

Messaging Worksheet

Message is the crux of the matter—the reason why anyone should care about your work—be it a study, initiative, or announcement. It gives the big picture by providing context, a sense of urgency, and/or possible next steps. Most importantly, it allows you to get your point across in the way that you want.

There are several types of messages that we use in explaining our work, the urgency of it, and a call to action. The four most important types of messages are:

1. **Problem message.** This message explains to your audience what you seek to address or fix. Problem messages are well suited to stories and visuals—describing a victim or group of people who are suffering or being treated unfairly, for example.
2. **Solution message.** This message describes what you and others plan to do or have done about the problem. While a problem pulls at the heart strings and can sometimes seem hopeless or insurmountable, a solution helps your audience invest energy or become engaged in the issue.
3. **“Ask” message.** Not everyone has a clear or simple “ask,” but it’s important to provide next steps—something people can do—when you’re engaging new audiences.
4. **Urgency message.** It’s always important to make it clear why now is the time to act. You may say, “All this is important right now because...” What will happen if nothing is done? What do we stand to lose or how will the problem get worse?

Additionally, it’s important to think beyond the here and now. Be ready with a message that explains what you hope to accomplish—your work is about more than the immediate next step.

5. **“I hope” message.** Tell them why you’re seeking change. The ask is to get you one step closer, and the “hope” message is about where you’re headed or your ultimate goal. You could say “My hope is that someday soon (*or name a timeframe*), our work will... (*lead to what positive change?*)”

When developing messages, it’s important to think through a few questions to ensure that what you are saying is both well-targeted and engaging. Try answering these questions before developing your message:

- **Who is your audience?** Be specific.
- **Why are you engaging this person/group?** What can they do and how is it in *their* interest to help? (Altruism only takes you so far—especially with policymakers) **What common ground do you share with your audience?** How can you “go to them” rather than making them come to you?
- **What story can you tell that will capture them?** Stories and examples are the quickest and most engaging ways to explain a problem or successful solution. Stories are one of our oldest means of communication (think of Aesop’s fables)

because they tie into emotions and can instantly make your audience relate with your subject.

Here is a short worksheet to help you flesh out your messages (remember to keep it short, clear and concise!)

Planning Questions

Who is your audience?	
What do you want from your audience?	
What is in it for them?	

Messages

Tell us the problem (provide context)	
Tell us about solutions(s)	

<p>Tell us what we can do to help (the “ask”)</p>	
<p>Tell us a story that explains the problem, solution or ask</p>	
<p>Why is this urgent? Why today and not tomorrow?</p>	
<p>What is it that you hope will ultimately happen or be different</p>	