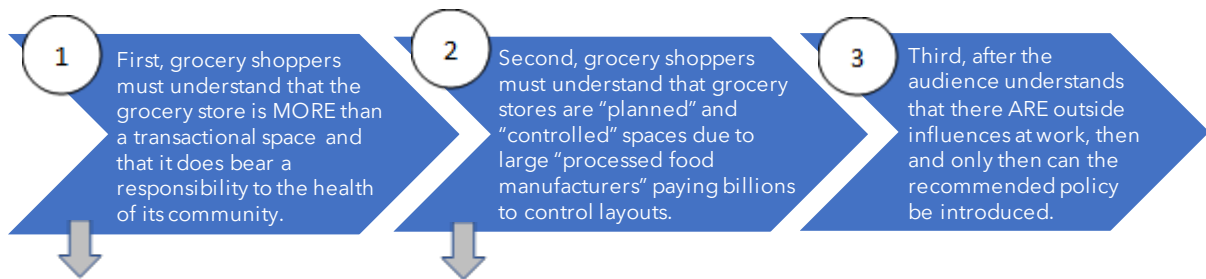


# Messaging Guidance for an Effective Healthier Grocery Experience Campaign

Effective messaging is paramount to a campaign's success. In early 2021, the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) hired a strategic communications and research firm (Seven Letter) to measure public opinion of potential policies designed to make the grocery shopping experience healthier for consumers. The research explored the effectiveness of messages designed to activate supporters and persuade skeptics across the country. Seven Letter identified key messages that resonate most with grocery shoppers as well as those that are less effective. The results of these findings are summarized below.

## *Key Messaging Takeaways for Communicating About Healthier Grocery Stores:*

- **Keep the tone positive.** The most effective messages focus on helping grocery stores promote healthier items, rather than asking them to *stop* promoting unhealthy items. It's about making it *easier* for shoppers to eat healthfully, rather than making it *harder* for them to eat unhealthfully.
- **Depersonalize messages.** Shoppers believe that they are healthier and more in control than they actually are. Any argument that describes how a shopper has been manipulated is only going to serve to make them skeptical and defensive. Instead, depersonalize the message. It's not "**You** shouldn't have to compromise **your** health when **you** go to the grocery store..." It's "**grocery shoppers** shouldn't have to compromise **their** health when at the grocery store."
- **Argument sequencing is critical.** Building on the point above, without laying the supporting contextual foundation, messages about policies will fall on deaf ears. If the order of information fails, policy messaging can actually have the opposite effect – convincing consumers that action in the grocery store is NOT needed or harmful. The critical contextual foundation is laid out below.



Example of #1 (above)	Example of #2 (above)
"Grocery stores are a <b>vital part of our communities</b> and have a responsibility to the people that shop in their stores every day. We should encourage grocery stores to <b>build on that community trust and promote healthier choices.</b> "	" <b>Consumers want healthier grocery stores.</b> Giant processed food manufacturers pay billions each year for the power to plan grocery store layouts. They decide how and where their products AND their competitors' products are displayed. Shouldn't grocery stores be promoting the healthier options that <i>consumers want</i> instead?"
KEY FACT: More than half of shoppers believe grocery stores have a responsibility to improve the health of the communities they serve. Two-thirds of non-white grocery shoppers and more than three-fourths of younger grocery shoppers (ages 18-34) agree.	KEY FACT: "Planned" and "controlled" are the most effective ways to describe the grocery store environment. More forceful terms like "manipulated" or "rigged" are less effective.

- **It's ok to criticize grocery stores**... as long as they're not the SOLE target. A statement like "We can – and should – ask our grocery stores to do better" does not work well. Shoppers generally have a good relationship with their grocery stores. Messaging must encourage the entire system to do better. A better statement might be, "***We can – and should – ask food producers and grocery stores to produce and promote the healthier options that consumers want.***"
- **Parents who shop with kids are a key audience.** They consistently respond more favorably to potential policies designed to make the grocery store experience healthier. This demographic is also much more prone to engage in "impulse" purchasing at the grocery store and finds it difficult to shop with their kids because of the amount of junk food and marketing efforts aimed at their kids. As a result, they are receptive to ideas that might transform the grocery space.
- **A softer touch.** Instead of "requiring" or even "asking" grocery stores to promote healthier choices, consumers prefer a less forceful term: "***encouraging.***"

- **“Healthier Grocery Stores” or “Healthier Grocery Experience.”** These terms work much better with consumers than “Healthy Retail.” Shoppers thought of “retail” as a place to purchase clothing, not food.

Roadblock	How to respond
<p><b>SUPERIORITY BIAS:</b> <i>We shouldn't underestimate people's ability to choose what's best for themselves and their families.</i></p>	<p><i>It's not that shoppers aren't capable of making healthy choices in a grocery store, it's that (in many cases) they are being pushed towards unhealthy options. <b><u>Big food manufacturers are pulling the strings to maximize their own profitability.</u></b> That sabotages our efforts to eat healthier.</i></p>
<p><b>PATERNALISM:</b> <i>Policies requiring grocery stores to promote healthier options would be burdensome and a step in the wrong direction.</i></p>	<p><b><u>More information is always better</u></b> - especially when it comes to our health and the health of our families. Policies requiring grocery stores to promote healthier options would be helpful to improve the way we all eat.</p>
<p><b>OVERREACH:</b> <i>Why are we talking about regulating grocery stores in the first place?</i></p>	<p>Grocery stores are a <b><u>vital part of our communities</u></b> and have a responsibility to the people that shop in their stores every day. We should encourage grocery stores to build on that community trust and promote healthier choices.</p>
<p><b>SUGARY DRINKS (CONVENIENCE)</b> <i>Shoppers find it convenient to have soda offered throughout the store.</i></p>	<p>[WORKS BEST WITH PARENTS] Most people want to get in and out of the grocery store as quickly as possible. And sometimes when they're in a rush, <b><u>convenience overrides shoppers' best judgement.</u></b> Sugary beverage companies <b><u>pay</u></b> to feature their products as frequently as possible (around 25 times in a shopping trip) to make it as <b><u>convenient</u></b> as possible to purchase their products. Imagine the health benefits of shopping at a store where healthier alternatives were displayed more frequently than sugary drinks.</p>
<p><b>SUGARY DRINKS (OVERREGULATION)</b> <i>Policies aimed at limiting consumer choice will make it harder for people to buy the products they want.</i></p>	<p>[WORKS BEST WITH THOSE WHO DISPLAY UNHEALTHY BEHAVIOR] Customers should absolutely be able to purchase sugary drinks if they want. There's already a whole aisle devoted to them. But we do know that when things are displayed more often - people purchase more of them. <b><u>We're not asking grocery stores to stop selling these products.</u></b> We're simply asking them to keep sugary drinks in their own aisle.</p>

<p><b>SUGARY DRINKS (OVERREGULATION)(continued)</b>  <i>Policies aimed at limiting consumer choice will make it harder for people to buy the products they want.</i></p>	<p><i>[WORKS BEST WITH THOSE WHO DISPLAY HEALTHY BEHAVIOR] Sugary drinks are the single largest source of added sugar in the American diet. They are linked <b>to increased risks of heart disease and type 2 diabetes</b>. Asking grocery stores to limit the placement of sugary drinks throughout their stores can have a real, positive impact on everyone's health.</i></p>
<p><b>HEALTHIER CHECKOUT (NOT WANTED)</b>  <i>Customers don't want healthier checkout lanes.</i></p>	<p><i>Consumers want to eat healthier, and more and more, they're choosing stores that promote good health. Grocery stores can <b>build customer loyalty, offer products customers want, AND make a profit</b> by offering healthier choices at checkout.</i></p>
<p><b>MARKETING (NO REGULATION NEEDED)</b>  <i>Grocery stores should be allowed to promote whatever food they want.</i></p>	<p><i>Our country has some of the highest rates of obesity and diabetes because marketing for sugary drinks and junk food really works. <b>Marketing in grocery stores is making us sick</b>. It's time to ask that they promote food and drinks that support our wellness instead of undermining it.</i></p>

### *Healthier Grocery Store Key Facts:*

- 82 percent believe grocery stores should promote healthier items.
- 73 percent think grocery stores should do more to make it easier for people to eat healthfully.
- 63 percent of parents who shop regularly with their kids think it's hard to go to the grocery store because there's so much junk food.
- 52 percent believe grocery stores have a responsibility to improve the health of the communities they serve.
- 81 percent would prefer to shop at a grocery store that offered promotions and sales on healthier items rather than unhealthy items.
- 85 percent of parents who grocery shop with their kids say that they would be more likely to purchase healthier items if they were clearly labeled.

### *Healthier Checkout Key Facts:*

- 70 percent consider healthier checkout a benefit to their shopping experience.
- 44 percent would SWITCH from their regular grocery store to a store that offered this type of checkout lane. An astounding 78 percent of parents who shop with their kids agree.

- 46 percent would choose a healthier checkout lane instead of a regular lane even if the line was LONGER. 76 percent of parents who shop with kids agree despite wanting to get in and out of the store more quickly.
- 56 percent think they'd purchase fewer unhealthy items if they weren't offered at the checkout lane. 59 percent of SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) participants agree, along with 81 percent of parents who shop with their kids.

*Soda in the Soda Aisle Key Facts:*

- 61 percent consider keeping soda in one place in grocery stores to be a benefit to their shopping experience.
- 36 percent would SWITCH from their regular grocery store to a store that stocked sugary beverages in only one place within their stores. An astounding 77 percent of parents who shop with their kids agree.
- 42 percent would support a policy that would require grocery stores to stock sugary beverages in one or fewer places (including no endcaps).
- 49 percent think they'd purchase fewer sugary beverages if they were only offered in only one place at their regular grocery stores. 58 percent of SNAP participants agree, along with 82 percent of parents who shop with their kids.

More Effective	Less Effective
We should encourage grocery stores to...	We must ask/require grocery stores to...
Healthier Grocery Stores Healthier Grocery Experience	Healthy Retail
Grocery stores are planned and controlled	Grocery stores are rigged
Healthier Checkout	Smarter Checkout
Healthier Options	Better-for-You Options
Keeping soda in the soda aisle Highlighting healthier beverages	A focused shopping experience Limiting sugary drinks to support better health

### *About the Methodology:*

Seven Letter conducted three virtual focus groups in three key markets: Detroit, Michigan (January 11, 2021), Denver, Colorado (January 14, 2021) and Atlanta, Georgia (January 19, 2021). The focus groups included a total of 29 participants who oversee the grocery shopping for their household. All participants shop within their respective cities – not the surrounding areas. All participants also voted in the 2020 election. Each group’s ethnicity, income, age, and political ideology mirrored the Q4 2019 Census projection for each city. Twenty of the participants were parents, eight were SNAP recipients.

Additionally, Seven Letter fielded a national, online messaging survey (M.o.E. +/- 2.7%) with 1,300 voters who oversee the grocery shopping for their household between February 15, 2021 and March 2, 2021. The sample closely mirrored projected voting demographics from the 2020 election.

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