



Alameda County Community Asset Network

Building a Strategic Message

One formula for building an effective message is **Value, Problem, Solution, Action**. Using this structure, we lead with the shared values that are at stake, outline why the problem we're spotlighting is a threat to those values, point toward a solution, and ask our audience to take a concrete action.

- **Lead with values.** Most communicators agree: people don't change their minds based on facts alone, but rather based on how those facts are framed to fit their emotions and values. Shared values help audiences "hear" messages more effectively than do dry facts or emotional rhetoric.

- *This country is built on the idea of opportunity for all, regardless of where you come from or what you look like.*
- *Our economic policies should be propelled by the values of accountability, economic security, and opportunity for all, not greed, privilege, or the interests of a few.*

- **Introduce the problem.** Frame problems as a threat to your vision and values. This is the place to pull out stories and statistics that are likely to resonate with the target audience. Where possible, include the cause of the problem, as well as who is responsible for fixing it.

For example, our flawed immigration policies are threats to opportunity, equality, and community. Eliminating affirmative action policies is a threat to equal opportunity.

Choose facts carefully. We all have a lot of evidence to support our claims. However, facts do not tend to change minds if the facts are not couched in values. After priming audiences with values, present one or two pieces of evidence that make your case. Break facts and statistics down to manageable pieces of information, into stories that people can digest.

- *But that's far from what we're seeing today, with working Americans' living standards declining and the richest 1% holding 40% of the nation's wealth.*

- **Pivot quickly to solutions.** Positive solutions leave people with choices, ideas, and motivation. Assign responsibility—who can enact this solution? Make sure your solution fits the problem you have posed. For example, if you have painted a picture of harsh conditions on the U.S.–Mexico border and the resulting migrant deaths that occur there, federal immigration policy reform may not sound like the right solution to your audiences. You will need to connect more dots to get your audiences to your policy solutions.

Information on this handout was developed by **Opportunity Agenda**, an organization that partners to tell compelling stories that will change the national conversation, shift the culture and result in transformative social change. Craft your own message and find other tools here: <http://toolkit.opportunityagenda.org/building>



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- *Reclaiming the promise of opportunity means demanding an economy that works for everyone, not just the richest members of society. Corporations need to pay their fair share, and banks need to invest in building up communities sustainably.*

- **Assign an action.** Try to give people something concrete they can picture themselves doing: making a phone call, sending an email. Steer clear of vague “learn more” messages when possible.
 - *Join us by [include a concrete action that your audience can take].*

My Message

Topic Area: _____

Audience: _____

Value(s): _____

Problem(s): _____

Solution(s): _____

Action(s): _____
