

COMMUNICATING YOUR MESSAGE:

Step 1: Eliminate Acronyms and Jargon.

You may know what a CDC is, but to a lot of people, “CDC” refers to the Center for Disease Control. Everything you say or write in your message must be clear and understandable to the average person walking down the street.

Step 2: Think About Your Audience.

Spend as much time thinking about WHO you’re trying to get the message to as about WHAT you want to say.

Understand who you’re trying to reach and what motivates them. Your message must be compelling to that target audience.

Speak in a language your audience understands and relates to. Understand that you may need to highlight different things about your organization and its programs and project depending on your audience.

Step 3: Outline the Issue

Identify what you want your audience to understand.

Even (especially?!) when you’re talking with an elected official, never assume they know or comprehend how the programs you use work.

- Make it personal – relate the issue to the legislator’s constituents, family, friends and/or interests.
- Outline points that support your message.
- Show benefits and identify pitfalls (have alternatives to assure success)
- Clearly state any request(s) you have, i.e., support for funding, policy

Step 4: Develop a clear, positive, descriptive message

- Plan what you want to accomplish.
- Break complex issues down into concise, simple messages.
- Organize your thoughts and try to put your message in about 30 words
- Make sure your points are brief and concise.
- Control your presentation. Don’t get sidetracked.
- Provide references and offer supporting studies, research materials / documentations.

Who are you?

Establish your credibility and Why they should listen to You.

- Provide a brief overview of your organization
 - What you do/provide to the community, geographic focus area, how long you've been around your mission, how you are unique
- Talk about who you represent (low-income families, child care providers, etc)
- Talk about your partners (CDCs, local government, faith-based organizations, even advocacy groups) and how you work with them.
- Highlight organizational participation in key commissions, task forces, etc.
- Acknowledge where your funding comes from (private and public foundations, governmental agencies, etc.)

Talk about What You Provide to the Community

Provide details about the type of work you do

- Affordable housing – how: active developer or supporting organization?
- Child care – at what level: facilities, trainings, funding?
- Employment – Opportunities? Trainings? Work with employers?

Identify Accomplishments

Your organization has:

- Built/rehabbed _____ affordable units of housing
- Helped _____ number of people find employment
- Provided child care to _____ children

Make Your “Ask”

Clearly identify what you want your audience to do as follow-up to your meeting.

Develop an “Elevator Test” (or the 30 second intro)

Especially at the state and local level, you can run into your elected officials anywhere (standing in line at the grocery, picking your kids up from school or even, riding in an elevator). This brief encounter is often a golden opportunity to get your foot in the door with an elected official so it's best to be prepared!

Be able to describe your organization succinctly and distinguishably. Explain your “niche” if you have one.

If your organization or your constituents/clients are located in the elected official’s district, make sure that they know that upfront.

If you’re contacting a chair of a committee, who may not reside in your district, explain to them to why they should listen to you.

Always make a connection between your work and its impact on the decision-makers’ constituents.