

COMMUNICATING YOUR MESSAGE FOR IMPACTFUL ADVOCACY

As constituents and organizations, your lived experience and expertise can change public perceptions, gain new support from community members and policymakers, and inspire systemic change. However, to have an impactful influence, it is critical that your message is inspiring, informational, and appeals to the community and policymakers at large. Having a tailored and well thought out communications strategy is key to your success.

Identity Your Goals

Before you can begin to craft your message, you should first decide what is your overall goal. Do you want to educate the general public? Do you want to raise awareness on a specific topic or proposed legislation? Do you want to influence a policymaker's stance on a particular issue? Having a clear vision is critical for determining your next actions.

Research and Identifying Key Players

Once you have identified your vision and goals, you then need to conduct research. Having a strong foundation of the issue will make your conversations and messaging come across as credible. A reminder that your lived experience can be evidence! Not every topic has robust statistics or reports to back it, and that is okay.

If you are targeting a specific community or working within a policy system, you will want to identify and research key players. For example, if you are trying to

garner the support of community partners, you may want to research local non-profits or agencies that have missions who align with the issue you are focusing on. Look at their previous projects and work and locate a contact person. If you are working within a policy system you will want to identify where your time is best spent. This usually is done by targeting a few key policymakers in leadership positions or those who may be sympathetic to your cause. It is always worth the time to look at a policymaker's voting history, interests, careers, etc. In doing so, you may find a way to personally appeal to them.

Crafting Your Message

Once you have done your research, and identified key players, you will then want to craft your message. There are a few key points to successful messaging:

- Introduce the problem – give a specific example when you are able
- Provide anecdotal stories and statistics
- If it is general education, give a little bit of the history
- Talk about the impact of the problem, and the proposed solution
- If you are meeting with a policymaker, have a specific ask ready. This could be asking them to support/reject certain policy initiatives or even just as simple as getting their commitment to learn more

A successful message appeals to the heart and the mind of your target audience. You want to be informative, yet brief, emotionally compelling, yet evidence-based, and overall, you want to deliver your message with confidence. A reminder – you are the content expert, and your audience is learning from you. Don't hesitate to take up space and use your platform!

COMMUNICATING YOUR MESSAGE FOR IMPACTFUL ADVOCACY

Elevating Your Voice

Now that your message has been tailored to your goals and audience, it is time to be heard. There are many avenues through which to share your message, each one with its own advantages. Methods of sharing, like social media campaigns and being interviewed by local news outlets, are a great way to reach a larger audience. If your audience is in the policy sphere, scheduling one-on-ones with policymakers and providing testimony during public hearings can influence meaningful change.

When messaging involves a form of conversation or public speaking, it is important that you come prepared with talking points. Practicing your talking points beforehand can help you speak more clearly and confidently – don't be afraid to practice in front of a mirror!

Social media is another effective way to reach a large audience. A successful social media post distills a complex problem and your vision for possible solutions into concise and engaging content.

Follow Up – Stay Persistent!

Rome was not built in a day and influencing systemic changes in your community is no exception. It is essential that you continue building momentum by sharing your message in more than one way. Following up with key players after one-on-ones, re-posting social media posts, and sharing interviews given with other members of your target audience are all effective ways to keep the ball rolling on your goals. Remember that an effective message becomes a conversation, and your willingness to continue a dialogue directly correlates to how impactful your advocacy becomes.

Considerations for Effective and Influential Messaging

- Build your message on the foundation of honesty
- Do not intentionally intimidate your audience or exaggerate an issue
- Share what you know – it is better to be brief and accurate, then wordy and misleading
- You don't have to have all of the answers – not every issue has a clear solution
- Timing is everything – strategically choose when to share your messaging

This publication was supported by Grant No. 15JOVW-22-GG-00914-MUMU awarded by the Office on Violence against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in the publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.