

## Message Management



### Slide 1: Message Management

A critical aspect of successful advocacy is the ability to create and deliver a message. While your passion matters greatly, your coalitions make the work easier, and your planning is critical, you will only be able to advance your objectives if you can define, refine, and deliver your message. Successful communication requires that you know your audience, make your message compelling, engage your listeners, and present yourself as a potential ally.

While your status and title matter, so does your delivery—your appearance, posture, and body language. You should strive to appear professional, confident, and prepared. How you sound is part of the message. Begin your message with a powerful introduction and be sure to speak clearly, confidently, and slowly enough that you can be heard.

The best communication is dynamic and creative. In order to be dynamic you must create a dialogue where the audience goes from passive to participant. In order to be creative, you have to imagine your audience's knowledge and needs and somehow reach them.

## Your Message

- Clear
- Concise
- Compelling



## Slide 2: Your Message

We'll talk about audience later. You can't control what they know, how many other messages they've heard, whether they are tired or not. But you do have control over yourself—the messenger—and your message.

- **Clear:** It's hard to follow someone else's speech or logic. First, *you* need to know what you are trying to say. Then, you need to translate your knowledge for your audience; talk to them, not at them. Be direct and precise and avoid over-using jargon.
- **Concise:** Time is precious. Grab your audience's attention, make your case, and leave them with a clear idea of what you want. As a rule, you should have three points included in your message: problem, solution, and action.
- **Compelling:** You can be clear and concise and still be utterly forgettable. You have to move your audience with your story, presentation, and call to action. Facts alone do not compel. You need to add a human element to your pitch. If you are talking about how women can help with peace building, provide an anecdote, a story about what women have done. Be sure not to portray women as victims.

### Focus on Your Audience

- Who are they?
- What do you want them to do?
- What specific message will make them act?

## Slide 3: Focus on Your Audience

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It's tempting to polish your message to your own satisfaction—but your goal is to persuade your audience.

- **Who are they?** Not all audiences are the same. Be sure to know your audience. What do they know? Why will they care? Ask yourself what your audience needs to know (versus what you want to tell them). Respect your audience. Do not talk down to them, do not overwhelm them with information, get to the point, and do not bore them. We often think about people's expectations of us, but what are your expectations of your audience? If you expect hostility, you are likely to come across as defensive. If you expect they will not respect you, you are likely to be tentative or overly aggressive.
- **What do you want them to do?** Before you deliver your message, know exactly how you want your audience to respond. Do you want them to be informed, persuaded, mobilized, or empowered? Your ultimate goal is dialogue. You should strive to have your audience become participants who actively listen and offer ideas.
- **What specific message will make them act?** Consider what message will move this specific audience to act. Remember that expectations can get in the way of an effective dialogue. How we hear a message (does it seem hostile or friendly?) and what we hear are influenced by perceptions and expectations.

### Structure Your Message

- Problem
- Solution
- Action



## Slide 4: Structure Your Message

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You can make your message clear and concise by following this structure, especially for persuasive messages. Here's an example:

- **Problem:** Current laws leave women vulnerable to abuse; if our women are not safe, there can be no peace.
- **Solution:** New constitution needs to protect women; legal structure needs to adopt a gender perspective.
- **Action:** Mandate that women be included in the constitution-writing process, allocate set-asides for female judges, and inform women of their rights.

Remember that you want your audience to DO something.

### Be Concise

- 3 minutes = 1 major point
- 10 minutes = 3 major points
- 30 minutes = 5-10 major points

## Slide 5: Be Concise

While your topics are complex, you have to be concise. For example, when calling a reporter to “pitch” your story, you have about 30 seconds to get their attention. But be careful: it takes a lot of time and work to make your message short and concise.

Here are some guidelines and examples.

- **3 minutes: 1 major point**
  - Women candidates need financial support.
- **10 minutes: 3 major points**
  - Women candidates need financial support, training, and security.
  - We need set-asides in both the political parties and the parliament.
  - We need campaign funds from you to convince women to run for office.
- **30 minutes: 5-10 major points**
  - Women candidates need financial support, training, and security.
  - We need set-asides in both the political parties and the parliament.
  - Parliament should offer day care for members’ children and better pay.
  - We need campaign funds from you to convince women to run for office.
  - The media needs to profile women in government.

## Tell a Story

- What is your compelling story?
  - What have you experienced?
  - What have you done as a woman leader?
  - What do you know that others do not?
- Tell your story in a way that reinforces your message

## Slide 6: Tell a Story

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While your message is framed around a problem, action, and solution, you can make it relevant to your audience by using a compelling story.

- **What is your compelling story?** A good story is timely, relevant, and interesting. It illuminates and personifies the problems and solutions you are facing. As an expert in women, peace, and security, you probably have a compelling story to tell that will make your message more memorable. Ask yourself:
  - What have I experienced?
  - What have I done as a woman leader?
  - What do I know that others do not?
- **Tell your story in a way that reinforces your message (problem, solution, action):** Be careful to tailor your story for your audience and what their interests are. For example, students are interested in hearing about people, ideas, hope, solutions, and heroines; reporters are interested in what is timely, whether it is “new” or not; and policymakers want to hear about solutions most related to their tasks.

Your audience may not know your country, your people, or the challenges of women leaders and peace builders. In addition, even if they think they know you, they do not. You are how they get to know you (personalize), and a story about a person—a beginning, a middle, and an end—is the easiest way to connect, care, and remember. It also establishes you as an expert.

### Talking to Policymakers

- Do your research
- Expect a warm, productive, cooperative exchange
- Look forward, not just backward
- Learn the jargon, but do not overuse it
- Have an “ask” and get to it quickly
- Find a way to keep the relationship going

## Slide 7: Talking to Policymakers

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Now that we’ve talked about your message and how to deliver it, let’s talk about the people who will hear your message—policymakers and the media.

We often forget that policymakers are also people—while they might be busy and important, they are also likely to respond to a compelling story, especially if you offer practical solutions to particular problems they are also facing. Most often, civil society advocates spend their time with policymakers recounting problems and challenges and run out of time or opportunities to present the most crucial point: their solutions.

Several steps can help in this process:

- **Do your research**
  - Look for commonalities and personal connections with the policymaker.
  - Understand the position of the policymaker—what is their responsibility, what authority do they have, what work have they done on this problem?
- **Expect a warm, productive, cooperative exchange**
  - Be relaxed.
  - Be engaging and direct, but also personable.
- **Look forward, not just backward**
  - Provide a solution and action, not just a problem.
  - Come with a strong story.

### Talking to Policymakers

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## Slide 7: Talking to Policymakers (continued)

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- **Learn the jargon, but do not overuse it**
- **Have an “ask” and get to it quickly**

An “ask” is the very specific thing you want the policymaker to do. While you might feel rude asking the policymaker to do something, don’t worry—they know you are meeting with them to ask them to do something, and they want you to get to the point.

- Some examples of an ask:
  - We need your political support to insist on women’s inclusion in negotiations.
  - Could you provide training in security sector reform for our women’s NGO network?
  - We are designing a program to work with female ex-combatants in our community, and we would like your financial support for it.
- **Find a way to keep the relationship going**
  - For example:
    - With whom can we remain in touch in your office?
    - Can we plan to come back and report on our progress?
    - We will send you the additional information requested. Could you please keep us up to date with next steps?



### Why Media Matters

- Influences public opinion and thus policymakers
- Brings others into your movement
- Positions you as an expert

## Slide 8: Why Media Matters

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If you can't talk directly to a policymaker, you can sometimes get attention by talking to the media. Here's what the media does for advocates:

- **Influences public opinion and thus policymakers:** Media greatly shape our knowledge of the world and influence how we view issues and public policy. If you target news outlets that reach your key constituents, you can dramatically increase the size of your audience to include decision makers, donors, activists, and voters.
- **Brings others into your movement:** Media can help you recruit support for your cause, from volunteers and additional staff to donors and partners. In the US, the NBC-TV Nightly News reaches an audience of about nine million viewers in prime time. CNN International reaches 200 countries worldwide. You need to cultivate relationships with news organizations and feed them timely, compelling, and accurate information.
- **Positions you as an expert:** An appearance on a reputable program or in a respected newspaper can enhance your credibility as an expert. If reporters consider you a reliable and trusted source of information or analysis, they will call you regularly for comment. The more you are interviewed, the higher your public profile, and the greater the chance of spreading your message.

### Select Media Tools

- Press conference
- Editorial briefing
- Media advisory
- Press release
- Press kit
- Opinion piece (op-ed)
- Public events

## Slide 9: Select Media Tools

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Here are some specific tools that will help you get your message out:

- **Press conference:** Arrange to make an important announcement at one time and place, so you only have to say it once. However, unless this is a significant announcement for newsmakers, or held in a visually interesting location, reporters may be reluctant to attend. (Political campaigns may hold one a day near the end of a race.)
- **Editorial briefing:** Newspapers often want a private briefing for the paper's foreign, local, editorial, and op-ed editors. This gives them a chance to ask you a range of questions on a host of issues. Your goal is to inform the editors in the hopes that they will write an editorial about your subject, ask you to write an opinion piece, or simply ask reporters to focus on stories about your topic.
- **Media advisory:** This is a one-page notification of an event sent to news assignment editors in order to have a reporter or photographer attend your event. This should include information that tells the reporter "who, what, where, when, and why." When possible, link your event to a relevant and immediate news story. See example of a media advisory on the Institute's annual event held in Boston and Washington, DC [see Appendix G].
- **Press release:** A widely-used tool sent to as many appropriate news outlets as possible. Written as an actual news report, it begins with a lead (your strongest point), expands on the lead with supporting arguments, and continues presenting information in decreasing order of importance. A compelling lead is all-important because the release is competing with scores of others for attention. See example of a press release by Ambassador Swanee Hunt, the Institute's chair, marking the International Women's Day [see Appendix F].

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## Slide 9: Select Media Tools (continued)

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- **Press kit:** A folder containing all relevant material about your organization for journalists. It may include a history of the organization, fact sheets on major projects, key leadership bios, recent press releases, background briefs, and media clips.
- **Opinion piece (op-ed):** An opinion piece is printed opposite the editorial page of a newspaper. Written in your own words, these articles provide an excellent opportunity to spread your message. Ideally, it presents only one idea, captures the reader's attention with a good strong lead, and includes facts to support the central theme. Submit them to a newspaper's editorial page editor. See the example of an op-ed authored by the Institute's director on peace talks in Darfur, printed in *The Christian Science Monitor* [see Appendix E].
- **Public events:** A large visual demonstration, such as a rally, march, or street fair, can attract greater media coverage. When planning an event, choose a convenient location close to journalists' offices. Early in the day is better for news events, as reporters have to write their stories later in the day. Be loud and strong. Favorable media coverage of your cause will pressure opponents to respond or take the requested action.

## Establish Terms

- On-the-record
- Off-the-record
- Background



## Slide 10: Establish Terms

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Discussions and interviews can be done according to different rules that determine how public your involvement and opinions will become.

- **On-the-record:** This means you are willing to be quoted and anything you say can be printed or broadcast. If you are reluctant to do an on-the-record interview, a reporter may request one off-the-record.
- **Off-the-record:** This term means that neither your name nor the information you share can be part of the news report.
- **On background:** In this case, reporters can talk to you in-depth for a better understanding of the story, but they cannot quote you directly. Unfortunately, this later technique has often backfired for sources, as their identity is often easy to spot, or reporters quote them inadvertently.

### Your Media Rights

- Ask what the interview is about
- Ask for the reporter's deadline
- Give yourself time to collect your thoughts
- Do not answer if you do not know
- Challenge reporter's assumptions
- Disguise your identity, if need be

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## Slide 11: Your Media Rights

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When a reporter calls for an interview, you have the right to set some guidelines to help you prepare.

- **Ask what the interview is about:** Be sure to also ask what specific information the journalist needs.
- **Ask for the reporter's deadline:** You have the right to schedule a time that works for you, although you need to respect a reporter's deadlines and broadcast show times.
- **Give yourself time to collect your thoughts:** Rushing can weaken your message and your delivery.
- **Do not answer if you do not know:** You do not have to answer a question if you do not want to, but resist saying "no comment" so you do not appear to be hiding something. Come up with a reasonable remark that touches upon the issue but avoids revealing too much.
- **Challenge reporter's assumptions:** You can challenge a reporter's assumptions, but do not be argumentative. You can also request information on the news outlet's audience, such as its geographic reach, demographics, and circulation or number of viewers.
- **Disguise your identity, if need be:** You may want to disguise your identity if you feel an interview might threaten you or your family's safety. Make these requests in advance.

### Interview Tips and Tactics

- Establish a relationship with reporter
- Control the interview
- Do not use jargon
- Tell the truth



## Slide 12: Interview Tips and Tactics

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- **Establish a relationship with the reporter:** Know her deadlines, angle, and “beat” (the topic she covers). If print, what section of the newspaper will run the story? Will it be in the local or national section? If broadcast, is it a hard news story for that evening’s TV newscast or a feature for a special interest show later in the week? How much time do you have to explain your point of view?
- **Control the interview:** If a reporter asks a hostile question or criticizes your viewpoint, redirect the conversation by turning a negative into a positive. For example, if he says, “Polls show your support eroding among voters,” you might calmly refute the comment and then return back to one of your three main points by saying, “That poll is not the only measure of public opinion. Voters have asked me repeatedly to ensure that elections are closely monitored, to prevent harassment and intimidation.” You will not ever completely control the conversation, but you can consistently guide the reporter back to your main messages.

Reporters often want a lively exchange and may use inflammatory language to raise the emotional bar. If a reporter uses this tactic, do not repeat her loaded words in your answer. For example, if she says, “The opposition says your team has failed terribly, botching the job assigned,” do not answer with, “We did not fail terribly.” Instead, reframe the discussion by saying something like, “On the contrary, we’ve taken strong steps to...” and then describe the action you have taken.

If you do not know the answer to a reporter’s question, it is perfectly fine to admit it, but continue the dialogue to make a related point. You might answer, “I’m not sure about that, but I can tell you this...” and proceed to one of your main points.

### Interview Tips and Tactics

- Establish a relationship with reporter
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### Slide 12: Interview Tips and Tactics (continued)

- **Do not use jargon:** People who are not involved directly in your work will not understand your organization's insider language. Do not use words that will confuse them and turn them off. Reporters do not know what "informal peace processes" means, but they do understand "informal talks among activist groups, such as women's organizations."
- **Tell the truth:** Never lie to the press. Your integrity is on the line if you ever speak falsely to a journalist. If a lie is uncovered, you will quickly lose the media's trust and any shred of believability.

### Practice Speaking to the Media

- Refine your main points
- Prepare answers for tough questions
- Role play with a friend
- Perfect your personal story
- Practice out loud
- Practice some more

### Slide 13: Practice Speaking to the Media

Always know your material, particularly the three points you want to emphasize. Practice aloud until the words flow easily off your tongue. You will be more relaxed during the interview, more confident, and able to respond readily and capably.

Be sure to:

- Refine your main points
- Prepare answers for tough questions
- Role play with a friend
- Perfect your personal story
- Practice out loud
- Practice some more