

INNOVATION OHIO

To: Spencer Dirrig, Political Director, Ohio Environmental Council
From: Terra Goodnight, Research Director, Innovation Ohio
Re: Renewable Energy Voter Research
Date: October 20, 2022

This memo outlines the results of Innovation Ohio's research on behalf of the Ohio Environmental Council into how to effectively message to voters about renewable energy investments in order to promote support for pro-renewable policies and candidates. Detailed methodology and list of five sample pro-renewable messages is provided at the end of this memo.

Phase 1: Audience Insights

We conducted an Audience Understanding Survey using the GrowProgress platform to better understand which Ohio voters are supportive of – or could be persuaded to support – pro-renewable policies and candidates and more importantly, why they feel how they do.

In open-ended and multiple choice responses to our survey questions, we learned that voters who most strongly support policies that invest in renewable energy tend to be liberal, vote Democratic, have higher levels of education and income, and live in suburban areas. These respondents point to the threat of climate change as a primary reason to support renewables, citing altruistic concerns about the health of the planet and future generations; others pointed to the importance of energy independence.

The replies from this group are very earnest and passionate; they think the planet is dying or in deep trouble if we do not act. They speak about renewables as the way of the future and express emotions of hopefulness, inspiration and happiness when asked about renewables. The most commonly held values among renewable supporters were Equality, Compassion, Hedonism. They trust academic institutions and small businesses and distrust Wall Street and large corporations.

When messaging to these voters, therefore, we recommend:

- Speak to their values of compassion and concern for equality by invoking renewables' potential to address environmental justice and improve health outcomes, particularly for marginalized people and the prospect to create a safer and healthier planet for future generations.
- Use words and phrases like “save the planet”, “protect the environment” and refer to renewables as the “way of the future”.

By contrast, voters who neither support nor oppose renewable investments are typically more moderate in outlook and identify as politically independent; the majority were women, had lower levels of education and higher rates of non-voting than other respondents.

A large majority of these respondents said they do not know enough or are not interested enough about renewable energy to have an opinion. When asked for reasons to invest in renewables, the two most common were to clean the air and water and to create good paying jobs.

Some equate issues of climate and renewables with politics. When asked about politicians, many conceded a candidate's opinion is important and several pointed to Joe Biden as a politician with a view that matches their own. Still others say renewable energy is too expensive or isn't advanced enough to justify transitioning from fossil fuels, or that companies should decide on their own to do it.

The most commonly held values among those who neither support nor oppose renewable investments are In-Group Care, Compassion and Emotionality. These voters express emotions of uncertainty, indifference and hopefulness when asked to think about renewable energy. They distrust the federal government and large corporations, favoring the military and local police.

When messaging to these voters, therefore, we recommend:

- Provide education about the potential for renewable in terms of benefits to health, the environment and reassure them about its cost and readiness as a replacement for fossil fuels.
- Alleviate concerns about renewables' with words and phrases like "affordable" and "innovative," and refer to the technology as "proven" and "ready." Speak to a "balanced" approach that includes the use of renewables alongside traditional energy sources.

Lastly, voters most opposed to renewable investments are primarily older, white, conservative, male and Republican. When asked why they oppose renewables, these respondents say the technology is neither ready nor sufficient to replace fossil fuels, preferring to keep things the way they are. They have misgivings about the potential of electric cars and energy storage and believe concerns about climate change are exaggerated or fake.

The most commonly held values among renewable opponents were Patriotism, Nostalgia, and Authority. They express emotions of disgust, frustration and anger when asked to think about renewable energy and distrust government officials and the media, preferring police and the military. **We do not recommend major investments in messaging to this group.**

Phase 2: Effective Messaging

Using the audience insights derived from our survey results, we crafted five messages incorporating the observed values, language, concerns and attitudes of persuadable voters, as well as of renewables supporters, and submitted them to Real Time Message Testing (see

“methodology,” below) to determine which was most effective in achieving desired campaign outcomes.

Desired Outcome 1: Candidate Support

The messages that were most effective in increasing voter support for candidates who support renewable investments were “Technology Boom” and “Ohio’s Past/Future”. Specifically,

“Technology Boom” increased support for pro-renewable candidates by 10 percentage points overall, and by:

- +25pp in the Cincinnati media market
- +24pp among conservatives
- +24pp among rural residents
- +21pp among voters with a Bachelor’s Degree or higher
- +16pp among independents
- +15pp in the Cleveland-Akron media market
- +14pp among 35-54 year olds
- +14pp among white voters
- +14pp among medium-turnout voters

“Ohio’s Past/Future” increased support for pro-renewable candidates by 9 percentage points overall, and by:

- +17pp among conservatives
- +17pp among voters with a Bachelor’s degree or higher
- +15pp with women
- +11pp among voters with incomes below \$50K

Desired Outcome 2: Renewable Policy Support

The message that was most effective in moving voters toward support for renewable energy investments was “Save the Planet”:

“Save the Planet” increased favorability for renewable energy investment policies by 10 percent overall, and by:

- +23pp in the Columbus media market (*note: small sample size*)
- +16pp among medium-turnout voters
- +15pp among those with a High School education or less
- +15pp among those earning less than \$50K annually
- +14pp among low-turnout voters
- +13pp among conservatives
- +12pp among women

Desired Outcome 3: Importance In Voting

We also measured which messages were persuasive in increasing the importance of renewables support when deciding for whom to vote, and found *all five of our messages were persuasive*, but two (“Save the Planet” and “Healthier Future”) were the most effective.

“Healthier Future” increased the share of respondents who said renewable support was an important factor when evaluating candidates for office by 12 percentage points, and by:

- +26pp among conservatives
- +24pp among voters with a Bachelor’s degree or higher
- +23pp in Cincinnati media market (note: small sample size)
- +22pp in Columbus media market (note: small sample size)
- +20pp among voters who earn less than \$50K annually
- +18pp among voters age 35-54
- +17pp among urban residents
- +16pp among voters age 55 and up
- +16pp among medium-turnout voters
- +15pp among independent and Republican voters

“Save the Planet” increased the share of respondents who said renewable support was an important factor when evaluating candidates for office by 10 percentage points, and by:

- +29pp in the Columbus media market (small sample size)
- +21pp among urban residents
- +19pp among 35-54 year olds
- +19pp among conservatives
- +15pp among men
- +15pp among medium-turnout voters
- +14pp among voters earning less than \$50K annually
- +14pp among independent voters

Methodology

IO conducted an audience understanding survey and real-time message test using the GrowProgress platform, which recruits participants via a number of platform partners to take surveys online. Participants are Ohio adults and samples are weighted by age, gender, race, education and party to resemble the electorate.

For the Audience Understanding Survey, 597 Ohioans were surveyed from September 23-27, 2022 and asked whether they “support or oppose policies that invest in renewable energy to reduce our nation’s reliance on fossil fuels”. Based on their answers to this question, we segmented the group into supporters, opponents and those on the fence and analyzed each

according to their responses to a number of demographic, multiple choice and open-ended questions including the reasons they responded how they did. Results are summarized above.

Message Testing was then conducted from October 13-14, 2022. 1198 voters were divided into 6 equal groups, one of which saw a placebo and the other 5 saw one of each of our messages, all of which were crafted to appeal to the values and views of our audience based on what we learned from our survey. After viewing messages, respondents were asked to respond to three custom success questions:

Q1: In the upcoming election, which of the following candidates would you be more likely to support, all other things being equal:

- A candidate who supports policies that promote renewable energy development
- A candidate who opposes policies that promote renewable energy development
- Unsure

Q2: Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of policies to promote the production of renewable energy in order to reduce the use of fossil fuels?

- Very Favorable
- Somewhat Favorable
- Neither Favorable Nor Unfavorable
- Somewhat Unfavorable
- Very Unfavorable

When deciding who to vote for, how important is it to you that a candidate support renewable energy and policies that reduce the impacts of climate change?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not very important
- Not at all important

Responses were monitored for statistically significant movement toward our desired outcomes vs those in the control group. Results are presented above.

Messages Tested:

1. **Save The Planet** (“We can combat the effects of climate change and preserve a safe and livable planet for future generations by investing in reliable, efficient, and inexpensive forms of renewable energy. We need strong leaders who embrace smart policies that will move us toward a healthier future”)
2. **Technology Boom** (“Ohio is primed to be the center of the clean energy technology boom that will bring hundreds of thousands of good-paying jobs to our state and revitalize our communities. By diversifying our energy sources, renewable energy will decrease energy costs for families and make Ohio energy independent.”)

3. Healthier Future (“Investing in renewable energy will build an economy where our children can grow, learn, and thrive here in Ohio for decades to come. New advances in clean energy means safer air for our kids to breathe and a better environment to play.”)
4. Have Fun Outside (“The mountains we hike, the oceans we navigate, and all the Earth's natural treasures are precious. By combating climate change through the use of clean, renewable energy, we can protect the air, water, and land we love to explore.”)
5. Ohio’s Past/Future (“Ohio needs to stop exporting our children. Investing in renewable energy will bring jobs to Ohio, ensuring the careers of the future are right here in our state - so our kids don't have to leave to get a great job and raise a family.”)