

BUILDING CHANGES MESSAGING HUB

PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide recommendations on how to best utilize fundraising language while maintaining Building Changes' brand integrity for its communications and development teams. This document can serve as a messaging hub to draw from for donor communications, events, and grants.

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FUNDRAISING MESSAGING TIPS

Incorporate Storytelling: Storytelling can help build an emotional arc, inspiring people to give. Since Building Changes does not provide direct service support, individual impact stories often do not accurately represent the way the organization has made a difference in people's lives. Instead, BC can tell a community-oriented general story about the current situation of those experiencing homelessness.

Ex. Imagine being an eight-year-old and not knowing where you're going to sleep that night. Does your homework or what you learned in school that day even cross your mind? There are more than 37,000 students experiencing homelessness in Washington—students whose grades, test scores, and graduation rates fall below those who are housed. These outcomes are not inevitable, however. When students connect with caring adults, receive tailored support, and avoid multiple school moves, they can and do succeed.

By supporting Building Changes, you invest in our behind-the-scenes work with state agencies, school districts, and community-based organizations to ensure that kids struggling with housing insecurity – especially young people of color who make up 64% of the homeless student population - get the support they need to have stable homes and meet their goals for academic success. When children and young people have a home and the opportunity for success in school and in life, our whole community benefits.

Use Values-Based Messaging: An important element of fundraising messaging is tapping into common values held between Building Changes and fundraising audiences. This messaging leans into BC's values of equity, people, partnerships, and integrity, while tapping into donors' ideas of themselves as compassionate, community-oriented, and working for the collective good.

- *Ex: When we have a place to belong, we are a part of the community, and as a community, we believe that everyone deserves a home. Together, we can ensure that children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness receive equitable access and support in finding permanent housing. By doing so, we invest in each other so our entire community can thrive.*

Move Donors to Action: Effective fundraising messaging combines values with storytelling, followed by a call to action. For Building Changes, it is essential to show how donors' support translates to impacts, even if those impacts are general.

- *Ex: By supporting Building Changes, you invest in more equitable systems so that children, youth, and families can access the services they need to leave homelessness behind. Together with your support, we can lay the foundation for a thriving community where everyone has safe, stable housing, the starting point for good health, education, and success in life, and a place to belong.*

Discuss Goals and Outcomes: In communications, it is important to discuss the actual goals we want to see in and not stop at the processes to get there. For instance, though equitable access to services might be what BC is pushing for, it is a means to an end with the goal of housing everyone so our community can thrive.

- ***BC's mission is the means to achieve a tangible goal:*** *Building Changes mission is to advance equitable responses to homelessness in Washington State, with a focus on children, youth, and families. When people can equitably access and use services, they can obtain stable housing stability so our communities can thrive.*

Use Equitable, Accessible Language: Equitable messaging means that anyone can understand it – particularly the people who are being served. One of the biggest complaints about the homelessness response system is that it is overly bureaucratic and hard to understand. BC can help to make the system more equitable and accessible by avoiding wonk and jargon. If you mention “diversion,” explain what that is. When speaking about “systems change,” spell out what that means — going beyond improving housing, education, and health systems – and discussing what systems change actually results in.

- *Expand on “housing systems change,” to discuss how, “We want more equitable housing and homeless services so that more people can achieve housing stability – particularly Black, Indigenous, and people of color who disproportionately experience homelessness.”*
- *Expand on “educational systems change,” talk about how “We want to ensure that students experiencing homelessness, who are more likely to be young people of color, get the tailored support they need so that they have a fair shot at academic success.”*
- *Expand on “health systems change,” talk about how, “We want to ensure that children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness have access to health services that support their unique needs so that they can maintain their health and housing stability.”*

Focus on the “We” not the “Me”: Some models of fundraising focus on donors as heroes, and the organization as a vehicle for their saviorism. To lean into BCs values of partnership, equity, and people, it's important to focus more on taking collective action for the collective good, and less on “saviorism” that comes with donor heroics. Instead, appeal to donors' desire to be part of the community that is working towards collective solutions.

- *Ex: “We all believe that communities thrive when people have safe and stable housing and can equitably access and use services. When you give to Building Changes, you invest in ground up partnerships that put the voices of children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness at the center of solutions. You invest*

in evaluating and advocating for those solutions. And through our collective action, we can ensure that those solutions are implemented equitably so that everyone has a home – particularly Black, Indigenous, and people of color who are more likely to experience homelessness.

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KEY MESSAGING

Messaging is the overarching narrative that moves people from where they are to where we want them to be by tapping into common values. Following are key messages, driven by values, based on both polling and media landscape analysis.

Messages emphasizing collectivity: Messages that emphasize unity, cooperation, and compassion are important to counter the NIMBY-ism and us versus them mentality that dominate neighborhood conversations on homelessness.

- *Ex: Our community takes care of each other. That is why we can work together to ensure that the children, youth, and families in our communities can access the support they need to have a permanent place where they can call home. Homelessness is not an impossible problem: WA State has the funds, and our community has the will to prevent and end homelessness equitably.*

Messages encouraging structural analysis of the housing, education, and health systems: This message points to structural drivers of homelessness, which counters the logic behind criminalization and relies heavily on individual responsibility. Long term solutions require changes in the housing, education, and health systems that are racially equitable. Building Changes takes into consideration inadequate housing, health, and education access and support, inadequate social safety net, inadequate resources, and capacity of those working in systems, etc. This helps counter the individual responsibility narrative that is prevalent.

- *Ex: Housing costs, economic inequality, racism, and broken systems are putting people on the street, not individual failures. Existing policies and practices perpetuate inequitable support for children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness. Policy change is needed: WA State has the funds, and our community has the will to prevent and end homelessness equitably.*

Messages to shift the face of homelessness: Naming populations outside the archetypal stereotype of “the homeless” expands the public’s understanding of who is homeless. Since BC focuses on children, youth, and family homelessness, shed light on this population in messaging. Also use person-centered, strength-based language that centers people’s experiences.

- *Ex: Children, youth, and families are losing their housing – and 64% of the 37,000+ students experiencing homelessness in WA are youth of color. Our responses must be grounded in their experiences and designed to meet their unique needs equitably, holistically, and in a culturally appropriate manner. WA State has the funds, and our community has the will to advance these solutions.*

Housing Crisis Messaging

- **Shared Values Between Building Changes and Donors:** We all believe that safe and stable homes serve as the foundation for good health, quality education, and economic opportunities that build a thriving

community. We care about those living in our communities and want to ensure that everyone has access to the services they need to find a place they can call home. When more people are stably housed, the entire community can flourish.

- **Humanizing the Face of Homelessness:** The face of homelessness includes children, youth, and working families in our communities. More than 37K students and many of their families in WA state do not have homes. Children walking to school, moms shopping at the grocery store, or clerks working at local shops might be experiencing homelessness. Ensuring that everyone has access to the housing support services they need takes collective effort and commitment. By supporting Building Changes, you're investing in the power of community partnerships to innovate, evaluate, and advocate for equitable housing solutions.
- **Broad Solutions:** There is no single face of homelessness, no single reason why people become homeless, and no single defining experience of homelessness. Strategies to address homelessness must be racially equitable, holistic, culturally appropriate, and informed by the unique experiences and needs of the people impacted. Together with our partners, Building Changes innovates, evaluates, and advocates for change in housing and homeless systems so that all children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness can get the support they need to thrive.
- **Problems:** Homelessness disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). Children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness, particularly those of color, have unique needs which are not being met by our housing and homeless systems. Under-resourcing, lack of capacity, and racially biased policies and practices in these systems contribute to this problem.
- **Our Key Solutions:**
 - Building Changes holds housing and homeless systems accountable for adopting racially equitable and culturally responsive policies and practices.
 - We advance innovative housing strategies that are informed by community, research, and evaluation and take into account that each person's unique needs.
 - We advocate for "Diversion," a common-sense approach that uses customized problem solving, light case management, and one-time financial assistance to cover expenses such as move-in costs, security deposit, past due eviction debt, car repair, etc. Diversion is far more effective than cookie-cutter solutions which do not take into account people's unique situations.
 - Another solution is flexible funding which allows service providers to innovate and better meet the individual needs of children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness.
 - We build the capacity of housing and service providers through peer learning, training, and one-on-one assistance. We believe that building the capacity of community-based service providers is critical to advancing meaningful change.
 - We support community-based organizations to design and deliver responses that target service gaps facing children, youth, and families of color experiencing homelessness.
 - We advocate for new legislation, policy changes, and sustainable funding that will ensure greater housing stability for children, youth, and families.
 - We make connections and encourage collaboration between the housing system and the education and health systems.

- We push for a more holistic response to meeting the needs of young people and families experiencing homelessness, particularly BIPOC communities whose needs are not being met.
- We advocate for continued investment in the Washington Youth & Families Fund, a unique combination of public and private dollars that supports innovative housing strategies and interventions statewide.

WYFF Messaging

- The WA Youth and Families Fund (WYFF) combines public and private dollars and grants funds to organizations and tribes providing housing support services to youth and families experiencing homelessness. Because grantees are community-based, they understand their community members' culture and specific needs.
- WYFF grantees provide Diversion services for youth and families—an approach that uses creative problem solving, case management, and flexible funding for things like security first and last months' rent, security deposits, utility payments, eviction debt, car repair, and childcare. This customized approach helps to address people's individual experiences and needs.
- WYFF grantees also support youth exiting systems of care (such as foster care, juvenile detention, or behavioral health facilities) to access the skills, education, and employment needed to be stably housed.
- Building Changes manages WYFF. We survey the homelessness response field to identify organizations and tribes that are innovating, conduct research and evaluation with those partner groups to see what works and what doesn't, disseminate those learnings statewide, and advocate for more funding for those solutions with the WA State legislature.

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Education Messaging

- **Shared Values Between Building Changes and Donors:** Students experiencing homelessness deserve a fair shot at success. We all care about the kids in our community and believe they must have a stable home to serve as a foundation for learning, academic success, and a solid future. When students receive the support they need, they can and do succeed. Their success reverberates into their families and our community, and they carry the positive impacts into adulthood.
- **Including Donors in Solutions:** Student homelessness is a crisis with more than 37K young people living without a home. They each have unique backgrounds and needs that call for tailored and culturally appropriate support. By supporting Building Changes, you are investing in equitable strategies, research, and partnerships that will help improve academic and housing outcomes and ensure that all youth in WA state have a home.

- **Racial Education Gap:** Youth of color make up 64% of the 37K+ students experiencing homelessness. Only 24% of students experiencing homelessness were proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) compared to 53% of housed students. Only 14% of students experiencing homelessness were proficient in Math compared to 40% of housed students. These numbers demonstrate how homelessness exacerbates the well-documented racial education gap. The education system has insufficient knowledge, capacity, and resources to respond to the unique and varied needs of students experiencing homelessness.
- **Our Key Solutions**
 - Informed by statewide data, schools, community partners, students, and families, Building Changes identifies strategies and develops tools for addressing the unique needs of students experiencing homelessness.
 - We provide tailored assistance to school districts to help them identify gaps in support for students experiencing homelessness and develop solutions that are racially equitable and culturally responsive.
 - We facilitate partnerships between the school districts and community-based housing organizations to provide comprehensive support for students experiencing homelessness. Poor academic outcomes are a result of interrelated issues that cannot be tackled solely by schools.
 - We build the capacity of school staff and community partners to better serve students experiencing homelessness by providing training, tools, and peer learning opportunities.
 - We research, evaluate, and disseminate successful strategies for improving academic and housing outcomes for students experiencing homelessness and advocate for more funding for these strategies.

HSSP Messaging

- HSSP is the first program of its kind in the nation, requiring coordination between education and housing services. Grants are made to both school districts and community-based organizations to identify students experiencing homelessness, coordinate support, and provide housing resources.
- HSSP improves school staff capacity to help unhoused students graduate from high school, address mental health needs, and streamline referrals to services in the community. Community-based organizations funded by HSSP connect students and families with housing services and can provide flexible funding to help them with urgent needs such as emergency rental assistance, move-in costs, and utility payments.
- Building Changes facilitates greater coordination between school districts and community-based organizations and provides training, technical support, and knowledge-sharing. We disseminate learnings statewide, advocate for solutions that work, and push the WA State legislature to provide more funding.

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HEALTH MESSAGING

- **Shared Values Between Building Changes and Donors: Lead with Values:** We all strive for healthy bodies and minds so that we can show up for our families and friends, at our jobs, and in our communities. We believe that everyone — including children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness — should have

access to both health care and the building blocks of good health. What Covid has taught us is that we are only as healthy as the person next to us and the person next to them. A thriving community is a healthy one.

- **Donors Invest in Solutions:** As a Building Changes supporter, you know that the homelessness crisis is a public health crisis, and that homelessness and health are interrelated. Healthy people are the foundation for healthy communities. By giving to Building Changes, you are investing in not only the improved health of children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness, but the health of our community. When we all have equitable access to housing and health care, we can all better support each other as individuals, in our families, and in our community.

- **Broad Solutions:** Government, schools, and organizations must prioritize funding and programs to increase and improve health care that supports children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness. Building Changes facilitates cross collaboration across communities and our housing, education, and health systems. Together, we can provide culturally appropriate services for BIPOC communities that disproportionately experience homelessness and health disparities.

- **Problems:** Homelessness negatively influences people’s physical and mental health, and those problems increase the risk of homelessness. Pregnant women are at greater risk of homelessness, and homelessness increases health risks for pregnant women. The pandemic has magnified these challenges, and without access to shelter, proper hygiene, and PPE, the housing crisis is also a health crisis. BIPOC communities are disproportionately impacted Our healthcare system is insufficiently resourced, and there is a lack of knowledge on how to address homelessness in a health context.

- **Our Key Solutions**
 - Building Changes is committed to ensuring that children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness have equitable access to health care that supports both their health and housing stability.
 - We hold our healthcare system accountable to adopt racially equitable and culturally responsive policies that also remove barriers to care for children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness, particularly around COVID-19 as well as maternal health.
 - We partner with and advocate for increased funding for community clinics since they are often better able to consider people’s backgrounds and cultures.
 - We work to ensure that unaccompanied homelessness youth can access health care without a parent or guardian.
 - We push state agencies and healthcare providers that interact with children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness to address their unique needs related to physical health, mental health, nutrition access, etc.
 - We collaborate with the housing and health agencies to pilot programs that ensure pregnant and post-partum women have their health and housing needs met. This includes training health workers and maternal support service providers in housing support strategies.

CORE ORGANIZATIONAL MESSAGING

Organizational Boilerplate/30-Second Elevator Pitch: *The following is suggested language to use throughout the organization as a boilerplate on materials as for 30-second verbal elevator speech.*

Child and family homelessness in Washington State is a crisis with more than 37K students and many of their families experiencing homelessness. Building Changes pushes for change at the intersections of our housing, education, and health systems with a through-line of advancing racially equitable solutions. We partner with agencies working on the ground level, identify innovative solutions, evaluate what works and what doesn't, disseminate best practices, and then advocate for more funding for successful programs. Our work is directly informed by individuals who have experienced homelessness, and their voices are centered in developing the solutions. Together with our partners and supporters, we are working to ensure that everyone has a safe and stable home to serve as the foundation for a thriving community for us all.

On Racial Equity

Black, Indigenous, and people of color disproportionately experience homelessness, educational injustice, and health inequities due to historical and systemic racism. To address homelessness, we must address racism at its roots, and the trauma it continues to perpetuate. Building Changes is committed to dismantling barriers to access and ensure that our housing, education, and healthcare systems are racially equitable and culturally informed.

What Makes BC Unique?:

- ***We serve all of Washington.*** We advance solutions in communities across the state, including rural areas, which have the highest per-capita rate of student homelessness.
- ***We advance equity through tailored solutions.*** Our work is tailored to meet the needs of those who have been least supported by housing practices, policies, and systems.
- ***We work at the systems-level.*** We do not provide direct service to people experiencing homelessness. We work upstream to create changes in our housing, education, and health systems' policies and practices.
- ***We use an interdisciplinary approach.*** We support and build the capacity of direct-service providers, conduct research and evaluation, and advocate for policy change.
- ***We focus on children, youth, and families.*** Children, youth, and families have specific needs that are not being addressed by the systems that serve them. We can prevent generational cycles of homelessness and build solutions that center the experiences of young people.

Our Approach & How We Work:

- *We center people and racial equity* not only in our goals and objectives but also in every aspect of HOW we do the work;
- *We collaborate* with community organizations, school districts, government agencies, and other institutions that serve children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness, and listen to identify gaps in services, practices, and policies;
- *We innovate* based on what we learn from communities, we develop and advance solutions;
- *We evaluate* what is most effective and for whom through research and data (both quantitative and qualitative); and

- *We advocate* and bring the most promising solutions to scale through education and advocacy. We push for equitable, culturally-informed responses in and across the housing, education, and health systems so that all children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness get the support they need.
- *We know that housing alone is not the solution to homelessness.* Therefore, we look at the intersection of adjacent systems with homelessness — namely education and health — to provide tailored, population-specific interventions and supports.

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KEY FACTS

Following are some key facts that can be peppered throughout donor and funder communications. When selecting a fact, choose one or two for impact rather than a multitude which can overwhelm the reader.

- BIPOC children, youth, and families experience homelessness at higher rates than white counterparts.
- There are more than 37,000 students and many of their families experiencing homelessness in Washington State.
- More than 64% students experiencing homelessness in Washington State are youth of color.
- Students experiencing homelessness have academic outcomes below those of students who are housed.
 - Only 24% of students experiencing homelessness were proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) compared to 53% of housed students.
 - Only 14% of students experiencing homelessness were proficient in Math compared to 40% of housed students.
 - Given that more unhoused students are youth of color, homelessness deepens the well-documented racial education gap.
- Pregnancy can increase a woman’s risk of becoming homeless, and pregnant women face significantly greater health risks while unstably housed.
- Half of school-age homeless children experience anxiety, depression, or withdrawal compared to 18 percent of non-homeless children.
- Homelessness and hunger are closely intertwined. Homeless children are twice as likely to experience hunger as their non-homeless peers. Hunger has negative effects on the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of children.

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REFERENCES

- [Fundraising for the Collective Good webinar by Big Duck](#)
- [External-facing Strategic Plan](#)
- [WYFF policy brief](#)
- [HSSP policy brief](#)
- [Housing Work Factsheet](#)
- [Education Work Factsheet](#)
- [Health Work Factsheet](#)

- [About Building Changes](#)
- [K-12 Outcomes Report and Dashboard](#)

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