

Counteracting Dangerous Narratives in the Time of COVID-19

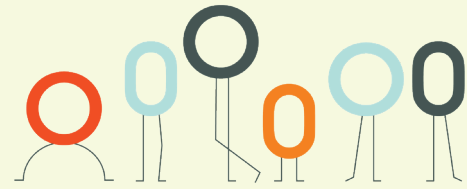
A GUIDE FOR THE UNITED STATES • MAY 2020

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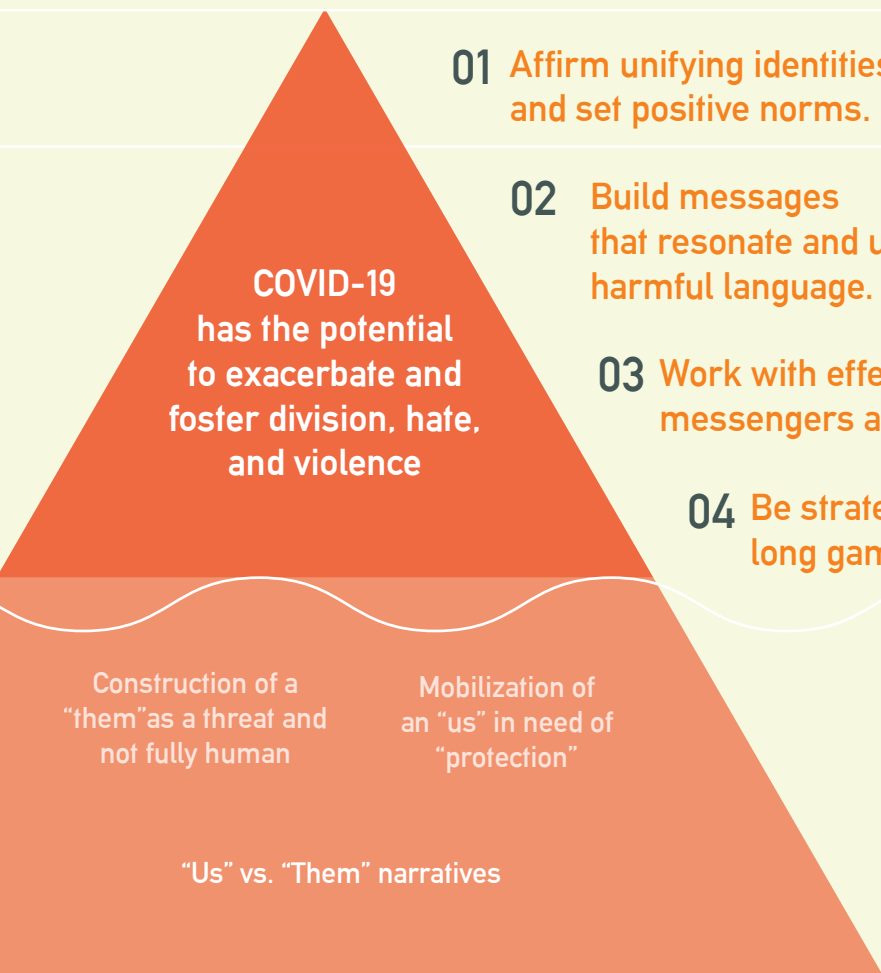
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COVID-19 threatens to exacerbate divisions and foster conditions that can fuel hate and violence.

In the face of these risks, leaders and communities can take key steps to promote inclusion, dignity and respect.



TAKE STRATEGIC ACTION ----->

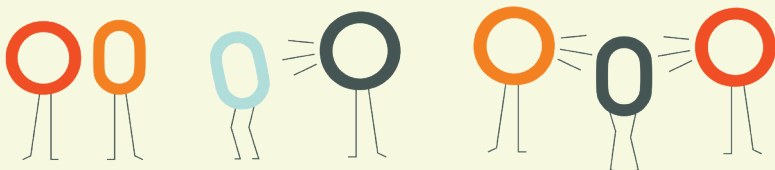
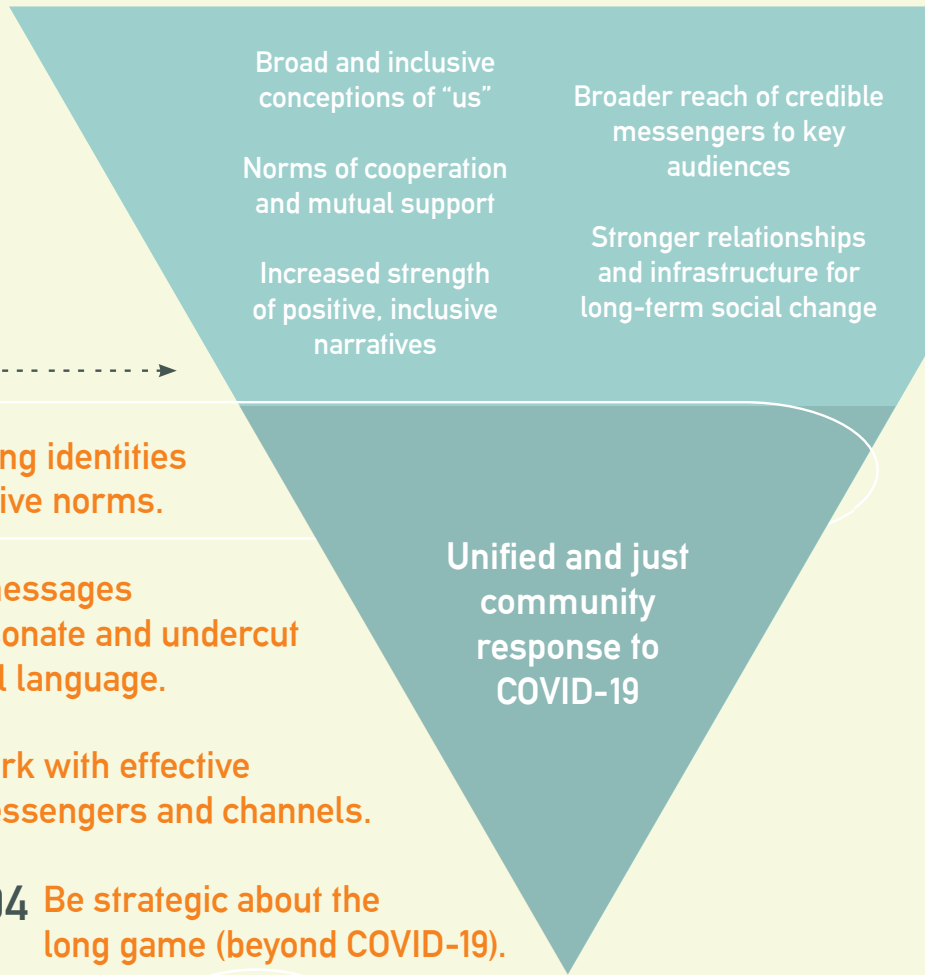


01 Affirm unifying identities and set positive norms.

02 Build messages that resonate and undercut harmful language.

03 Work with effective messengers and channels.

04 Be strategic about the long game (beyond COVID-19).



As we face COVID-19, the words and actions of leaders (be they formal, informal, old, or new) matter.

01 Use your platform to affirm overarching and cross-cutting identities, model mutual helping behaviors, and set positive norms of unity and inclusion.

- Define the “we” broadly. Promote a broad and inclusive “we” that cuts across lines of division. You can do this by showing diverse groups coming together under a common banner, or identity. For example, you could activate the identity of a town by showing diverse citizens organizing support for one another (e.g. “Akronites Unite” for Akron).
- Tell stories that promote cooperation: As a leader, you can share information, design and promote messaging, and lead by example. Take actions and tell stories that show cooperation and unified actions across diverse groups. Be they led or endorsed by leaders, these actions are a powerful way to set norms of inclusion (“we are all on the same team”), cooperation (“we work together”), and collective agency (“we are ‘do-ers’ and together, we have the power to solve this”). Such narratives and images make it harder for people to activate identities in divisive ways.
- Prevent negative norms: When you see a harmful narrative, make it clear that most people DO NOT approve of it and showcase norms of unity or inclusion instead.

02 Build messages that resonate and undercut harmful narratives.

- In all communication, be careful to separate people who have or may have contracted the disease from the disease itself.
- Use metaphors to set informative, positive frames. Avoid metaphors that feed harmful narratives. Avoid metaphors that prime for fear, anger, and suspicion of the “other.” This can include metaphors comparing COVID-19 to war or crime.
- Be strategic with messaging to increase empathy and engagement: There are best practices for activating empathy across group lines and making sure empathy turns into action—including activating shared identities and setting an example for others by showing yourself or another respected leader experiencing empathy and taking action.
- Undermine stereotypes. When you tell stories about people or groups that are being targeted with hateful speech, make sure you show their warmth (caring for others in and outside their groups) and competence (e.g. capabilities, responsibility). Also, avoid reliance on “exceptional” stories. It’s important not to imply that people only belong or deserve compassion, if they are exceptional.
- Use best practices when correcting mis- and disinformation. Provide information from trusted sources. Focus on the source of the misinformation and undermine its credibility. Use positive framing so you don’t reinforce negative associations (e.g. “John is not a thief” reinforces the association between “John” and “thief”) and avoid repeating misinformation. Most importantly, work to figure out why the mis- or disinformation is resonating so you can create longer-term corrections.

03 Use effective messengers and channels—and be sure that your actions are building strong, cross-cutting networks and trust: Amidst a crisis, communicating through key trusted messengers and channels is critical. Develop relationships with the most relevant messengers in your community. Work with them to ensure that they use language that unites rather than divides—and that they don’t inadvertently contribute to narratives that promote hate. Where there are leaders and messengers that share these concerns, find ways to connect them to one another. One way to build trust is by offering your own platform and expertise to support these messengers.

04 Beyond COVID-19: Be strategic about the long game. Preventing identity-based harm and violence is a long-term endeavor. The existence of a diverse community network is one of the most critical factors that enables communities to be resilient. Such networks include people from different backgrounds; they have built—or effectively build—trust by collaborating together to solve problems. This moment of crisis provides a chance for communities to build or strengthen diverse networks and relationships of trust together as they problem-solve their way through the current crisis.