progressive, POC, urban*



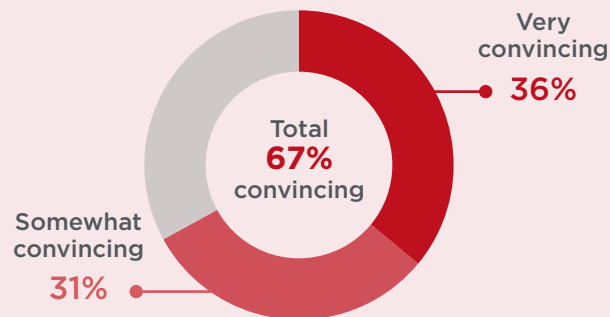
Put Communities Over Corporations

Make vivid the impact local decisions have on communities, and contrast it with the corporate interests behind preemption.

MESSAGE

Use vivid language that helps the audience imagine the people and places that benefit from local decisions and the corporate interests that stand in the way. Describe government officials only as intermediaries between communities and corporations.

“Local residents want what’s best for their towns and cities. But state politicians are looking out for special interests. To fix our problems, we should be listening to communities—not corporations.”



IMAGE

Show the faces of local residents, and the parts of their communities that will be strengthened by local decisions—parks, schools, etc.

STORY

Tell stories that show the importance of a local decision by pointing out how they would benefit the community, and show how corporate interests are an impediment. Characters should include those who helped solve the problem, those who stand to benefit, and the clear role that corporations play in stopping progress. Make sure to clearly state what corporations stand to gain from preemption.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: FOCUS GROUP RESPONDENTS DESCRIBE PUTTING COMMUNITIES OVER CORPORATIONS

“If the block captain gets a coalition of block captains together, because they’re all suffering from the same issue, and they go to the mayor and the mayor says, ‘Okay, let’s put something in place to fix this’ and then the governor says ‘Oh, but this is a terrible idea because X, Y, and Z company would not really appreciate that.’ It really brings up the question ‘Is America about, or even just your state, about people or profits?’ And I think that we should really be about people.”

—Adriana, progressive, POC, urban



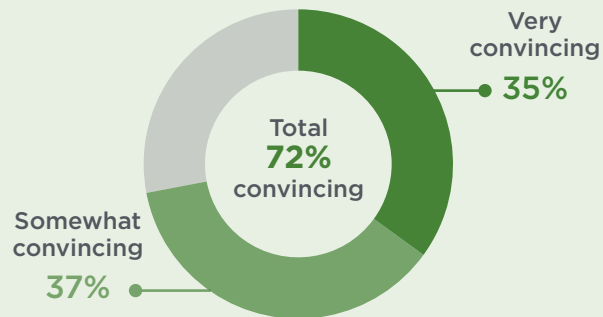
Build On Local Knowledge

Show how local knowledge inspired policies, regardless of who passed the legislation. Position local knowledge as a basis for cooperation—rather than competition—with the state.

MESSAGE

Avoid “zero sum” language that suggests either the state or locality must win. Instead, use constructive language that emphasizes that all parties should be working toward the same goal.

“States should provide a foundation to build on—basic protections so everyone is treated fairly. Local governments should have the ability to strengthen those protections based on what they know about their communities.”



IMAGE

Show knowledge being gathered in the community—not the committee room. This could include site visits to show a policy in action, or conversations between policymakers and residents.

STORY

Connect local intuition to innovation. Provide a surprising and meaningful example of how a community’s unique attributes required a different approach than the state’s one-size-fits-all policy would allow.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: FOCUS GROUP RESPONDENTS DESCRIBE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

“The local leaders live in the community, [so] they know how we feel. They listen.”
—*Bernice, conservative, suburban*

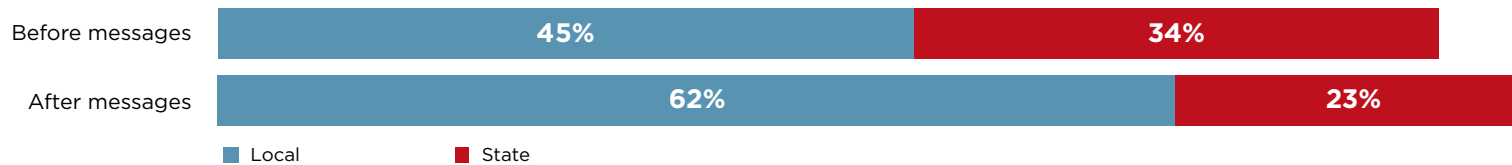
“They know who’s living there....They’ve got local roots that I think allows them to bond and bridge with the community, and that allows them to make stronger decisions.”
—*Rafael, moderate, small town*

BY THE NUMBERS

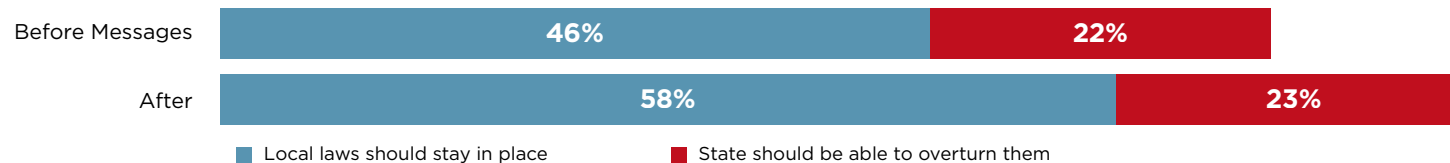
How Messages Turn People Against Preemption

In our survey, respondents were asked a series of questions about preemption before and after seeing our messages. The data below shows that the messages helped move the needle significantly against preemption.

Which of the following do you trust more to make decisions about issues facing your community?

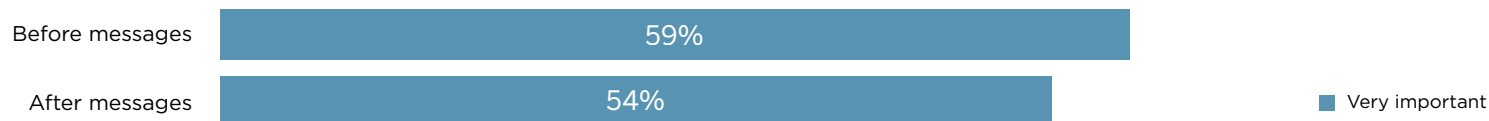


Sometimes, in an effort to help their community, a local government will pass a law that the state government disagrees with. So the state government will overturn it, even if it passed by a vote of local residents. When it comes to a situation like this, which of the following do you agree with more?



KEEP COOPERATING

How important do you think it is for local communities to make their own decisions about issues facing them?



Notably, respondents thought it was less important for communities to “make their own decisions” after seeing our messages, even though they had become more trusting in local governments and more opposed to preemption. This suggests that as voters start to turn against preemption, they still want to see cooperation between local and state governments.

Unique Value Proposition

The following Unique Value Proposition is a succinct statement that describes the benefits of local decisionmaking and the harms of preemption. This statement can be used to introduce the topic and answer common questions.

Local residents and local leaders know how to solve local problems—because they see them up close. When they work together to come up with a solution, the state should help them improve it—not strike it down because special interests told them to. We should be listening to communities, not corporations.



Build On Local Knowledge



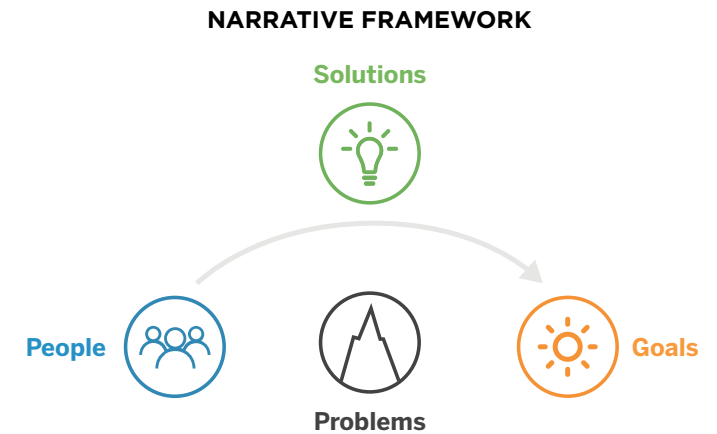
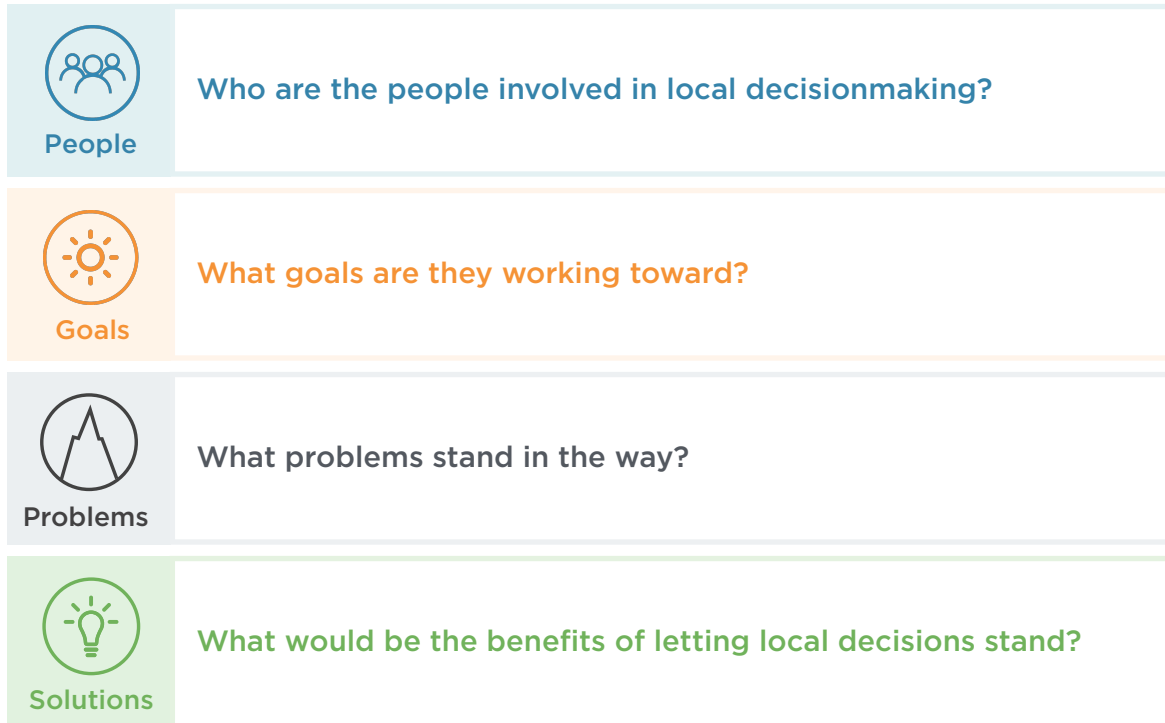
Show Local Action



Put Communities Over Corporations

Introduction To The Narrative Framework

The **Narrative Framework** shown below provides a useful method for communicating with maximum motivating power. It includes the pieces people need to understand the “story” of preemption. Narratives often flow in the order below—**people, goal, problem, solution**. But you can adjust the order in the way that is most intuitive for your work.



Narrative + One Minute Message

The narrative below expresses the key ideas from the Message Formula in a message that can be spoken out loud in about a minute. This is an effective message for communicating about preemption writ large. But you may benefit from tailoring a narrative about the specific issues you work on. To do so, use the guiding questions on pages 12.

People: Local Problem Solvers	Local residents and local leaders want what's best for their communities. And they know how to solve local problems—because they see them up close.
Goals: Leaders Should Listen	When communities use local knowledge to come up with a solution, leaders should listen. A beach community knows if it needs different environmental protections than a big city. And a rural town knows if it needs to use its land differently than in the suburbs.
Problems: One-Size-Fits-All Rules	But more and more, state politicians are striking down local ideas when special interests tell them to. Communities end up stuck with one-size-fits-all rules that don't make sense for them. Or they have to wait for the state to take action.
Solutions: Communities—Not Corporations	Our leaders should listen to communities, not corporations. States should provide a foundation—basic protections so everyone is treated fairly. But local communities should be able to build on that foundation. Because local impact starts with local ideas.

Winning Words

The words and phrases below give the narrative its motivating power. They are also designed to be easy to retain and repeat, to help the message spread via word-of-mouth.

People		Goals	
Solve local problems	When describing local decision-making, use active verbs to highlight agency and action—an implicit contrast with state bureaucracy.	Local knowledge Leaders should listen	These repeatable phrases capture the aspirations associated with local decision-making: being respected for what you know, and being heard.
See them up close	Language invoking sight reminds the audience how important proximity is—and how distant state lawmakers are.	Beach community... rural town	Use vivid language so your audience can literally picture how communities are different.
Problems		Solutions	
One-size-fits-all rules Wait for the state	These phrases imply rigidity, delay and frustration—a direct contrast with the action and knowledge involved in local decision-making.	Communities, not corporations	This is a motivating reframe of “local vs, state,” which can be confusing.

Crafting A Narrative About Your Work

This worksheet will help you craft a tailored narrative for your work. The questions ask you to describe your work in ways that reinforce the narrative on page 13. Ideally, your narrative will be about 150 words total and about one minute long when spoken.

PEOPLE: What community members were involved in creating the policy that preemption threatens?

If they are a member of local government, describe them as individuals first, and introduce their titles later. You can describe how they first came up with the idea, and/or the work they did to put it into practice.

GOAL: What aspirations were they pursuing?

This can include their vision for the community, and/or the values motivating the work. Be vivid, and help the audience picture and feel what the outcome would be like.

PROBLEM: How does preemption stand in the way of the goal?

Describe the harm that would be done to the community if the policy was preempted. If relevant, explain why special interests want it overturned.

SOLUTION: What would be the impact if leaders listened to the community?

Describe the tangible, local benefits of the policy you're defending.



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