

# Messaging to Promote a Tax System That Works For All

Jenna Severson  
RAISE Texas Conference  
06.13. 2024



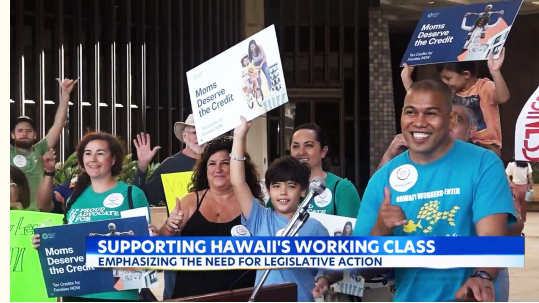
Economic  
Security  
Project

# Agenda

---

1. Who is ESP?
2. Why the tax code?
3. Messaging Research + Implications
  - a. Guaranteed Income
  - b. Child Tax Credit
4. Key Takeaways
5. Q&A
6. Activity

**THE ECONOMIC SECURITY  
PROJECT MOBILIZES  
RESOURCES AND PEOPLE  
BEHIND IDEAS THAT  
BUILD ECONOMIC POWER  
FOR ALL AMERICANS.**



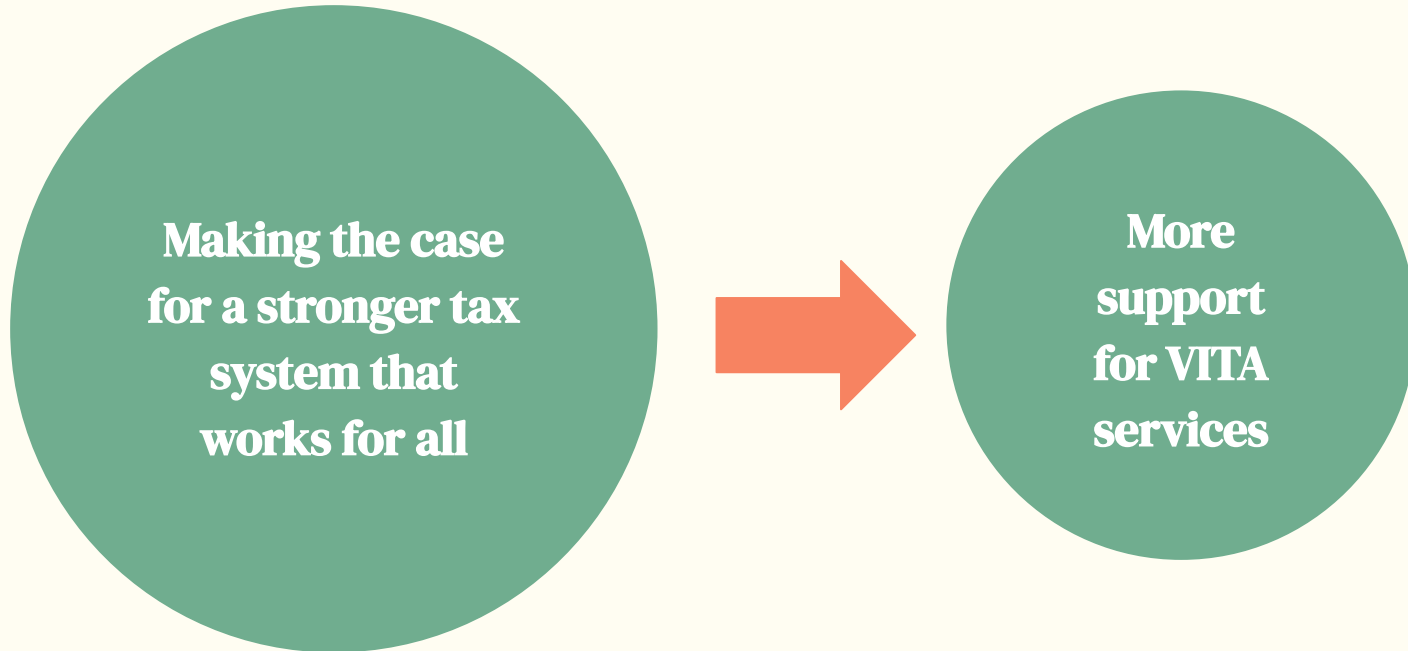



## SESSION GOAL

**Harness **messaging research** and insights to effectively engage audiences on the benefits of a tax system that works for *all*.**

# Why does the “narrative” matter?

VITA’s role in the larger fight for cash policies and a better tax system.





**Are you  
selling the  
recipe, or the  
*brownie?***



# **Messaging starts with your audience**

Your message will differ depending on who you are talking to; make it resonate with your key targets.

- Conservative legislators from rural districts have different motivations than their colleagues in suburban swing districts, and than liberals in city centers.
- Certain language might resonate with progressive advocates, but it does not always get you to a win.
- You use different language on flyers than you might in a meeting with legislators.

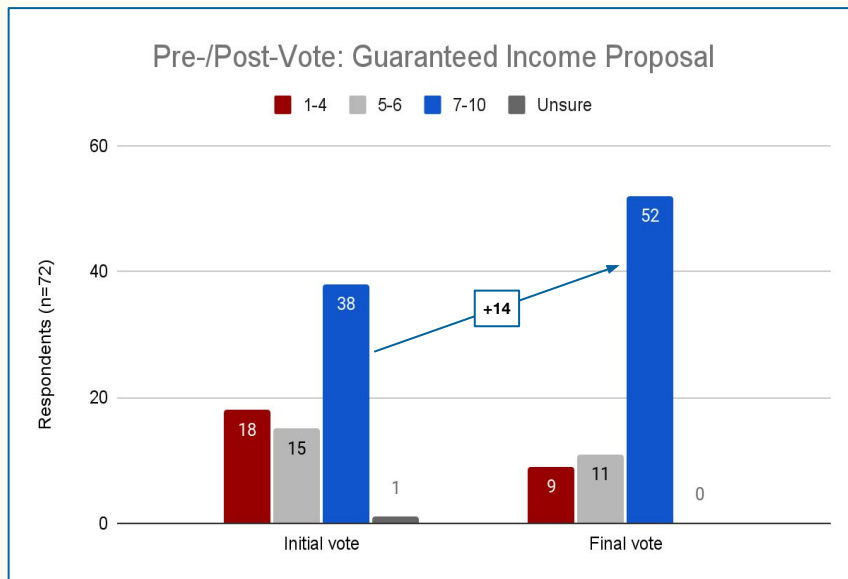
**Figure out who you are speaking to, what motivates them, and build your message around that.**



# PROOF OF CONCEPT: It's possible to grow support for cash policies

---

Our mindset and persuasion research helped demonstrate that it is possible to grow support for cash policies, namely, Guaranteed Income



[FINAL LANGUAGE] Imagine guaranteed income was proposed for your state, where individuals and households would receive payments of \$400 per month. These payments would be unrestricted in that the government wouldn't tell you what to do with the money. Would you favor or oppose this guaranteed income proposal if the payments were limited to people of lower and middle incomes? **Please select a number from 1-10, where 1 means you strongly oppose while 10 means you strongly favor.**

We saw **significant positive movement across audience groups** when audiences were presented with effective messaging interventions

# ESP Messaging Research Implications

**Community, family responsibility, and interconnectedness** are key themes. *Wellbeing, stress, and mental health are not, the latter gives cues of luxuries or indulgences.*

**Eliminate ‘othering’** at every opportunity e.g., *“available to all except the highest earners,”* not *“those on low and middle incomes.”*

**Use real life examples!**  
First-person accounts provide emotional connections that economic data does not and cannot provide.

**Trusted messengers** – *community leaders, nurses, teachers, etc.* – are as important as the message in terms of providing assurance and credibility.

Sadly, racial justice messaging doesn’t persuade; instead frame as a more universal problem: **people can work hard and not get ahead.**

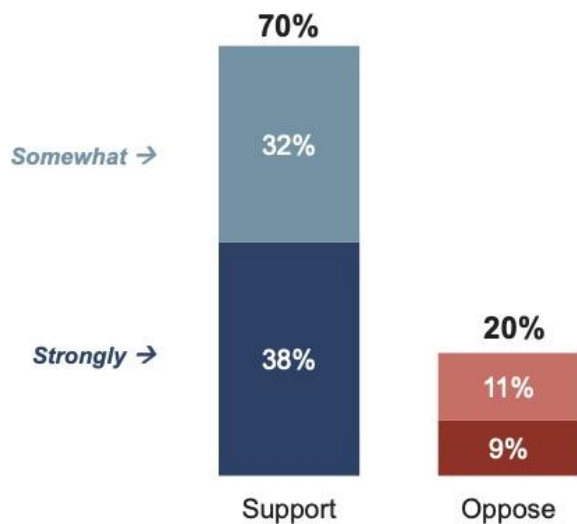
# ***Who says it matters just as much as what is said.***

- Messengers build audience trust and buy-in
- Ideal messengers include:
  - nonpolitical faith leaders
  - small business owners
  - education/healthcare leaders
  - participants
  - well-respected community leaders included hyper-local government



## Expanding the Child Tax Credit enjoys strong support across party lines and in all regions.

*There is a proposal to expand and improve the Child Tax Credit, to refund poor, working-, and middle-class families more money for each child under age 18, create a larger tax cut for families with children under age six, and make the credit fully available for all families with low incomes. Would you support or oppose expanding the Child Tax Credit?*



Democratic base groups strongly embrace CTC expansion, but so do key Republicans.

	Total Support %	Total Oppose %
Northeast	75	19
South	66	23
Midwest	72	17
West	70	20
Mountain West	71	21
White	68	21
Black	81	10
Hispanic	79	15
Parents	84	11
Age 18-34	83	11
Democrats	81	10
Independents	65	22
Republicans	60	30
Repub. Parents	77	17
White non-college	69	21

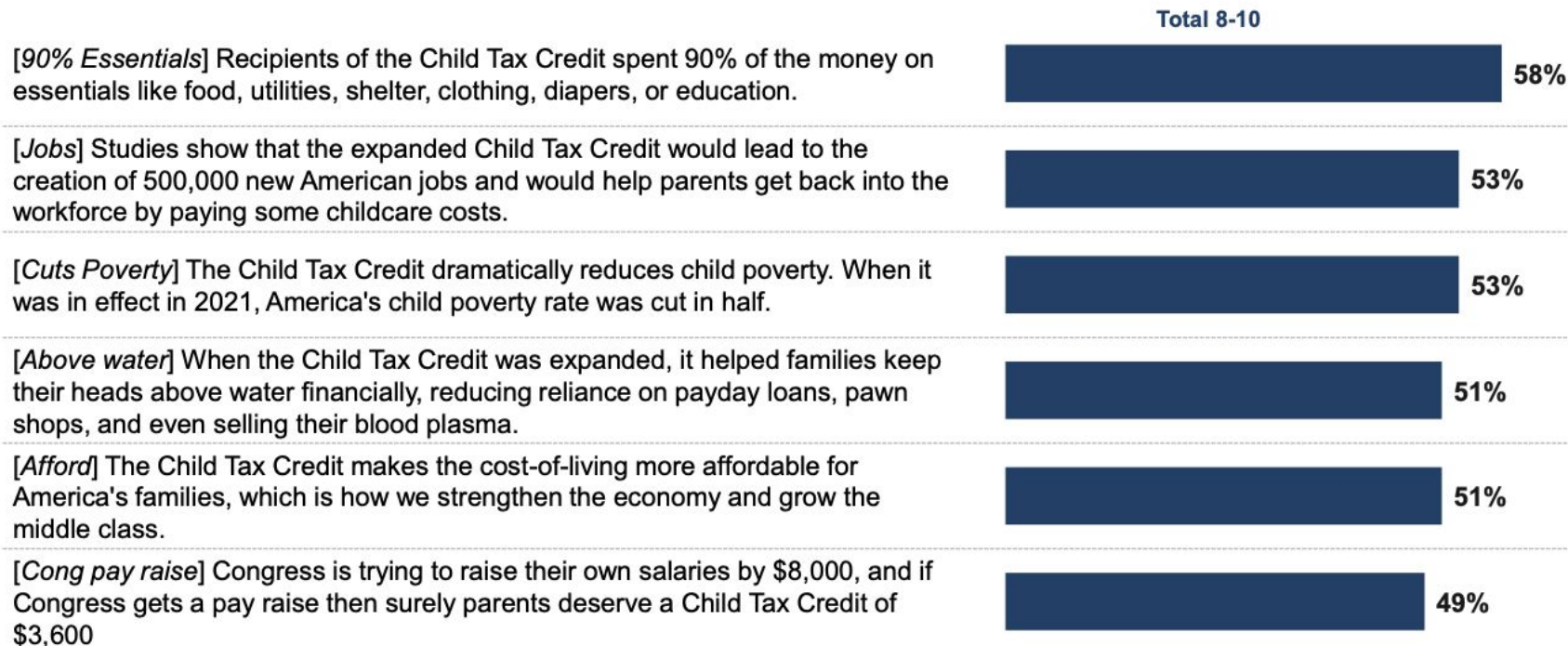


**MESSAGES THAT ARE STRONGEST ARE CONNECTED TO HOW PEOPLE SEE THEMSELVES**

**CTC helps families spend money on essentials: food, utilities, shelter, diapers, clothing, education.**

# Strongest Messages in Support of CTC

Please indicate on a scale from zero to 10 how convincing a reason you feel each statement is to SUPPORT expanding the Child Tax Credit. You may use any number from zero to 10.

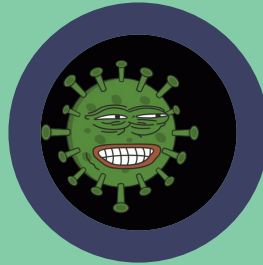


# Language & frames that did *not* move audiences



## “POVERTY ALLEVIATION”

Audiences expressed empathy for those in poverty, including those facing economic precarity, however – empathy was insufficient to move audiences to support



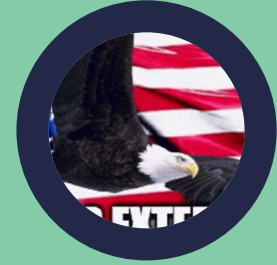
## “COVID-ERA STIMULUS CHECKS”

Consistent references to waste, frivolity, and lack of utility in reference to pandemic cash payments are a drag on support for Guaranteed Income



## “PROGRAMS”

Guaranteed Income is less effective when associated with the word “program” — triggering audiences’ negative associations with government programs and perceived/observed misuse of such programs



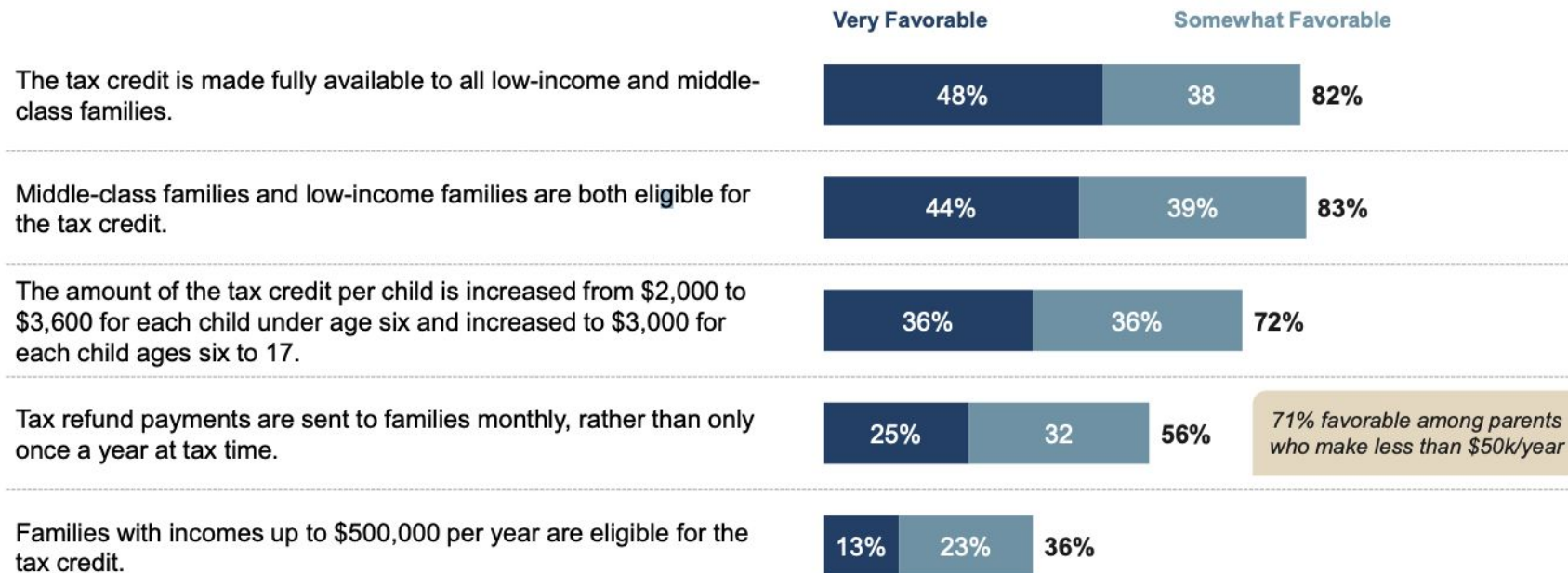
## “FREEDOM”

The term freedom is complicated. It can elicit fears of waste and abuse, and calls on the need for safeguards. Instead, use “money that can be spent to best meet the needs of the household”



# Broad eligibility is most appealing feature of CTC expansion.

*Feelings towards features of the Child Tax Credit.*

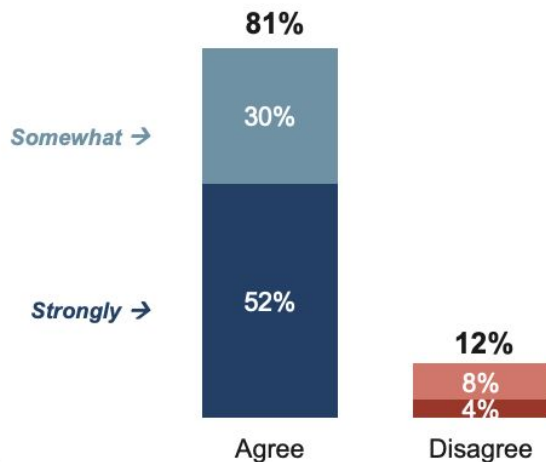


# Connect to values

## Overwhelming agreement that Congress should not pass corporate tax cuts until they support families.

Too often, tax breaks for corporations get prioritized over tax relief for working-class and middle-class families. Congress should not pass any more tax breaks for big corporations unless they provide support for families too.

*Do you agree or disagree with this statement?*



	Total Agree %	Total Disagree %
Northeast	84	9
South	79	14
Midwest	81	12
West	83	10
Mountain West	78	14
White	80	12
Black	85	7
Hispanic	86	9
Parents	85	8
Democrats	92	5
Independents	80	10
Republicans	71	18
Low-Turnout Dems	89	6
Repub. Parents	80	13
Repub. <50k	78	12
Repub. >50k	67	22

## Key Takeaways

- Frame taxes as “Brownies” *not something that takes away*
- Know your audience, speak to them
- Pick the most effective messenger
- Use specifics : tax refunds are spent on essentials including food, shelter, clothing
- Strong messages connect to values



# Q & A

# Activity

---

**1.**

Discuss your flyers and messaging materials with peers. (Elizabeth)

**2.**


Practice your pitch for funding to your City and County Officials (Jenna)

# Let's keep in touch!

Jenna Severson, Senior Communications Strategist

 [jenna@economicsecurityproject.org](mailto:jenna@economicsecurityproject.org)

 [economicsecurityproject.org](http://economicsecurityproject.org)

 [@EconomicSecProj](https://twitter.com/EconomicSecProj)

