COMMUNICATION SKILLS WORKSHOP

Telling your story & working with media
Master the plan to set you up for communications success.

Sharpen your message.

Enhance understanding of the media environment and what reporters want.

Clarify the rules of engagement.

Increase confidence so you can own the interview.
Start with the Plan.

**STRATEGIC**
A strategic way to set up whatever you want to share so that it has the intended impact you desire

**CLARIFYING**
Asks simple questions, sometimes with complex answers that the plan helps clarify.

**COHESION**
Helps teams clearly and consistently articulate the same message about what the organization is doing and why it matters
GOAL: Catalyze support for gender diversity in the construction industry through a thought leadership campaign, resulting in a more robust and complete labor force.

Objective 1: A Summit is organized in 2019 to give leaders in the industry a forum for discussion, advocacy and implementation of career pipeline programs for women.

Objective 2: Three to five leadership spokespeople are identified to use their voice and influence for the campaign.
The Communication Foundation.

MESSAGES
General messages that can be used with most audiences. May also include key facts.

TARGET AUDIENCE
Get specific. Who do you want to take action? What do you want them to do with the information?

MESSAGE:
The Firearm Injury Prevention initiative encourages and coordinates research across disciplines to develop new knowledge and data on firearm violence.

KEY FACTS:
● Firearm-related injuries resulted in about 40,000 deaths across the United States in 2017
● Firearms have been the No. 2 cause of death among children and teens for at least 17 years, behind car crashes.

TARGET AUDIENCE:
- City staff and officials
- State and national elected officials (State reps and US reps)
- City council members
- Community advocates/stakeholders
- Detroit public via media (WDET, Detroit News, Detroit Free Press, Michigan Radio, podcasts, blogs)
- Survey participants
- U-M students who want to get practical experience and faculty who want to do research
- Funders and potential funders
Exploring the Audience.

VALUE PROPOSITION

To effectively steer dissemination and increase engagement, it's helpful to articulate the specific value proposition for each audience, including those that are aspirational.

- **City staff officials**: DMACS results help support evaluations, assess investments, provide core metrics (e.g. inclusive, opportunity neighborhoods, are residents benefitting) and inform work. It can also provide insights into why people move into and out of the city.

- **City council members**: DMACS provides insights on city council issue areas in real time, providing a complement to other information gathering efforts.

- **Community and neighborhood groups**: These groups can leverage DMACS findings to tell their stories, inform work and city priorities. They can gain access to data that could underscore priorities and define why that matters when seeking funding.
Baseline communication tool for next steps, deeper knowledge and sharing

Sharing results, information with key media contacts (press release, OpEd, LTE)

Factsheets, handouts, data visualization, videos, other marketing (may include ads)

Strategy and channels for sharing, who can help? Hashtag?

Who needs to know internally? Heads up.

Identify key spokespeople, can be stronger when there are a few outside the organization as well.
Getting to The Point.

- Your message is the most important aspect of having impact
- How to avoid the “curse of knowledge”

If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough.

*Albert Einstein*
Demands for Attention

*many* demands competing for attention.

A central message serves as a point of focus for *both* the audience *and* the communicator.

Doesn’t Avoid Complexity

Having a single central message to focus a communication effort does **not mean that the message avoids complexity or uncertainty**. Instead, a good central message is compact in that it alludes to related supporting ideas and can be unpacked into larger, more complex ideas.

Distills Detail

“Every block of stone has a statue inside it, and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.”

- Michelangelo
Develop Your Message.

A proposition you can make a case for, defend, and illustrate. Not a topic, subject, title, or theme.

- Context
- Goal
- Audience
Decoding
Half-Life Your Message.

What changed as you progressed through the 60 second version to the 30 second, 15 second, and 8 second versions? What elements remained, and what fell out?

Reflect on the central message that emerged.

- Is the message appropriate for the context, target audience, and communication goal?
- What points are necessary to appropriately support the central message?
- Do you like the emergent central message?
What makes your message newsworthy?

Is it new, unique, or timely?

Is it relevant to the news outlet's audience?

Pay attention to news outlets and reporters with whom you want to work.
Examples
What’s newsworthy?

DO THIS
U-M experts can discuss what auto insurance reform means for low-income drivers

NOT THIS
State lawmakers adopt several Poverty Solutions' auto insurance policy recommendations

RELEVANT TO GENERAL PUBLIC
Hot spots for environmental injustice in Michigan identified by U-M study

NOT RELEVANT TO GENERAL PUBLIC
Recipients named for new U-M professorship
Once you know your message, prepare your pitch.

What's a pitch?

A pitch is how you present your message to the media to gauge their interest in covering the issue.

A pitch can take several forms:
- Press release
- Media advisory
- Email
- Conversation
How to pitch a story

Journalists like to do their own reporting, so just try to make that process easier for them.

**Contact**
Put the press release/pitch in the body of the email, not as an attachment.

**Explain**
Explain why your project is newsworthy as concisely as possible.

**ID Sources**
Include full name, title, contact information, and availability for interviews.

**Offer More**
Link to relevant additional information.
## Dos and Don’ts of Pitching a Story

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<th><strong>DO</strong></th>
<th><strong>DON’T</strong></th>
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<td>Follow up once, a few days after your initial pitch.</td>
<td>Don’t follow up multiple times or call immediately after you send the email.</td>
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<td>Send the same pitch to multiple news outlets.</td>
<td>Don’t frame a press release as an “exclusive scoop” or threaten to give the story to their competitors if they don’t respond quickly.</td>
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<td>Know who you’re pitching to and why. Contact an editor, if you don’t know which reporter to pitch to.</td>
<td>Don’t email everyone in the same newsroom separately with the same pitch.</td>
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<td>Make sure your key source is available for interviews for 24 to 48 hours after you send out the press release.</td>
<td>Don’t overhype or overpromise the significance of your project or event.</td>
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Regional news outlets in Kentucky, Mississippi, and Ohio. Rural-focused publications and podcast.

Local newspaper in Manchester, KY, (pop. 1,331) published four stories on findings.

Good Pitch

Regional Press Releases on Index of Deep Disadvantage

National research project we released in January, with in-depth analysis centered on South Carolina and Kentucky.

Be Patient

A pitch won't always result in immediate media coverage, but that contact helps build relationships with journalists.
Dear Sir,

Have you heard about the new app that will revolutionize the tech industry?

Main source not available for comment.

“Please help us promote our fundraiser.”

“Our important event starts in 15 minutes. Hope you can join us!”
What journalists need to do their jobs

- Meet deadline
- Visual element
- Multiple sources to interview for the piece
- Follow up with more information

See which Michigan commits had the best...
10 minutes ago

Ann Arbor pays deputy police chief’s mom to conduct offic...
19 minutes ago

Renovations to close Detroit-Windsor tunnel for 4 ...
32 minutes ago

Fan charged $724 for 2 beers at Dolphins game gets a...
Interview Tips

- Feel free to ask the reporter questions too.
- Provide background information if you can tell the reporter doesn’t understand the broader context of an issue.
- Don’t be afraid to say, “I don’t know, but I’ll get back to you on that.”
- Flag critical information
  - “My key takeaway is …” “There are three major trends we’re seeing …”
- Consider the opposing stance on the point you’re presenting, and be prepared to address it.
- Use “no comment” rarely, and explain why you’re declining to comment.
- Do not ask to review the piece before it’s published.
- Assume anything you say to a journalist is on the record, unless both parties agree to another arrangement prior to the conversation.
Use the question...but you don’t always have to answer

- **ZOOM IN** | “That’s a big question, the most important part about that is...”

- **ZOOM OUT** | “If we look at the bigger picture...”

- **ZOOM BACK** | “Let’s take a look at where we were a year ago...”

- **FLAGGING** | “That’s true, however, the real issue here is...”

- **REITERATING** | “As you suggest, this situation is complicated. Let me clarify our policy.”
After the Story Comes Out

- Share the piece with your network of people interested in the topic.
- Thank the reporter and offer to send more story ideas in the future.
- Request a correction or clarification.
THANKS

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