

STEP 5: FIND COMMON GROUND

“Enabling Narratives” provide opportunities for people to feel that their actions, such as to welcome migrants or to support structural change in migration policies, will make a difference.



Focus on What We Have in Common

Finding common ground is a key step towards creating narrative change on migration. While [thinking local](#) enables us to identify what we have in common through a shared space or community activity, finding common ground helps us deepen mutual understanding, empathy and recognize potential for transformation and a joint way forward. Finding common ground can help further nuance our analysis of our target audience, including [their values](#), concerns and the [stories](#) we choose to tell. It can also help us create [new allies and unlikely partnerships](#) to collectively transform narratives across different sectors.

Finding common ground on an issue as diverse, contentious and often divisive as migration may be one of the most challenging tasks at hand. Yet it offers an opportunity build bridges, open spaces for dialogue and invite a balanced debate on migration.

Start where people are, reflecting an understanding of the way the world looks to your audience. Important steps towards finding common ground include building on shared values and experiences, genuine listening to migrant voices and our target audience's perspectives and identifying trusted messengers to help us connect.

Expanding our understanding about our audience's values and finding common ground on difficult issues is an important aspect of achieving positive change. By focusing on our common experiences and values, we reduce the weight given to what we may disagree on. Underscoring what we have in common expands a sense of empathy, community, and belonging that can be supportive towards realizing the human rights of migrants.



[NoA](#), the international community of creatives behind TV2 Denmark's video "[All That We Share](#)" brings together diverse segments of society, backgrounds and beliefs. The moderator asks a series of questions that underscore what these seemingly different people have in common: love, fear, loneliness, childhood, laughter and a devotion to Denmark. The video shows how there is more that brings us together than we think.



In "[Look Beyond Borders](#)", Amnesty International brought ordinary Europeans and migrants together to show what happens when we look in each other's eyes for 4 minutes. Based on research by psychologist Arthur Aron, the video shows how these 4 minutes of looking into a stranger's eyes, brings people closer. It helps them recognize each other as real people, who – just like us - have families, loved ones, friends, their own stories, dreams, and goals. Read more [here](#).

💡 Numerous organizations, such as [Hope Not Hate](#) or the [People's Action Institute](#), have been working to find common ground on a range of issues, including migration and LGBTI rights, using so-called deep canvassing techniques. The one-on-one conversations based on empathetic listening, are particularly effective in finding common ground. Read more about their work [here](#) and on listening below.

Listening in the Migration Debate

One of the most critical steps in finding common ground is to create opportunities to listen to each other and cultivate empathy. We are all “guilty” at some point of not listening, instead trying to convince our counterpart. When our views are challenged, our brains react as if we were under attack. This is why trying to convince people they are wrong may be perceived as attempting to shout over or shut them down.

Listening in the migration debate is particularly challenging, as it is often an emotive issue that has led to vilifying and demonizing people with harmful impacts on their rights. Accepting such discourse as the status quo results in the normalization of polarization, division and distrust and prevents balanced and nuanced conversations. Most importantly, it often results in migrant voices being shut out and inhibits potential allies from speaking out in support.

Challenging such divisive and harmful speech is therefore key to our mission to shift towards more balanced narratives, but how do we achieve this without aggravating polarization or hardening people's views?

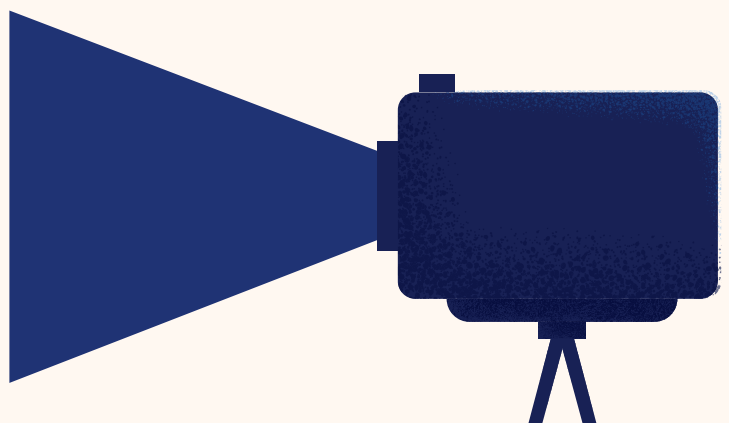
We know that the majority of people seek unity and boundedness. At the same time, they may feel conflicted about the issues that anti-migrant narratives raise, as migrants are often used as scapegoats for deep-rooted societal problems and fears. For example, while some might blame migrants for ‘taking up’ social housing, the concern at the root of this fear may be about how governments are allocating resources for public services. For example, while some might blame migrants for “taking up” social housing, the concern at the root of this fear may be about how governments are allocating resources for public services.

Listening to and acknowledging these concerns can be the first step in opening the space for a nuanced debate on migration. Listening will help us better understand the real and perceived concerns, more readily discuss the complexities and to ultimately, find common ground to address challenges together.

💡 In the United States, the [Talking Turkey Project](#) by Immigration Impact brings together people from different ends of the political spectrum to engage in a frank and open discussion about migration. The discussion begins with the question: What does it mean to be American? This shared value provides an opportunity to begin a fruitful exchange of ideas. Immigration Impact emphasizes the role of listening and asking open-ended questions to build a productive exchange.

💡 The Jesuit Refugee Services partnered with the Sydney Alliance in Australia to host a series called [Our Table Talks](#). This series invites 100 people at a time to participate in a facilitated migration discussion based in values, sharing stories, listening and finding common ground. Participants are individuals with diverse views on migration. The discussion begins in small groups where all participants share their values and personal stories illustrating these values. Next, an individual with a story of migration shares his / her story with the larger group. Then the facilitator helps the participants reflect on the story of migration and identify their shared values to find common ground.

💡 [Hope Not Hate](#) went across the UK from town to town sitting at kitchen tables and in town halls to engage with citizens about their viewpoints on migration. This research, called the [National Conversations Project](#) found that most people had a balanced and nuanced view on migration when offered the space to discuss face-to-face. By understanding individuals on this one-to-one level, Hope Not Hate found an opportunity to build common ground.



Listen to & Amplify Migrant Stories

"Nothing about us without us" calls for representation of the voices of affected individuals and reflects the principles of participation and empowerment, which are foundational to a human rights-based approach.

If you are in a position of relative power or privilege, listening, providing platforms and networks are powerful and necessary tools to give space to marginalized voices. These may be people from migrant or local communities who have a right to be heard, consulted and participate in achieving social change.

Listening to and amplifying migrant stories is a key component to any debate on migration. Truly understanding the diverse experiences and views of migrants and those affected by migration can enrich our audience's perspectives and facilitate finding common ground. Amplifying these stories can take the form of providing a platform in policy discussions, sharing these stories online, creating in person community fora, covering migrant perspectives in media reporting, and ensuring these stories are included when we communicate about migration.

Remember not to reduce migrants to just their "migrantness" and make sure people can tell their whole story beyond how and why they came to be a person on the move. Find ways to create safe and accessible spaces for undocumented and other migrants who might avoid telling their stories due to possible harmful consequences.

💡 United We Dream advocates for the rights of young people regardless of their immigration status and runs the [Home is Here](#) campaign. Under the campaign, they produced a series of videos featuring "Dreamers," young undocumented people protected from deportation under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. One video profiles [Zaid](#), a talented chef in Kansas City who was born in Mexico City. Another shares the story of [Yazmin](#), born in Mexico and now an aspiring surgeon who has completed medical school. [Ju Hong](#) came to the United States when he was 11 years old and is a passionate dancer. When he finally received his DACA status, he was able to return to South Korea to visit his grandmother before she passed away. The videos amplify migrant voices while emphasizing common experiences and values: family, friendship, hope, aspirations, struggle and joy.

💡 In Malaysia, R.Age's [Chin-Up project](#) highlighted stories from the Chin refugee community to respond to the shared question: Where do you see yourself in 2020? The program enabled people around the world to listen to individuals from the Chin community speak about their shared hopes and dreams for the future. Amplifying these stories of hope helped secure refugee protection for the Chin community.

Active Listening

In order to start the conversation from where people are we need to be engaged in active listening. Active listening enables you to nuance your understanding of your audience beyond your initial assumptions toward a more genuine insight to their hopes, fears, dreams and motivations. This applies when you are communicating with your base of supporters, the “moveable middle” and people who might oppose your views on migration.

For this, you need to be genuinely curious about understanding someone’s viewpoint and how they came to this understanding. If you are simply waiting for your turn to speak to convince them of your own opinion, or listening out only for arguments that you can rebut, it may make the other person feel insecure, unsafe in sharing their genuine interpretation of the world and they will shut down.

Everyone has the need to feel safe and listened to. Being attentive and responsive by asking follow-up questions will make people more receptive and help you find common ground. Do not assume you know what they think and definitely do not tell them what they should think.

That is not to say listening is easy – especially if we feel our values, ideas about migration and human rights are threatened by what the other person or group is saying. However, remember that listening is a process and it does not imply you condone your counterpart’s views. Recognize that there is usually more to the story than first appears. Indeed, you may even agree that you share common concerns and that these are not really about migration at all. Try to listen without anxiety and be open to hearing all sides. This process will help you identify the ground you can build upon to shift the person towards a more balanced viewpoint on migration and migrants.



Key Steps in Active Listening

Listening can happen in person, via focus groups or online. Think about ways you can incorporate listening techniques in everyday conversations or your work:

1. Begin by asking an open-ended question that is non-judgmental and invites people to tell you a story.
2. Ask follow-up questions. Make sure to not lead the question with your opinion on migration or make them feel backed into a corner.
3. Reflect and repeat back what they have told you. This will make sure they know you have heard them.
4. Insert a personal story that finds common ground with what they have said but provides an opportunity to shift the discussion.

Tips for Active Listening:

- Be genuinely curious about listening to the other person's point of view.
- Resist the urge to interrupt them with your own opinions or objections to statements you don't agree with.
- Use active body posture to reflect you are listening. This can include nodding your head and making eye contact. If you are bored or resentful, people will be able to perceive this in your body language.

Open-Ended Questions

First, refer back to our activity on [shared values](#). If you know your audience's values, you can begin with an open-ended question that connects with their values. For example, if you know the audience values employment and security, this is a place to start.

Which of the following is a good example of an open-ended question that is non-judgmental? Why?

1. The job market should be equally open to all, migrants and citizens alike, don't you think?
2. Why do you think it is okay to discriminate when it comes to employment?
3. How is the job market in your area these days?

Activity: Active Listening

Next, let us apply this to your own work or conversations related to migration. Think about your audience or a person you would like to engage with. This could be a member of the public or a policy-maker.

Reference your activity on shared values from [Step 2](#). With this in hand, complete the following exercise with a specific issue related to migration that is relevant to your audience's values.



What is an example of an open-ended question that can lead to a productive discussion?

Optional: If you are doing this in a group, you can role-play a question and answer discussion.

Next: What is a non-judgmental follow-up question?

What is a story or anecdote you could use that builds a bridge to find common ground and reflects a more human rights-based approach to migration?

Questions need to be adapted to your audience, whether that is your base, the moveable middle or those who oppose your views on migration. Understanding your audience's opinions will help you hone messaging that builds on [shared values](#).

Activity: Adapt Messaging

After you have listened to your audience and members of migrant communities, how has this deepened your understanding of their viewpoints? Have you been able to confirm your shared values and find common ground?

Take some time to reflect and decide whether any aspects of your communications strategy and messaging may need to be adapted to fit what you have in common.



For example, More in Common found how messaging, which balanced competing core beliefs, found most appeal with survey respondents. Read more about their research "[Speaking to Core Beliefs](#)."



After you have had a chance to listen to your audience, list a statement you have heard that struck you as particularly important. This statement should reveal something about your audience's values.



Next, how would you adapt your existing messaging to emphasize common ground? Does this common ground provide any opportunities for people to be part of shifting the narrative on migrants and migration and achieving change?



Find the Best Messenger

As relevant as the narratives and messages delivered are the narrators and messengers who deliver them. Appreciate that people will be more or less receptive to messages depending on who is delivering that message. Bring on board a range of messengers who can speak persuasively to your audience and to different aspects of the often complex and multidimensional migration picture.

For example, think of ways that bring your messages into the spaces where your audience may be more likely to listen, such as through popular culture (TV shows, music festivals), community spaces and activities. Who could be good allies and messengers in such spaces?

Be aware that some messengers may be unsuited to deliver certain messages or to engage with particular audiences, as they are likely to be seen as part of the problem. For instance, a politician who could speak persuasively to national policy-makers about border governance issues might not be seen as an authentic champion of inclusive communities at the local level. Empower trusted local actors to tell the story of migration and migrants in their community, city or municipality.¹

¹ For additional information on identifying messengers, see also [Step 3](#).



Summary

- Start where people are, reflecting an understanding of the way the world looks to your audience.
- By focusing on our common experiences and values, we reduce the weight given to what we may disagree on.
- Listening in the migration debate will help us better understand the real and perceived concerns, more readily discuss the complexities and to ultimately, find common ground to address challenges together.
- Listening to and amplifying migrant stories is a key component to any debate on migration. Truly understanding the diverse experiences and views of migrants and those affected by migration can enrich our perspectives and facilitate finding common ground.
- Adapt your messaging to achieve common ground and bring on board messengers who can speak persuasively to your audience and to different aspects of the often complex and multidimensional migration picture.



Take Action

- Think of ways to provide platforms to migrant voices and bring in diverse perspectives to inform your work.
 - Use the listening techniques in this step to have a conversation with someone around issues related to migration.
 - Share inspiring examples of experiences, stories and values that unite people by underscoring what we have in common by using the hashtag #StandUp4Migrants.
- In the next step, Build a Big Tent, learn how to multiply your impact by increasing your allies.