

Creating and Communicating an Effective Message



An effective message is the centerpiece of any advocacy campaign. A message conveys the campaign's core argument. It answers the "why" questions, like "why does this issue matter?" and "why should I care?" The most effective messages are clear and concise and resonate with the target audience's interests and values.

Developing Your Message

Strong messages require planning and research. Even if you are personally excited by your campaign's message, other people you are trying to convince may have a different understanding or may not be as moved!

Steps in the message development process

- **Map out your audience.** Who are you trying to reach and what do you want them to think or do? You may need different variations of your advocacy campaign's main message depending on your target audiences (e.g. Congress, your grassroots base, people who are "on the fence," faith communities, youth groups, etc.). For instance, members of Congress may be persuaded by a message that has a different frame from the message you use to mobilize your base.
- **Get to know your audience.** Once you have determined your target audience(s), make an effort to get to know them. After all, a good message will focus on values that are shared between the campaign and its audience. The best way to get to know your audience is through direct conversation. A dialogue about the issue with members of your audience will help you understand their position and how to shape your message accordingly. If it is not possible to speak with your audience, try researching key members (such as organizations) and their mission statements or core values.
- **Conduct research.** It is critical to have a firm understanding of the issue, legislation, or initiative you are advocating for. Messages should be based on evidence – a message that is factually inaccurate will damage your credibility! In addition, it is also wise to research your opponents and what they are saying about the issue. This will help you think about how to respond to counterarguments you may come across.

Elements of an Effective Message

A strong message is credible, concise, relevant, compelling and communicative of values.

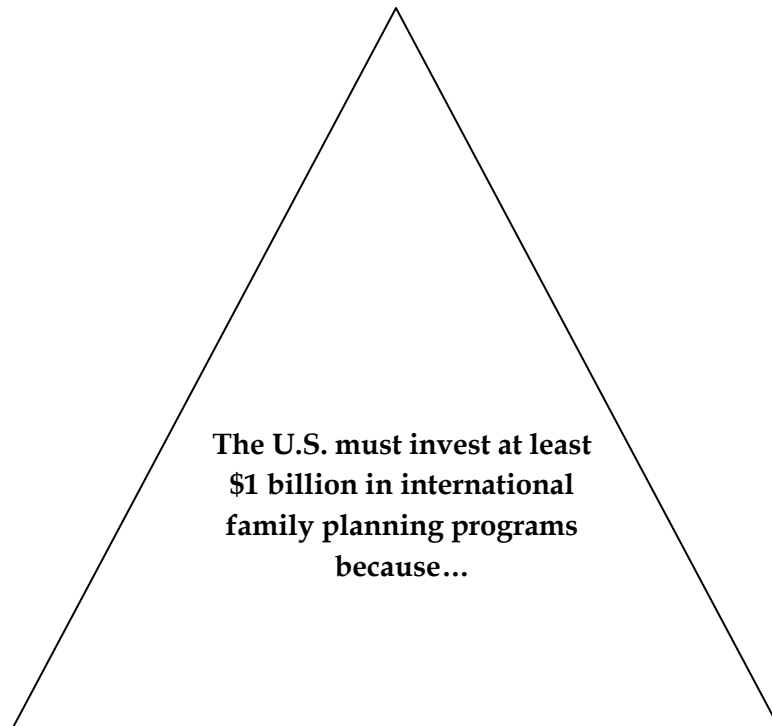
- **Credible.** It is factually accurate, provides information to back up assertions, and is delivered by people that are trusted on the subject.
- **Concise.** A good message is clear and simple. Crisp messages that people can understand and remember are much more effective than messages that are long or wade into policy minutiae.
- **Relevant.** It starts with what a person's interests – what they already know and think – and moves them to where you want them to be.

- **Compelling.** It touches people so they are inspired to act.
- **Communicative of values.** Messages that are framed in a way that resonates with people's core values (e.g. fairness, equality, freedom, honesty) are the most powerful.

Below is a message triangle about U.S. investment in international family planning. It contains a central message with three different supporting arguments. This message triangle is geared towards members of Congress on the appropriations committees.

Message Triangle

...voluntary family planning is critical in enabling women to make safe and healthy decisions about childbearing.



...these programs help prevent the unnecessary deaths of more than half a million women due to pregnancy and childbirth complications, and contribute toward increasing educational opportunities for girls, promoting gender equality, and alleviating poverty.

...this amount is the first step in meeting the U.S. commitment to reaching universal access to reproductive health, a goal agreed upon by 179 countries, including the U.S.

