

MESSAGES THAT WORK:

Effective Communications about Gun Violence

As of January 2019



REALITY CHECKS

The Second Amendment is NOT the problem, but the gun lobby LOVES it when we say it is! In the 2008 Heller decision, which determined that individuals have the right to possess firearms for personal defense, Justice Antonin Scalia wrote: *"Like most rights, the right secured by the Second Amendment is not unlimited... It is not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose."* He went on to explain that the government has the right to regulate WHO can possess a firearm, WHERE firearms may be carried, WHICH firearms may be sold and by WHOM.

45% of our friends and neighbors in Minnesota have at least one gun. Unless we are disciplined in our communications, we will convince them that the NRA is right, and we're really just "gun grabbers" out to take away their guns. We need to speak in a way that shows we know most gun owners are safe and responsible.

The NRA represents just 1.5% of all Americans. 95% of all gun owners **ARE NOT** NRA members. Only 2 out of 10 hunters are NRA members, and many only join for the free give-aways. 74% of gun owners support some form of increased gun regulation. It is a terrible mischaracterization to make all gun owners sound like they support the extreme agenda of the NRA leadership.

In Minnesota, MANNERS MATTER. Minnesotans do not respond well to snark or sarcasm, and have very long memories. If we speak impolitely about or mischaracterize those who disagree with us, it will absolutely turn off the majority of Minnesotans who do agree with us, but might not know it yet. Further, it will give the gun lobby a reason to denounce us.

Passion is important, but policy rules. Minnesotans are pragmatic people who believe in sound public policy and economic practicality. We tend to distrust excessive displays of emotion. Although it is important that we be passionate in our advocacy, we must base our arguments on trustworthy data from respected sources and avoid using hyperbolic language at all costs.

THE WRONG MESSAGE—DO NOT SAY:

"Gun nuts" — Do not characterize gun owners as crazy or homicidal.

"Our law makers are slaves of the gun lobby with blood on their hands" — Never use hyperbole to disrespect an opponent. This is doubly true when talking about elected officials.

"Let's repeal the Second Amendment" — There is NO NEED to repeal; we already have the right to regulate guns.

"Minnesota should ban (insert type of gun or equipment here)" — ANY TIME we talk about an outright ban of firearms, we lose crucial support and attract all kinds of NRA attention to our state. Protect Minnesota supports national bans of semi-automatic assault rifles, high capacity magazines and bump stocks, not state bans.

"We should be like (insert country name here)" — Minnesotans don't want America to be like other countries.

"We need to keep guns out of the hands of the dangerously mentally ill" or any version thereof. We must be careful not to stigmatize those with mental illness, or alienate the mental health community. The truth is that those with mental illness are far more likely to be victims of gun violence than to represent a danger to others.

"The mentally ill" — don't reduce people to an illness. Say *"people who live with mental illness."* Also, don't say people who *"suffer from"* mental illness. Finally, the mental health community prefers *"die by suicide"* instead of *"commit"* suicide, which sounds criminal.

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION: MESSAGES THAT WORK

- The vast majority of gun owners are responsible and support common sense gun laws. Hunters have always understood the importance of gun safety. Our concern is the growing number of gun owners who don't have a hunting background and haven't passed a gun safety course, but keep loaded guns unsecured in their homes, holsters, and vehicles.
- 75-85% of gun deaths in Minnesota are suicides, which disproportionately claim the lives of older white men and veterans in Greater Minnesota. These deaths go largely unnoticed, but devastate families and communities. Comprehensive criminal background checks cut suicide rates nearly in half.
- Gun violence is a public health issue that needs integrated, evidence-based solutions. We will never arrest our way out of the problem. We need to pass sensible gun laws to **prevent** gun violence before it happens and provide help and support for those most at risk. The answer is to INVEST, not arrest.
- We managed to cut the rate of death by car accidents in half over 40 years by employing public health solutions—and we didn't confiscate cars in the process. In fact, more cars than ever are on the road today. We can do the same thing with guns: dramatically reduce gun deaths without taking away the rights of responsible, law abiding gun owners.
- We need to achieve a **balance** between the right of individual Americans to possess firearms, and the rights of other Americans and communities to be safe from gun violence. We have swung too far in the direction of protecting individual gun rights, and Americans are dying because of it. Even most gun owners believe we need to restore balance.
- We need to keep guns out of the hands of those who represent a threat to themselves or others.
- The gun lobby loves to say the problem is mental illness, not guns. But mental illness is a factor only 4% of the time in interpersonal gun violence; guns are a factor 100% of the time. People who live with mental illness are far more likely to be victims of gun violence than perpetrators.
- Gun violence costs the state of Minnesota \$2.2 billion every year—as much as two new Viking stadiums. Reasonable people agree that we need to pass sensible gun laws to make our community safer.
- No law will prevent every incident of gun violence, but the states with the strongest gun laws have the lowest rates of gun death. In general laws do work to reduce crime and modify behavior. If they didn't, we wouldn't have speed limits, stop signs, seat belt laws, and laws against driving under the influence—we would just trust every driver to be responsible. Trusting every gun owner to be responsible is unrealistic. Minnesota needs to strengthen our gun laws, not weaken them.
- The NRA represents just 1.5% of Americans. 95% of gun owners DO NOT belong to the NRA. Why do we allow this tiny, extremist special interest group to prevent us from protecting our communities and saving lives?
- I am a strong supporter of the Second Amendment, especially the “well regulated” part.
- According to a recent Star Tribune poll, 90% of Minnesotans support mandatory criminal background checks on all gun sales—that includes 90% of Republicans, rural residents, and gun owners. It's time for our lawmakers to listen to the people of Minnesota, instead of the gun lobby.

*Citations for data included on this handout can be found in “Gun Facts”,
posted on www.protectmn.org, under “Resources.”*