To: Interested Parties
From: Building Back Together & Fellow Americans
Re: Build Back Better Agenda - Creative Testing Rd. 1
Date: December 9, 2021

Overview

Building Back Together and Fellow Americans partnered to produce and test creative content to amplify the policy success stories of the Biden-Harris administration and support the passage of its domestic agenda — from here on referred to as the "Build Back Better" plan.

Fellow Americans' network of creators pitched dozens of concepts, from small businesses getting back on their feet thanks to the American Rescue Plan to parents whose lives have been changed by the expanded Child Tax Credit. In this first of what is expected to be several rounds of production, we chose to create 19 videos that, by design, varied widely in narrative approach, production value, and tone — keying off of insights from the 2020 campaign cycle, test results from earlier in 2021, as well as public opinion research.

Our goal first and foremost was to identify creative that could be distributed to meaningfully influence public opinion during this critical period when Congress is debating the Build Back Better plan and the immediate aftermath of what we hope will be signed legislation. Secondly, we aimed to find approaches and issues that proved effective and could be worth exploring further in future rounds of creative production, especially as we move into 2022.

Methodology

Open Labs tested these videos (links in the appendix below) in four batches throughout September 2021, using in-survey randomized controlled trials — split into control and treatment groups in which each respondent sees one ad and is then immediately asked the series of outcome questions.

Our primary metric of success is **Biden approval** — both for the reason that it serves as a reasonable estimate of whether an ad effectively persuaded a participant into a supporter of the administration's policy agenda, as well as the fact that it's a question on which most people are already informed and have fairly strong opinions on, making signs of movement more meaningful. As Open Labs put it, "Everyone we successfully persuade starts against us, skeptical, or ambivalent."

Secondarily, we looked at other metrics of Biden-Harris policy success (**favorability**, **COVID approval**, **economic approval**, etc.) and **support for the Build Back Better agenda**. Finally,

we also measured the creative treatments' effects on **social trust** (e.g., trust in other people) and **institutional trust** (e.g., confidence in democratic institutions).

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- **On the whole, the creative treatments averaged positive, statistically significant results on nearly all metrics.** On nearly every metric, this batch of creative saw average movement that was positive — and on all but two metrics (Democratic Party favorability support and institutional trust), that positive movement was statistically significant. Open Labs reports that this performance, even considering the variety of tactics employed, is on par with other ads made by partners of the administration.

- **The top performing ads saw strong movement on Biden approval.** Three videos had an outsized impact on Biden approval over the average ad (+0.8%): "Real Minds Changed" (+3.1%), "Joe Gets It Done" (+2.1%), and "Small Business Success" (+2.0%).

- **Creative that centered on Joe Biden as it relates to delivering on the policy agenda performed well** — a finding that is consistent with Fellow Americans' 2020 results and Open Labs' research this cycle. While most of our videos leaned into personal testimonials, "Joe Gets It Done" could be described as a hype video for the administration's accomplishments in its first months in office and it saw positive movement on nearly every metric.

- **Ads that illustrated accomplishments performed better on the whole than forward-looking spots.** Open Labs chalks this up to research on swing voters that indicates they care about what you did more than what you'd like to get done. All three of the top performing ads were centered on tangible achievements of the administration and the impact that policy has had on people's lives.

- **Two notable characteristics of successful testimonials** (which made up the majority of Round 1 content) **include:**

  - **The protagonist expressing initial skepticism of Biden**, which speaks to the fact that persuadable audiences are generally not already members of his fan club. This finding echoes findings from the 2020 cycle that Biden endorsements from former Republicans or people who voted for Trump in 2016 were effective at moving persuadable voters; and

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- ○ **Footage of the protagonist at work.** We haven't fully isolated why this might be effective, but it does speak to a level of trust or believability that persuadable voters identify with people with blue-collar backgrounds. It's worth noting that this finding was consistent when the video featured a small-business owner. Those who were featured visibly doing work tended to perform better.

- **Child Tax Credit ads were mostly positive, but didn't move the needle as much as other angles.** One of the ways in which the American Rescue Plan is directly helping millions of families is through monthly payments of the expanded Child Tax Credit. While none was a top performer, each of our CTC-related testimonials showed positive movement, indicating that it might be worth exploring additional angles. Notably, while Leah's Child Tax Credit testimonial showed positive movement on Biden approval (+0.5%) it was one of our top performers on social trust (+3.6%)). One potential explanation is that Leah's testimonial focused on tangible expenses for school, seemingly solving a real crisis in her life and potentially reinforcing the idea that we have a responsibility to our neighbors.

- **When the audience is represented in the video, it resonates.** "Real Minds Changed" was our top performer, perhaps because it employed so many of the tactics that proved effective — Luis' initial skepticism of Biden, footage of Luis working, underscoring a specific policy that Biden has already enacted, and demonstrating real impact on his life. It was effective across all audiences (+3.1%) but this story resonated even more dramatically among Black (+9%) and Latinx voters (+10%). This is similar to a lesson from the 2020 cycle that the best creative to move a certain target audience was generally created by someone from that audience.

- **Not all effective videos had a negative impact on social trust (but the most effective videos did).** Among the most consistent findings in Fellow Americans' work is that effective political messaging tends to erode people's trust in one another. These tests reinforced that conclusion, but also showed evidence that it's not always the case. While some of the videos that moved the needle the most on Biden approval had larger negative effects on social trust ("Real Minds Changed," -1.1%; "Small Business Success", -1.0%), we saw two notable exceptions: "Joe Gets It Done" was our second-best overall performer (+2.1%) and showed positive movement on social trust (+0.6%); and "Back to Work - Lina" was our fourth best video overall on Biden approval (+1.4%) and had strong positive movement on social trust (+3.5%). Our hypothesis, based on past analysis of political content's effect on social trust, is that "Lina" quickly pivots after a brief negative start to a positive and optimistic tone. We also see many

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people portrayed, potentially leaving the viewer with the feeling that a community experienced Lina's story.

Recommendations for Further Exploration

There's more work to do and tremendous opportunity in telling the story of Biden-Harris policy achievements in a way that resonates with persuadable audiences — and that's getting more true all the time. As evidenced by this batch, the success stories from the American Rescue Plan and Biden's first several months in office provide plenty of compelling fodder for future content. And we're hopeful that the passage of the infrastructure bill and the imminent passage of the reconciliation package will provide a whole host of options. The key, as we've learned here, is to tell these stories in a way that speaks to what got accomplished and who was helped.

Similarly, we'd like to source more protagonists who can represent Biden skeptics who've been won over because they've felt the impact of these policies. This is particularly true when it comes to storytelling on the Child Tax Credit.

Finally, we'd like to dive further into the makeup of our target audiences and identify ways to make more content featuring subjects and made by creators who come from those backgrounds — demographically, regionally, and culturally. We have reason to believe this is a key part of a successful messaging campaign as we head into 2022.

Appendix

Full List of Creative Assets

Standout Performers - Recommended for Wider Distribution
- Real Minds Changed
- Joe gets it done
- Small Business Success

Above-Average Performers - Recommended for Narrow Distribution
- Back to Work - Lina
- Child Tax Credit - Alex

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- [Fair Share - Borden](#)
- [Clean Water](#)
- [Michigan Forever](#)

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