

MESSAGING GUIDE AND TIP SHEET



**TWO GENERATIONS.
ONE FUTURE.**

 **ASCEND**
THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

MESSAGING GUIDE

You have the opportunity to speak with local, state, and federal policymakers about how a two-generation (2Gen) approach is breaking children and families free from the traps of poverty and empowering them to live up to their full potential. In this memo, you'll find topline messages to make a strong case, suggestions for using language that makes your work more compelling, and ideas for picking stories strategically to advance the issue.

Use these to craft tailored messages that bring your 2Gen work to life in a way that makes policymakers see what a good idea 2Gen is and encourages them to support spreading 2Gen where it makes sense.

These messages are based on the results of available polling and focus groups to date. However, with ongoing shifts in the political landscape, your individual conversations with lawmakers will help test what works. Please share feedback on what resonates and what falls flat in your conversations so we may continue to provide relevant message guidance to the field.

Topline Messages

What is 2Gen?

2Gen is an antipoverty initiative that provides support for both children and their parents together. This approach has proven effective at breaking children and their families free from the traps of poverty and empowering them to live up to their full potential. The 2Gen approach helps children and families get the education and workforce training, social supports like parenting skills, and health care they need to create a legacy of economic stability and overall well-being that passes from one generation to the next.

- **Give concrete examples of the initiatives you are working on that have a 2Gen lens; and**
- **Explain how 2Gen works across generations and how it produces lasting results.**

Example: In a successful partnership at the local level, the Women's Foundation of Greater Birmingham is collaborating with Jefferson State Community College, Childcare Resources, Head Starts, local pharmaceutical stores and a hospital to provide scholarships and career support for women whose families make less than \$48,600/year. The program offers a fast-track postsecondary educational program that has led to higher wages, benefits, and opportunities for advancement as pharmacy technicians and medical and ophthalmic assistants — in-demand careers in Birmingham, Alabama. At the same time, it integrates quality early education programs for participants' children as a core element of the program. This integrated approach means families get on sound economic footing and that both generations are set up for lifelong success. As a result of this pilot program, in 2016, 106 women were enrolled in postsecondary certificate programs; 89 women passed certificate programs; and more than 30 were employed in living-wage jobs. Additionally, teachers reported that 75 percent of children in participating families showed better attendance than nonparticipating families, and 75 percent of the teachers reported an increase in parent participation in the classroom and/or home activity logs.

Why 2Gen works.

Research shows the impact that a parent's education, economic stability, and overall health has on a child's trajectory. Similarly, children's education and healthy development inspire parents and set the entire family on a more secure path. A 2Gen approach helps both generations make progress together and get us closer to fulfilling all parents' wishes that their children will do better than them.

Example: At the state level, Tennessee is aligning services to serve families more effectively and make better use of existing resources. This includes investing in staff development, from case managers who work directly with families to department leadership, so that they understand how to help families achieve their potential through education, financial asset development, health care, and peer networks. The focus is on coordinating resources instead of providing individual services that help the child or the parent but do not lead to stability for the whole family. For example, the Drive to 55 initiative seeks to help 55 percent of Tennesseans earn a college degree or an equivalent certificate by 2025. Pairing the Drive to 55 for a young parent with the Imagination Library program for their children is an investment in the whole family's education, which is critical for Tennessee's future workforce development and economy.

What makes 2Gen Effective.

2Gen removes unnecessary silos and integrates antipoverty programs, streamlines services, and works across generations, so efforts are informed by and make more sense for children and families. In short, 2Gen gets better results. It ensures programs meant to empower children and families are equitable in their offerings and availability and are rigorously measured to confirm they work.

2Gen is catching on at the local, state, and federal levels because of its common-sense approach and impressive results. The 2Gen approach has bipartisan support among voters and policymakers (e.g., the Allegany County Human Resources Development Commission in Cumberland, MD; Governor Bill Haslam, R-TN; Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-NM; and Sen. Susan Collins, R-ME).

Example: At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Education funds the Full-Service Community Schools Program. This 2Gen program helps coordinate academic, social, and health services through partnerships among public schools; local education agencies; community-based organizations, nonprofits, and NGOs; and other public or private entities. These types of initiatives result in improved educational outcomes for children and can include early learning, nutrition services, primary health and dental care, and social services that promote family financial stability. These programs also provide important supports for parents through parent education programs and family engagement opportunities, such as literacy classes.

2Gen generates strong support from the public.

Public support for a 2Gen approach is strong. According to a 2016 survey from Lake Research, 76 percent of Americans believe that if we want to make sure children from low-income families are successful in their early learning, then we also have to invest in their parents' economic well-being. Today 86 percent favor such a program as a means to raise families out of poverty. Moreover, 74 percent of Americans across both parties favor the approach, even if it means tax increases to introduce such programs. Bipartisan polling conducted in 2016 showed that a significant majority of the public — from both parties — supports a 2Gen approach. In particular, the majority supports programs that target both parents and their children, so parents receive education and skills training to get a better job and at the same time their children get a good start with Head Start, early education, and quality schools. Support for the specific policies that comprise a 2Gen approach is both broad and deep. Americans support creating partnerships that build upon existing policies as well as new policy innovations.

MESSAGING TIP SHEET

Tailor messages to the audience you are engaging with.

This is your opportunity to have a face-to-face conversation with policymakers about an issue you're passionate about, so tailor your talking points, story, and message to make sure your visit will stick with them when they deliberate future policies about your issue area. To ensure your meeting leaves a strong impression, consider the following:

What are your questions? What do you need to learn in these conversations to build support for your work? List the questions you want to ask so you can find the common ground and build from there.

What's the context? Is the policymaker a democrat or republican? Which committees does he or she serve on? Does the policymaker have a history of supporting two-generation (2Gen) or antipoverty initiatives? What are the top issues for his or her constituents, and what has the policymaker listed as top legislative priorities that you can connect to?

What do they care about? What does the policymaker care about that you can connect to your 2Gen work (e.g., he or she may want people who can work to be able to work or to know that taxpayer dollars spent are getting tangible results)?

What are their barriers? What might raise the policymaker's skepticism or make him or her hesitant to back 2Gen (e.g., he or she doesn't want to mandate how states do something and want flexibility or he or she doesn't want to expand government programs)? How can you message around these barriers and make your case?

What's going on in the policymaker's mind when you talk about this issue? Is the policymaker wondering if leaders in his or her party are 2Gen fans? Does the individual suffer compassion fatigue around this issue and believe antipoverty programs are failures? Does he or she hold an implicit bias about the types of people he or she believes use these programs that you need to keep in mind?

What is your ask? What do you want the policymaker to do to further 2Gen? What specific ask do you have that you want to raise after you make the case (e.g., make a site visit, check out results, consider funding for a pilot)?

How can you help the policymaker? Can championing 2Gen solutions help the policymaker in his or her re-election bid or deliver on a campaign promise? Or is the policymaker a freshman official looking for a way to leave a mark? How can his or her constituents benefit from the policies you're presenting? Does it give the policymaker a chance to support a public-private partnership?

Consider language choices so you make a strong case.



Start with the basics. Even if the policymaker knows what 2Gen is, use every opportunity to reiterate what it is, why it is special, and why it is something they should embrace.



Avoid jargon. For example, instead of talking about “infant and parent neurobiological change,” say, “recent brain research shows that new parents’ brains undergo major changes just as babies’ brains do.”



Use visionary and personal language. Talk about putting poverty permanently in the rear-view mirror for families rather than simply reducing poverty. Make it more personal. If you’re speaking with Senator Crapo, for example, say “Idaho’s families” rather than just “families,” so your points hit closer to home.



Use concrete examples with measurable results. For example, “A \$3,000 difference in parents’ income when their child is young is associated with a 17-percent increase in the child’s future earnings.” People respond to specific, concrete and pragmatic solutions. Big ideas often seem vague to people and too broad in general.



Highlight people the policymaker cares about. Whenever possible, tell stories about people they care about, such as their constituents, families, children, opportunity youth, etc.



Use stories to bring messages to life. (See below.)

Use compelling, true stories to carry your messages.

Stories are a proven approach to get policymakers’ attention and hold their interest. Members of Congress and other busy decision makers communicate through stories, using the power of narrative and the emotional lens of personal experience to make abstract issues concrete and to make complex problems and solutions easier to understand. Here are some tried-and-true story models — pick the one that is the best fit based on who you are meeting with.

Nature of Our Challenge

This type of story shows that the 2Gen field understands the realities of the challenges our society needs to solve for. Telling a Nature of Our Challenge story can help members of Congress understand the problem your work responds to and why it is important to the members’ constituents. This type of story is often useful in illustrating why your work is crucial to making a difference in the lives of the people or communities that matter most to your target decision maker. It most often focuses on an individual who struggled with a problem or what the individual is up against that we as a society need to tackle. This type of story does not always have a happy ending and can sometimes be a cliffhanger, but it must offer hope that we can overcome the challenge described.

Lessons Learned/Performance

Some policymakers object to supporting new antipoverty measures because they believe current efforts are wasteful and ineffective. Lessons Learned/Performance stories can show how you are improving your process (e.g., delivery of services) and how your 2Gen solution has become more streamlined and targeted, leading to improved measurable outcomes. Lessons learned/performance stories also provide an opportunity to talk about implementing common-sense solutions so programs work better (e.g., health screenings for parents and children at the same time or streamlining benefits applications). In fact, focus groups with parents have shown that these big fixes are no-brainers to the average American — many of them are shocked these are problems to begin with. Telling a Lessons Learned story can show a poli-

cymaker you know well that your organization is committed to constant improvement, or it can help a member you are just getting to know understand why it is important to get past misconceptions about the issue. Telling a Performance story can help a member of Congress see how his or her engagement can eliminate a roadblock that stands between you and greater gains for his or her constituents.



Symbol of Our Success

These stories can help establish why 2Gen is an effective, worthwhile approach. Tell stories that lift up parents as the heroes and show how 2Gen solutions empower them. We need policymakers to admire parents' strength and commitment and want to join forces with them rather than reinforcing that they are taking advantage of the system, making bad lifestyle choices, etc. Telling a Symbol of Our Success story underscores the message that your organization can get things done, so it is a great opportunity to build your credibility. This type of story often focuses on a person your organization has helped or a staff member or volunteer who has made a difference. The Symbol of Our Success story must have a happy ending. Because it illustrates your organization's potential to address a pressing need, the Symbol of Our Success story can show a policymaker the value of helping your organization reach more people in his or her state or district.



Vision

This story shows where the 2Gen field is going and illustrates how your work in the space is having a real impact. Telling a Vision story can help a policymaker understand the potential of your work to make real change in his or her state or district and why it is worthy of his or her support. The best example of the Vision story is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s historic "I Have a Dream" speech. It is set in a possible future where your mission has been accomplished. The Vision story can effectively illustrate why your work is crucial to improving the lives of people in the member's state or district.

Stay on topic.

The conversation may naturally flow to different topics, and bridging phrases can help refocus the conversation. Here are some you can try:

- That reminds me of ...**
- A more useful way to look at it is ...**
- What that means is ...**
- That's not my field of expertise, but what I can say is ...**
- It's important to emphasize/it's important not to overlook ...**
- What's important to remember, however, is ...**
- What I think you want to know is ...**
- What I think you're getting at is ...**
- Along those lines, another question I'm often asked is ...**
- Yes, and in addition to that ...**

Use these tips for delivering memorable messages, paired with the Ascend Messaging Guide, to prepare for upcoming policymaker meetings. We are interested to hear feedback that can inform future communication, so please share what really resonates and what falls flat in your conversations so we may continue to provide relevant message guidance to the field.