



Clean & Prosperous  
**America**

## Climate Messaging Testing Research Focus Group Report

April 2020

# Project Background, Purpose & Methodology

Clean and Prosperous America is conducting research to understand how target voters respond to proposed messages to motivate voting for climate-friendly candidates and supporting climate actions. This community will provide feedback about message reactions, action motivations and insight into optimal message strategies.

This research is the follow up to research on low-carbon prosperity messaging, with the ultimate goal of creating messaging that would identify an audience and provide insight into their attitudes toward climate change and climate action to help get climate-friendly candidates elected.

Two groups each of 18-24 year-olds and 25-39 year-olds were interviewed in focus group format in Spokane, Washington in March.



## TECHNIQUE

4 In-person  
Focus Groups  
Spokane, WA  
29 total participants



## TIMING

Sunday, March 8, 2020  
Thursday, March 12, 2020



## AUDIENCE

18-39 year-olds  
Undecided/infrequent  
voters



## SESSION LENGTH

2 hours

## Key Findings

A message of unity as the way to overcome challenges wins over blaming the current administration. These voters want to see hope beyond the party divide.

Messaging economic prosperity has to be personal and cannot just make vague promises about job creation or savings. Emphasizing local wins carries more weight than national or global, although how narrow “local” is should be explored further.

“Climate change” is a polarizing term for this audience. They are more receptive to calls to reduce pollution because it is something they understand is detrimental.

Climate change action is more urgent for young people in this audience, but it still ranks in importance behind other issues such as health care and the economy.

This audience is proud to be independent voters. To them, this means they do not hew to a particular party line but think for themselves and make their own choices.

# Message Presentation

Videos with different messages were tested in the focus groups to gauge how motivating various elements were to undecided/infrequent voters.

Sessions on Day 1 showed four videos: Unity, Morality, Prosperity, and "Trumpity" (R).

Sessions on Day 2 showed 3 revised videos: Clean Energy/Jobs (L), Get involved/vote (S), and Unity-New (P).

Unity (U)



Morality (M)



Prosperity (P)



Trumpity (R)



Clean Energy/Jobs (L)



Get involved/Vote (S)



Unity - New (P)



# Message Reactions

Individuals were asked to select which video would most motivate them to support or learn more about a candidate with a climate action message.

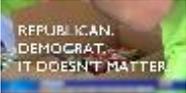
The 18-24 year-olds were most motivated by the Unity messages. The 25-39 year-olds were motivated by the Unity messages and Clean Jobs.

Day 1		
	18-24	25-39
<b>Unity</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>
Morality	2	1
Prosperity	1	1
Trumpity	0	0

Day 2		
	18-24	25-39
<b>Clean jobs</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Unity-New</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
Get Involved	1	1

# Message Concepts Round 1 – 18-24 year-olds

Unity is the most motivating for 18-24 year-olds because all they have known in their political lives is harsh divisiveness. These voters appreciate a message that says addressing climate change is not the job of one side or the other, since it is an issue that affects everyone.

<p><b>Unity</b> ★</p> 	<p>This video is seen as defusing the controversy around climate action and offering a neutral way forward. Showing all different kinds of people is also liked.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Anything but anger and blaming.”</li></ul>
<p><b>Morality</b></p> 	<p>The Morality message tugs at the heartstrings of parents but does not resonate with young voters who do not have kids. This message seems weaker and more manipulative than others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “No one is anti-children, but it’s too soft.”</li></ul>
<p><b>Prosperity</b></p> 	<p>This message is liked for reframing climate change as not just a “blue” issue but something that matters to conservatives, as well.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Good arguments: creating jobs, investing in the future.”</li></ul>
<p><b>Trumpity</b></p> 	<p>This video is seen as off-putting and divisive and a sure way to make people defensive rather than open to the key message of addressing climate change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Not going to reach the people who need to be convinced.”</li></ul>

# Message Concepts Round 1 – 25-39 year-olds

Unity is the most motivating for 25-39 year-olds in this target because the message seems the most honest in calling for climate action by any means necessary, beyond political affiliation. Calling on everyone to do what's right also resonates with this group.

<p><b>Unity</b> ★</p> 	<p>These voters like a message of inclusivity, rather than division.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Stands for what the US is supposed to stand for.”</li></ul>
<p><b>Morality</b></p> 	<p>Gets across the idea that climate action is more important for people than for business. Resonates a lot for those with kids.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “We’re supposed to do better for our kids.”</li></ul>
<p><b>Prosperity</b></p> 	<p>This message seems more optimistic than the others with its offer of “opportunity.” Also like because it offers more than just one reason for climate action.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “There’s more than one reason to address climate change.”</li></ul>
<p><b>Trumpity</b></p> 	<p>Too much blame and negativity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Smearing is a waste of time when you can be talking about things that matter.”</li></ul>

## Message Concepts Round 2 – 18-24 year-olds

Unity is the most motivating for the 18-24 year-olds in Session 3, yet both groups find common themes in the three videos: a call to action to make positive choices for the environment; climate change as relevant to everyone, regardless of party affiliation, and positivity. Some saw the videos as too brief and vague.

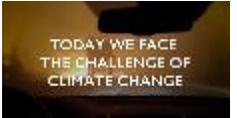
Some find it odd to not address political affiliation; others think the inclusive voice could be canceled by addressing party affiliation.

<p><b>Unity</b> </p> 	<p>Big message that felt meaningful, unique, and with a high priority call to action. Moving imagery, showing people helping others, reflects the idea of change being is larger than one individual and single party affiliation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We have to work past differences to fight climate change. Climate change is more relevant than clean energy.”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Clean energy / Jobs</b></p> 	<p>Informative, effective messaging that motivates viewers to research the inspiring message and create action through their own efforts. Also motivates some viewers to vote.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I learned Spokane isn’t as clean as I thought it was. It makes me want to vote and help make it clean.”</li> <li>• “Gives a direct cost of not doing anything about climate change. Motivates me to potentially do more research. I will consider voting based on the response.”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Get involved / Vote</b></p> 	<p>Teaches viewers they are capable of taking personal responsibility and can create change on an individual level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We need to make the planet healthier. Make this a healthier/ cleaner planet and they need our help to do it.”</li> </ul>

## Message Concepts Round 2 – 25-39 year-olds

Clean energy/Jobs is the most motivating for the 25-39 year-olds in Session 4. For this group, local actions have more appeal and seem more tangible via their individual vote, versus larger scale actions (ending forest fires, stopping fossil fuel subsidizing) that seem out of range. Similar to the 18-24 year-olds, this group generally appreciated messages of positivity, unity, and non-partisanship.

Articulations of the current administration sparked an array of reactions, from manipulation, apathy, and economically unrealistic expectations.

<p><b>Clean energy / Jobs</b></p> 	<p>Appreciated for local focus yet non-partisan message directed at everyone. Persuasive, and slight sense of urgency creates appeal to action.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Made me realize we could save the planet. Voting for someone who what wants a healthy climate can make a difference if we work together.”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Unity</b></p> 	<p>Slightly dramatic, dogmatic, and blunt about pain points. Appreciated for being less partisan and less blame-driven, key to not driving away more conservative viewers and voters. Focuses on facts and solutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“I like P the most because the other ones undermined their points by showing that they're partisan, even though they're promoting nonpartisanship. It makes you not want to trust the matter.”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Get involved / Vote</b></p> 	<p>Positive, feel-good, inclusive, empowering, and slightly motivating. Informative about clean energy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Leaves me feeling empowered and like solutions are within reach. Unique with the light and positive vibe.”</li> </ul>

# Perceptions of Climate Action Urgency

Participants were asked, on a scale of 1 (least) -10 (most), how urgent they think it is for people, companies or government to take action to take care of the environment and relieve human impact on the earth.

The 18-24 year-old groups generally have a lower sense of urgency about climate action than the 25-39 year-olds. Although most agree it is at least somewhat important, many do not feel they know enough about the issue to have it be a high priority.

For 25-39 year-olds, other issues in their lives are just more pressing than climate action.

	18-24	Average		25-39	Average
Day 1	2, 5, 5, 5 6, 8	4/10		7, 7, 8, 8, 9, 9, 10, 10	8.5/10
Day 2	5, 5, 6, 7, 7, 7	6/10		3, 7, 7, 7, 8, 9, 9, 10	7.5/10

Climate change is not the topic that's going to make me vote ... one way or the other.

Climate change is not something I think about constantly, but I try to do my part.

## Optimistic Statements – Round 1

When asked about some climate action facts, these voters are generally skeptical about claims and want to know more.

Information about savings on an individual level are most meaningful, although the claims of \$10k-\$30k per year seem too high and not believable.

The worldwide jobs claim is too abstract and conceptual to be meaningful to this audience.

The statement about farming is too esoteric and not connected enough to regular people's experiences.

Statement	
	The renewable energy sector will add 10 million new jobs worldwide by 2026.
	If we optimized our farmland for carbon capture, we could reduce the USA's carbon footprint by 25%.
	<b>Homes with solar panels save \$10k to over \$30k a year on energy costs.</b>
	Electric vehicles cost less than half as much to operate as gas-powered vehicles.

'Optimizing farming' is not something the average person can afford to care about.

The problem with EV's is you have to spend money short-term to save long-term.

## Optimistic Statements – Round 2

In Round 2, the younger group was more motivated by hearing about increases in the amount of pollution produced by coal, gas, and oil companies since the 2000s.

The older group most wanted to hear about savings, although the average dollar amount of solar power savings seems implausible to the general Spokane consumer.

The air pollution life span reduction claim does not sound truthful to most and the claim runs counter to other factual claims, such as longer life expectancy.

All the statements raised red flags, except for solar and wind power adding US jobs.

18-24	25-39	Statement
3	2	Air pollution is taking an average of 3 years off our lives.
1	1	Spokane has been experiencing wetter springs, followed by drier, hotter summers which puts the Spokane area at high risk of wildfire.
0	2	In 50 years the average temperature for the Spokane region is projected to be 9.5 degrees warmer than it was before 2000.
8	2	<b>Coal, Gas and Oil companies are actually legally allowed to produce more pollution today than they were in 2000.</b>
2	7	<b>In Washington State, the average savings of homes with solar power installed was \$10,483 a year.</b>
2	2	Solar and wind power are adding US jobs at a faster rate than any other industry.

I didn't know that coal, gas and oil companies were polluting more than they were in the 2000s. I thought they would have been less.

The savings of homes with solar power being \$10k+ a year seems a little farfetched, because energy bills do not add up to that much a year in general. I think we're going to be 60 bucks a month at the house I'm living in next year. That's the average.

# Messaging Climate Action Urgency

Many would like to see additional supporting evidence to make any optimistic claim more believable, overcome the perceived vagueness of the statement, and surmount perceived facts they believe to be true.

Some statements may be more likely to spur action, especially those that state an effect on a personal level and in the near term (for example, connecting pollutants to diseases that could affect the individual, or showing individual money savings).

Backing up claims with sources, such as peer-reviewed scientific journals that cite, test, and support claims, or a field expert in the data area, will make statements more believable to this group. Citations indicate a statement could be backed by valid and trustworthy data.

For some, national news sources, such as The New York Times, may not be wholly trustworthy sources of information for these claims.

The more details, the better. When they say this policy did this or this executive order had this effect, it makes it a little more believable. Even if they just said, 'According to the Department of Agriculture', more effective for me.

You can say, '50 years from now, if you don't change going to McDonald's every day,' but if you say, 'Hey, now you're not going to have any water to drink, you and your kids,' that's enough to get somebody going. In the now moment, which matters.

Everybody is talking about climate change, but they really fail to make it connect with the average Joe. I don't think that they're really saying anything that's personal enough to make people cross party lines to vote for somebody for their environmental stance, connecting it to people enough the way that they do health insurance or student loan debt.

# Messaging Climate Action Urgency

Within this target audience, there are differing viewpoints on the messaging that will most inspire a sense of urgency.

- Resonates:
  - Locate the message in an immediate personal impact for appeal. Many believe in personal responsibility for change.
  - The local (Spokane) is more relevant. Claims should be grounded in actionable, local specifics with responsibility held by a recognizable person.
  - Pollution has broader appeal as a target for action than climate-change that is seen as an ongoing, geo-historical issue.
  - Local politicians are more likely to be believed because they are seen as accountable to local constituents.
  - Economic opportunity is a plus.
- Misses:
  - Low trust in companies and government action to make an impact may equal low personal impact or voter action.
  - People turn away from messages seen as requiring a drastic economic or social change (e.g., Green New Deal).
  - Environmentalism is seen as polarizing, politicized, and a liberal talking point.
  - Some distrust politicians on climate change or environmentalism because they're seen as all words and no action.

If a politician comes up with something that is relevant to people, and they actually have a plan and can tell that to an audience of how they're going to achieve it over time, it's a lot more reason to lean towards them.



Research for Humans

Let's continue the conversation...



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