

# REFERENDUM

## *Conversation Guide*



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**WRITE**  
*Yes!*

*GetUp!*



We pay respect to elders and acknowledge the Traditional Owners who've cared for Country since time immemorial. Sovereignty over this land was never ceded - it always was, and always will be, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land.

# CONVERSATION TOOLKIT

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**THIS CONVERSATION  
GUIDE IS DESIGNED TO  
ASSIST YOU IN HAVING  
VALUES-SHARED,  
STRENGTH-BASED  
CONVERSATIONS  
ABOUT FIRST NATIONS  
JUSTICE.**



It's drawn from *Passing the Message Stick*: a groundbreaking multi-year research project **designed** by First Nations people to shift public narrative in support of First Nations justice and self-determination.

The single most important thing we can do in this moment is to speak of shared values and a collective vision for our future, using messages grounded in First Nations strength, knowledge and expertise that centre the aspirations of communities and combine truth with action.

We win when we lift the conversation up to a place where most people agree and can speak with confidence – to shared vision and values like equity and respect, and who we want to be as a nation.

Conversations are a powerful tool and setting an agenda for transformative change on First Nations justice requires time, truth-telling, respectful listening and sharing.

Please use this guide to apply and share these learnings, so that you and your community can have conversations that build the power of our movement for First Nations justice, now and beyond the referendum.

Join our campaign to #WriteYes at [yes.org.au](https://www.yes.org.au)

# TIPS FOR PERSUASIVE CONVERSATIONS

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To engage and persuade people on any issue, we must engage their hearts and minds and motivate them to take action. In each conversation, try to use a combination of thinking, feeling and action messages (see below for examples).

It's best to ask questions, listen with empathy, share your story and experiences (why you think, feel and act the way you do), and thank them for raising their questions and concerns.

By doing this, you open up space for an honest conversation where you can build connections, listen without judgement, share your vision for the future and help the other person see where they fit, what they can do and get them to commit to taking action.

## CONVERSATION PRINCIPLES

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### PRINCIPLE

### WHY

#### VALUES

Always start with shared values like equity, respect, inclusion and self-determination that many people agree with.

**When we're trying to persuade people on an idea, we want to find common ground.**

This is why we start with values. Values build alignment across the political spectrum, and give people the confidence to take a stand without being an expert on facts.

#### EMPATHY

In conversations, media and social media interactions, have empathy for your audience and treat them with respect. Don't bombard them with facts or start arguments.

The opposition is sowing fear and division, turning the conversation into an argument. This makes people feel uncomfortable and like they're not smart enough if they don't know the facts. We are empathetic and don't attack First Nations contributors to this conversation.

## **HUMANITY**

Focus on the humanity of First Nations people, don't reduce the conversation to facts and figures, mechanisms and policies.

Ultimately this referendum is a vote on First Nations people, whether or not people support First Nations people and want to see change. When we focus just on mechanisms and policies, it dehumanises the conversation. When we are describing a problem, we must also say who is causing it, as well as the people (all of us) who can be a part of the solution.

## **FIRST NATIONS STRENGTH AND LEADERSHIP**

Lead with stories of First Nations strength and leadership, show that when First Nations people lead, we get the best outcomes for First Nations communities and for everyone.

People don't know stories of Aboriginal strength and leadership, but when they hear them they are much more supportive of us having control over our lives.

## **COMBINING TRUTH WITH ACTION**

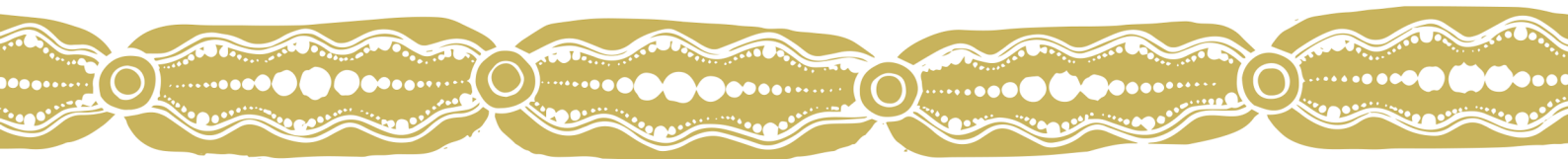
We need to share our truth in a way that's grounded in our strength, and motivates action.

Both base and persuadables understand that truth-telling helps all of us move forward together, and that truth-telling must translate into action. So combine your truth-telling with a clear ask or action that our audience can take.

## **SOLUTIONS**

Share the positive, tangible and practical solutions our communities have been calling for for decades.

People want to support a more positive future, so we need to focus on the solutions that can exist if everyone supports us. Make them tangible and practical, for example, on housing, health, cultural heritage, land management and education.



# MESSAGE EXAMPLES

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MESSAGE	WHAT'S INCLUDED	EXAMPLE
<b>THINKING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Facts + figures</li><li>• Informational narratives</li></ul>	“First, we vote - everyone will vote on the principle of whether we should have a representative body, and then we decide the model. The government has expressed an intention to lead a thorough consultation process with First Nations communities to develop a truly representative body. We must demand this and hold them accountable.”
<b>FEELING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Vision</li><li>• Stories + lived expertise</li><li>• Emotion</li><li>• Inspiration + ambition</li></ul>	“Right now, we have an opportunity to say enough is enough. We respect First Nations people and we believe that they are the right people to decide what is best for their future. Together we can say ‘Yes’ to transformative change, ‘Yes’ to treaties, ‘Yes’ to truth-telling, ‘Yes’ to ending black deaths in custody and ‘Yes’ to justice. Together, we can build momentum for transformative change.”
<b>ACTING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Specific behaviours</li><li>• Tangible actions</li></ul>	“Getting involved can be as simple as talking to ten members of your friends and family about why you are writing Yes and why you care about the referendum being a step in the right direction towards treaties, truth-telling and justice. AskTell them why they think it’s important for First Nations people to have a say in the laws and policies that impact First Nations people”.

# RESPONDING TO COMMON CONCERNS

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A practical toolkit to guide your conversations about First Nations justice and the referendum.

01

## REQUESTS FOR MORE DETAILS ABOUT HOW THE REPRESENTATIVE BODY WILL OPERATE

Both First Nations and non-First Nations base and persuadable audiences have significant concerns about how the Voice to Parliament will be genuinely representative and meaningful. Calls for more detail do resonate with persuadable audiences, instead of getting stuck in conversations about detail and repeating the opposition frames, be clear and transparent about the process from here.

Messages that communicate the two-step process help overcome calls for more detail. For example:

First, we'll vote on the principle of the matter – then once we have the mandate, we move to a thorough consultation process with First Nations communities.

02

## UNCERTAINTY ABOUT WHETHER THIS WILL DELIVER SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

It is fair enough that First Nations people are sceptical about whether the referendum will deliver change, especially when we've been calling for meaningful change for generations. Whilst we see this referendum is a step, it is not the final destination and it's up to all of us to win the narrative and demand transformative change now and beyond the referendum.

We have an important opportunity to hold meaningful conversations about the world that we want to live in, how we centre First Nations justice. Instead of telling someone who's sceptical they are wrong, ask questions about what they think and generate discussion about what transformative change can look like and how we get there. From there, you've established shared values and vision, critical elements of a persuasive, winning messaging.

03

### **CONCERNS BECAUSE NOT ALL FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE AGREE**

Just like any community or social movement, First Nations people have a diversity of opinions, perspectives and approaches to creating change and this needs to be respected.

In our research, we found many First Nations people are largely persuadable on the referendum and almost half of all First Nations people have heard nothing or very little about the referendum on a Voice to Parliament. Overwhelmingly, we heard that most First Nations people want to have conversations in their communities and with other mob before they decide how they will vote.

What this tells us is that more resourcing is needed to support First Nations communities to come together in culturally safe spaces to learn, share, ask questions and have critical conversations amongst one another.

04

### **CONCERNS ABOUT THE INCREASE IN RACISM AND HARMFUL NARRATIVES**

We are seeing a massive culture war that is giving rise to racism, hurling attacks on First Nations people and spreading harmful narratives and misinformation that hurts and undermines our communities. We cannot allow them to take us backwards.



# EXAMPLE Q&AS

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Q:

**WILL THIS MAKE A PRACTICAL DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE?**

A:

"Laws and policies work best when the people affected by them have a say in how they work.

Writing Yes won't change everything but it's a step in the right direction to win the bigger changes we've been calling for.

If the overwhelming majority of people write Yes, then we can create a wave of transformative policy changes - like treaties, land rights and equity - because of the momentum and the political mandate of voting together."

Q:

**IF FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE DON'T AGREE, WHY WOULD I WRITE YES?**

A:

"There are a range of diverse views within First Nations communities, as there always are in any community.

Some First Nations advocates who have been fighting for transformational change for generations do not think the proposal will create sufficient change. That's fair enough.

We agree that change needs to be much bigger than this – and we see a representative body as a step in the right direction, moving us towards bigger change. When a clear majority of Australians write Yes in the referendum, it will send a strong message that we want justice, equality and enduring change. On the other hand, a No vote will set back First Nations justice for decades."

Q:

**I WANT TO WRITE YES, BUT I'M NOT SURE BECAUSE WE HAVEN'T SEEN THE DETAIL**

A:

“There are two key steps in this process – first, we vote - everyone will vote on the principle of whether we should have a representative body, and then we decide the model. The government has expressed an intention to lead a thorough consultation process with First Nations communities to develop a truly representative body. We must demand this and hold them accountable.”

Q:

**DOESN'T THIS REFERENDUM DEBATE DISTRACT US AND TAKE FOCUS AWAY FROM IMMEDIATE ACTIONS FOR JUSTICE?**

Eg. Tangible changes that will improve the lives of First Nations people, like raising the age or stopping deaths in custody.

A:

“With the referendum upon us, our challenge is to build a movement that will fight for the systemic change that our communities have been calling for, and use this moment as a vehicle to fast track treaties, land rights, truth telling and justice, with the referendum being a stop along the journey but not the final destination.

More than half the population believe this moment is bigger than the referendum, and an opportunity to bring about more meaningful change. The national mood is on our side and there's a huge groundswell of support for us to tap into and mobilise.

Together, we can build a political mandate to hold governments accountable and leave them with no choice but to follow our lead.”

# CALL TO ACTION

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## SIGN UP AT [YES.ORG.AU](https://yes.org.au)

This guide was made for you to take out into the world, thread these learnings into your conversations, in the referendum, and beyond it.

These messages have been tested and work with people who already agree with you and with people who are uncertain.

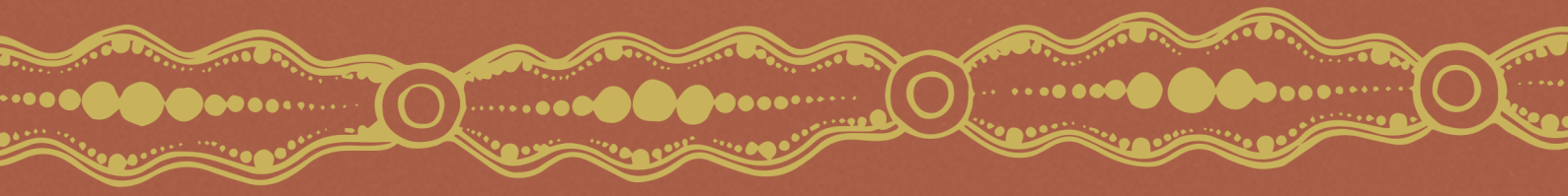
For too long the narrative in this country on First Nations people has spoken from a deficit perspective, and it is time to speak in strength - so that we can win.

### Here's how you can share this messaging far and wide:

- Print and distribute in groups that you're a part of: friends, family, schools, sports clubs, faith groups, community groups.
- Hold a gathering at your house or a public place to talk about this research and how you can use it to have more conversations
- Online conversations - conversations we have online are so important - they are seen by many people, and are visible long after we end them. If you find yourself in online conversations where people are using deficit language, not only can you reframe the conversation by using this messaging, you can also point people in the direction of [passingthemessagestick.org](https://passingthemessagestick.org) - pass on the tools you have learnt!
- Sharing the research on local community groups on social media
- Having conversations at a market or busy location like outside the shops

### Other things you can do:

- Put up posters and hand out flyers that link people to this resource. You can print posters to put around your local area at [yes.org.au](https://yes.org.au)



We would like to acknowledge the contributors who made this work possible.

This research — from the very early days of ideation, through to the conversation guide that's in your hand now — has been created for First Nations people, and by First Nations people, at every stage.

Please pass this conversation guide as far as you can.

Take action at [yes.org.au](https://www.yes.org.au)

