



Your Words Are Your Bond

Four Urgent Messages Philanthropy Must Deliver To Hold Its Bond With Community Partners

Following the recent election, many philanthropic organizations are struggling with how to effectively communicate with community partners and maintain the neutrality their nonprofit status requires. The heightened polarization, fear, and anxiety among communities have created a challenging environment for clear, impactful messaging. Philanthropic leaders are often caught between wanting to respond to the legitimate community concerns of those partners while ensuring their communications do not alienate other stakeholders who may hold differing perspectives and values.

This moment requires philanthropic organizations to be especially intentional and strategic in how they communicate with the community partners they serve. Your community partners are looking for leadership, clarity, and action-oriented messages that demonstrate a commitment to justice, equity, and the well-being of those most impacted by systemic inequities. Yet, many philanthropies find themselves uncertain about how to navigate this space, balancing the need to build trust, avoid missteps, and maintain some transparency in their communications.

At TheCaseMade, we help a wide variety of justice-focused organizations to make the case for their work and to help them avoid the backfires that come when they do not understand the core principles of casemaking. TheCaseMade founder and CEO, Dr. Tiffany Manuel, recently offered some essential casemaking recommendations to philanthropic organizations as they try to respond to the needs of their community partners in this environment.

How to Avoid the Backfire and Communicate with Your Community Partners Thoughtfully

For those philanthropic organizations that are supporting social justice work, we know that your intentions are focused on protecting that work, even in the challenging current environment. We know that you see this work as important, and it is in jeopardy if we do not take the time position it carefully now. Here are some tips for how to engage your community partners doing that work in this moment.

At TheCaseMade, we've created an easy-to-follow blueprint, Strategic CaseMaking™, to make it easier for you to call people to action in ways that transform our world for the better.





How to Avoid the Backfire and Communicate with Your Community Partners Thoughtfully in This Moment

What truly resonates and helps us move forward is a clear, unwavering commitment to the communities you serve and the work you stand for, regardless of political winds. To get that message across, let me offer a few points to help my colleagues in philanthropy “right the ship” and better connect to the community partners who depend on you right now.

First and foremost, your message should be grounded in solidarity. Let your community partners know you see their challenges, hear their concerns, and stand ready to amplify their voices and support their work. Acknowledge the disproportionate impacts of systemic inequities on historically marginalized communities and clearly state your organization’s commitment to dismantling these barriers alongside them, irrespective of who is in elected office.

Second, express trust in your partners. They are the experts in their communities, and your role is to bolster their efforts, not dictate them. Reinforce your commitment to their leadership by prioritizing flexible, multi-year funding that allows them to navigate the current moment without undue restrictions. This is the time to ask, “What do you need most from us right now?” and then act on their guidance. At TheCaseMade, we call this the “trust walk” and if your community partners don’t trust you in this moment...you need to step back and define your trust walk with them.

Third, be transparent about your plans and values. Declare that your commitment to equity, justice, and systemic change is steadfast, regardless of the political landscape. Community partners want to know that you are not reactionary but proactive, willing to pursue long-term solutions rather than short-term survival strategies. They need to see you as strategic and firm, not floppy and surrendered, before they can call the next play.

Finally, inspire confidence and give your community partners grace. Instead of simply stating your willingness to “work with the incoming administration,” articulate how you plan to advocate for the policies and systemic changes needed to support your shared mission. Let your community partners hear that you are in this fight with them for the long haul and that together, you will push forward no matter the obstacles ahead.

Then, give people some grace. Many of us need to focus on keeping our families, our communities, and our loved ones safe at a time when the rhetoric about who has value (and who does not) is ratcheting up. As neo-Nazi groups (for example) are getting emboldened and spreading doctrines of hate, your community partners need the time and space to square their soldiers, pull their resilience up from the knees (again!), and prepare for the challenges on the horizon. If you want to be helpful, give them the grace and space to do that work!

Be clear: We all know this is a challenging time, and none of us are exactly sure how to navigate this moment expertly—even if we think we’ve been through it before. But we can show up for each other in an unequivocally clear way: We will not spend our time negotiating with people who do not see our human value.





A CaseMaking Example to Support Your Engagement with Community Partners

It may feel like a lot to ask, but here's a short casemaking example to get you started on that different course. Feel free to tailor this example to fit your trust walk with the community partners you serve.

To our valued partners,

We know this moment is tough for many of the communities we serve. In this moment of uncertainty and transition, we want to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to you and the communities we serve together. We know that the challenges ahead—economic instability, political polarization, and persistent systemic inequities—require more than resilience. They demand bold, collective action. They require commitment to justice in all its forms: racial, economic, social, and political. And we are in this with you!

We want you to know this: We see you, trust you, and stand with you. You are the experts in your communities, and your leadership is central to achieving the just and equitable future we all seek. Our role is to support and amplify your work, and we remain fully committed to doing so in ways that reflect your priorities, not ours.

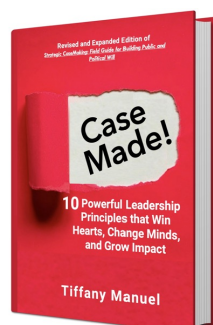
This means that we will continue to provide or help you find flexible, multi-year funding to help you respond to the immediate needs of your community while building long-term solutions. It means we will use our voice to advocate for the systemic changes you have identified as critical, regardless of the political landscape. It means that we will hold ourselves accountable to the same principles of equity and justice we champion, ensuring that our practices align with our shared values. And let us know what you need most right now and how we can help. While we won't be able to meet every need, we are willing to listen and adjust our priorities to fit the needs you are seeing on the ground.

Let us be clear: We will not work with any organization, agency, or corporate partner who does not recognize the humanity of the people who live, work, and have invested in this community. We intentionally align ourselves with people across our nation who continue to fight for policies and systems that advance equity, dismantle barriers, directly address racism, and create opportunities for everyone to thrive.

Together, we will push forward, grounded in hope, urgency, and a shared determination to build something better. Our nation will be better because of the work we are doing together, and we're proud to be an ally of justice.

We thank you for your continued partnership and stand ready to support you, amplify your work, and stay in this fight with you for the long haul.

*In solidarity,
Our Team*





A Second Real Time CaseMaking Example from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation



Rich Besser · Following
President at Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
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Recent executive orders that roll back health measures and diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts reverse course on the nation's necessary journey toward a more just and equitable future.

It is unconscionable that the Trump administration would coopt the language and vision of the civil rights movement in these executive orders as it attempts to send our nation back to an era of rampant, state-sanctioned discrimination. Ultimately, these measures drive us farther away from a future when health is no longer a privilege, but a right for all.

Everyone wants healthcare rooted in compassion and respect. Research shows that greater diversity among doctors improves health outcomes for people of color, disabled people, women, LGBTQIA+ patients, and others whose identities have long been underrepresented in the healthcare field. Plus, strategies aimed at reducing racial disparities in healthcare—such as maternal health and cancer care—lead to better outcomes for all patients. The evidence is clear: a diverse healthcare workforce and inclusive policies serve us all. These executive orders serve no one.

We believe that policies across all levels of government—especially from the White House—should build upon people's aspirations for better, healthier lives. Instead of sowing division, discord, and fear, our leaders should be strengthening access to healthcare, protecting workers, and supporting families.

At RWJF, we will continue to defend and advance fundamental American values of diversity, equity, and inclusion with the urgency this moment requires. This includes steps such as increasing our investments in efforts to diversify the healthcare professions, as well as supporting legal, communications, and organizing efforts alongside leaders in the field. These actions will improve the health of us all.

Our grantees and partners have for decades worked relentlessly to build a healthier, more equitable future for everyone. In these days of backlash and backsliding, we at RWJF must match our commitment and resolve to transform health in our lifetime. We will.

