

MAXIMIZING IMPACT

Integrating Communication
Principles into Advocacy Strategies

An Advocacy Guide
Designed for
Educational Service Agencies



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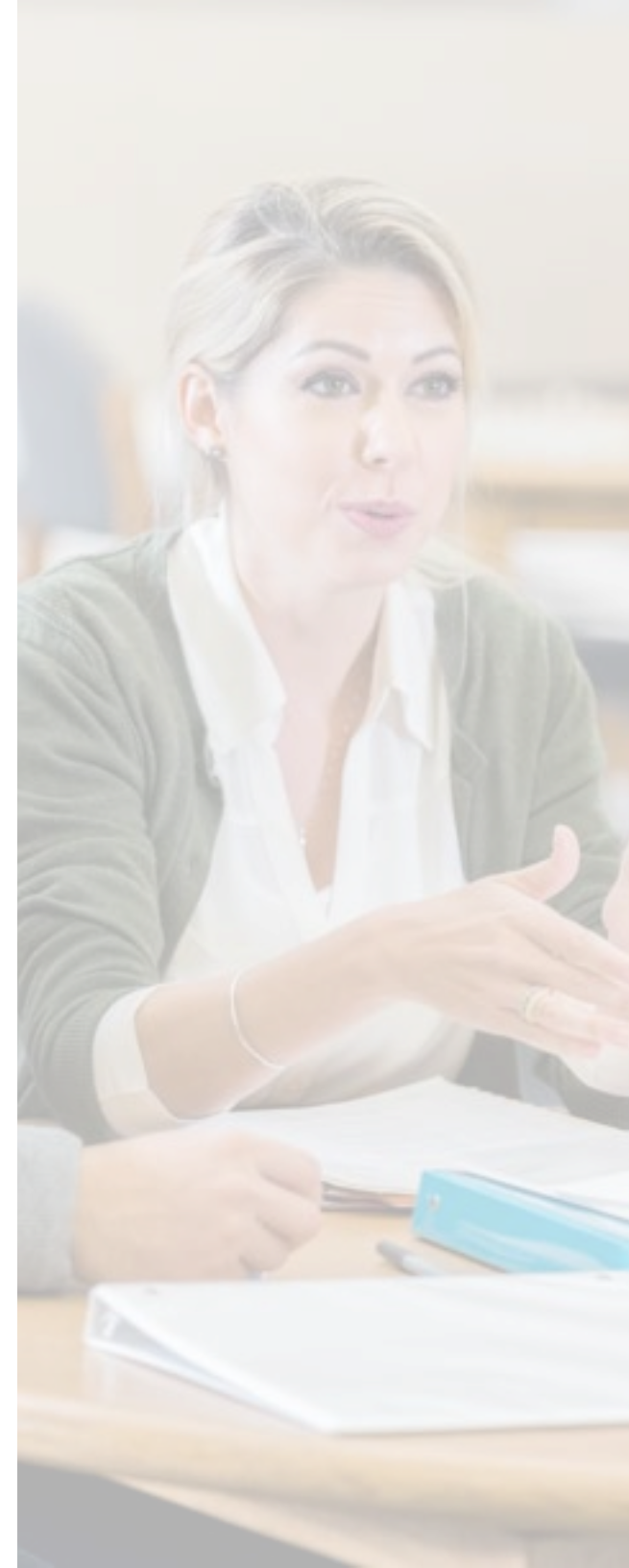
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INTRODUCTION

GETTING STARTED

An Advocacy Guide Designed for Educational Service Agencies

What is advocacy?

Advocacy is a strategy used to influence public policy and decision-making. Advocacy involves raising awareness and promoting a particular cause, often seeking to change public opinion and create social change. It encompasses various activities, such as public education campaigns, grassroots organizing, and media outreach. Advocates aim to create a supportive environment for their cause by engaging with the public, mobilizing supporters, and generating public discourse. Education and awareness-building are at the heart of advocacy. At its foundation, effective advocacy requires strategic communication effort.

Reasons for Advocacy:

- To impact state executive agency decision-making,
- To gain better laws;
- To protect favorable laws;
- To repeal unfavorable laws; and
- To stop unfavorable proposals (bills) from becoming law.

This resource guide was developed to help educational services agencies (ESAs) apply effective communication principles to their strategic advocacy work.



What is effective communication?

Effective communication establishes mutual understanding between two or more people. What it isn't is also important. Effective communication isn't completing random activities in the hopes of having your message reach the target. It depends on developing a plan to be effective.

That's why we wrote this guide: Why spend your valuable time preparing an advocacy communication unless it has a chance to make a difference?

The guide first covers three fundamental, strategic communication concepts: audience, message, and channels to help you plan your strategic advocacy work. The last chapter contains templates and examples to begin developing your advocacy effort.

You can set your communication and advocacy apart when you focus on these three foundational practices of strategic communication.

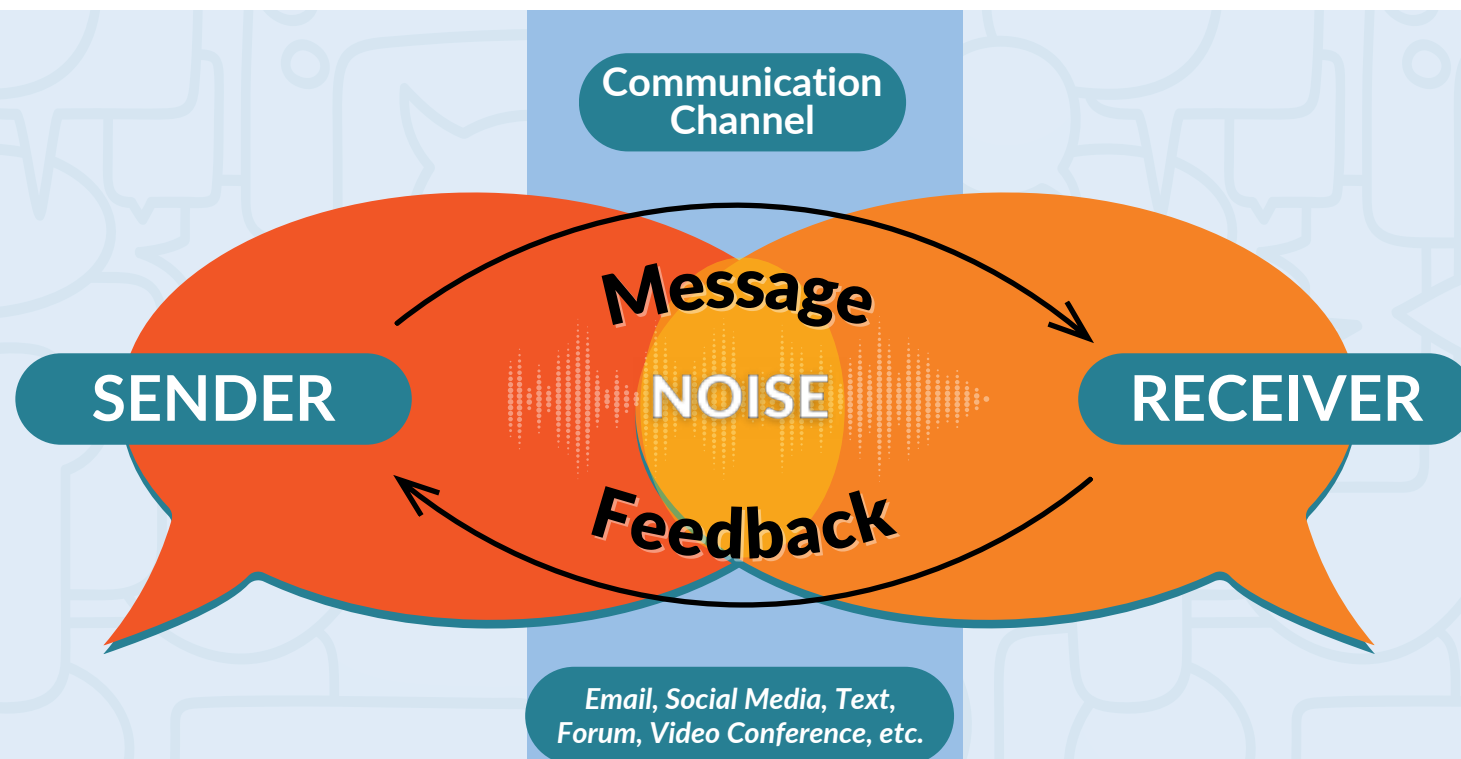
- **Audience analysis:** Know who you are trying to engage.
- **Message development:** Craft your messages so that they are important *to your audience*.
- **Channels and Visual Content:** Send your messages using channels that your intended audience prefers, in a way that is easily understood.

The Intersection of Communication and Advocacy

Communication is more than sending and receiving information.

Communication is about creating mutual understanding. Advocacy tries to move the parties toward mutual understanding on a topic, and hopefully, generate support for a cause.

Effective communication is two-way and considers the other person's viewpoint, knowledge level, etc. We can't be sure if our message is understood when we aren't listening for understanding (not just hearing). Our noisy, information-overloaded world has caused us all to be selective about the information we will attend to. Therefore, for your message to be heard, advocates need to consider their receiver (audience) and relate to him/her when communicating. The below diagram of effective two-way communication may look easy enough, but there are many factors to consider. This resource guide is intended to help you with effective advocacy communication by first applying the principles of effective communication.



AUDIENCE ANALYSIS



CHAPTER 1



It's hard to be heard. Audience analysis can help.

Cut through the noise.

This chapter is about helping you understand your audience.

Too often we write, speak, or develop content to convey the information that is important to **us**. Unfortunately, that practice may cause our messages to be overlooked and undervalued by our intended audiences.

In this chapter, we will overview the following topics to help your messages be heard by those you wish to hear them!

- Understanding why audience analysis is important.
- How to do a simple audience analysis.

First, let's examine why and how to understand what is important to the intended receiver of your message. We start here so that you can improve the effectiveness of your communication overall.





Why is Audience Analysis Important?

Today's world is full of information. Information overload makes targeting audiences more important than ever - and more difficult. Understanding your audiences helps you frame your messaging to resonate with your intended audience, break through the noise from competing information, and help **your voice** be heard.

When your message is relatable, it becomes more likely that your intended audiences will listen, appreciate, and find value in the information you're sharing. You may form a connection with them by relating your message to how it affects their lives personally, or in terms of their job, vocation, a problem they are trying to solve or decisions they are making.

Also, through audience analysis, you may identify other people or groups that you may not have previously considered. And, who knows, maybe you'll discover new people or groups who would also join in your advocacy work once they see how the impact of legislation, policy, or funding decisions might affect them.

Audience analysis helps target your message to the people you need to reach.

Audience analysis helps you avoid two common missteps

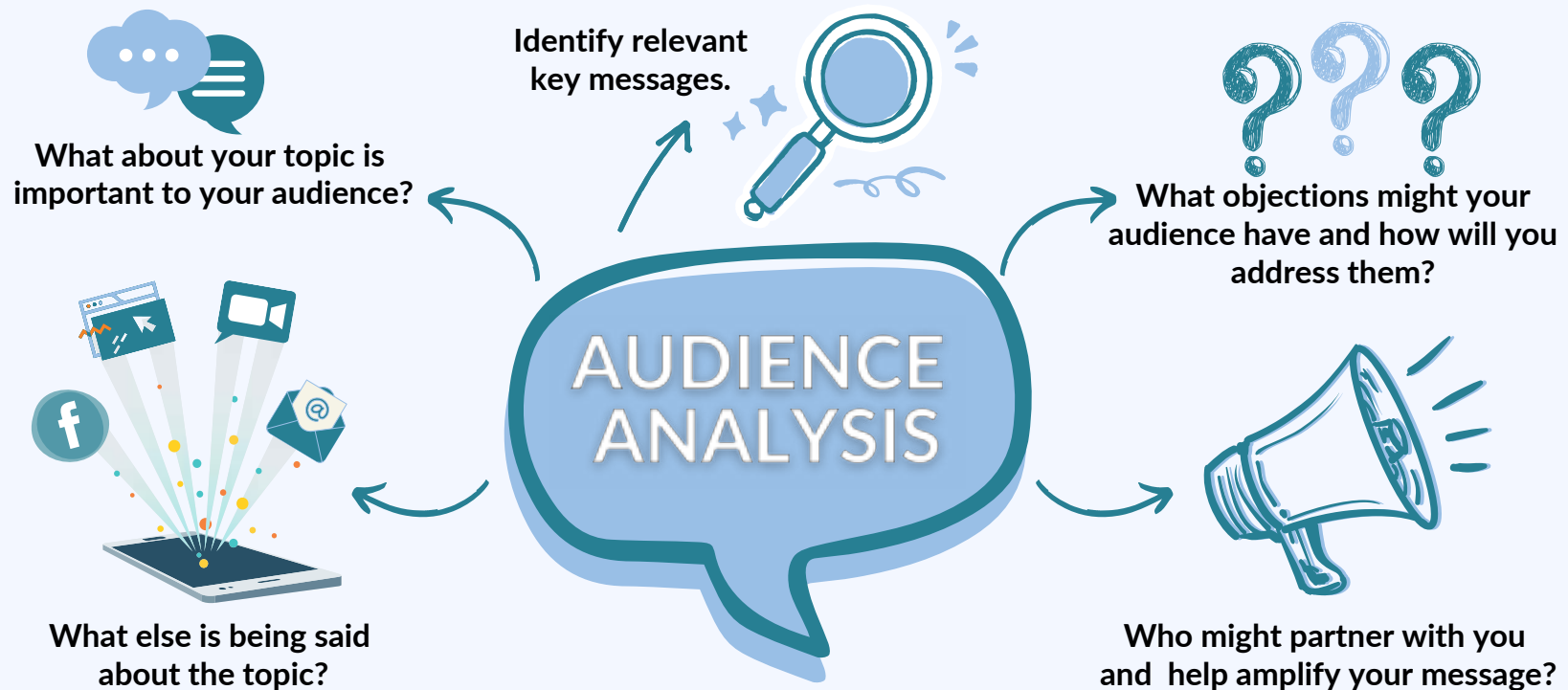
TOO MUCH

The first common communication misstep is to provide one blanket message to everyone to cover your bases. An example would be developing an “issue paper” and sending it to everyone. What’s wrong with that? Sometimes, nothing at all. In fact, in your advocacy work, an issue paper is likely necessary. However, sometimes you inadvertently cause information overload. If you create information overload, eventually people will overlook your messages entirely.

In the example of the issue paper, after you’ve developed the content, audience analysis allows you to tailor your message to highlight what matters most to your target audience regarding the issue. Place the issue paper on a website and refer to it through a link in your personalized message to your intended audience.

TOO LITTLE

The second common misstep is the other extreme. Sometimes communicating, and yes, advocacy, seems overwhelming. When no communication is provided, people jump to conclusions or make decisions without the knowledge and insights that you offer.



Simple audience analysis

The first question: Who?

The first step of audience analysis is deciding who you are communicating with and why.

Make a list of your audience members, even to the point of writing down names of individuals or sub-groups of individuals. Then sort them into primary, secondary, or tertiary audiences.

Typically, people closest to the impact of your information naturally come to mind. This would be your primary audience. Are there others who need to know? Perhaps the information affects their work or the decisions they need to make, too. Think about fellow educators, education organizations, and community allies. These might be your secondary audience. Finally, there are often groups of people for whom it would be nice to know your information, but they likely won't act upon the information (or at least not now). That is your tertiary audience(s).

Example

Scenario: The office parking lot will be resurfaced and line-stripped in about one week. Naturally, everyone who works in the office needs to know this and receive information about logistics such as alternative parking locations.

You might stop there and send a general email to all office staff. However, others might be affected too such as:

- Vendors with deliveries,
- Staff who travel between locations,
- Attendees at events or meetings scheduled in your building during that week.



SIMPLE AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

1

List individuals or groups of people you want to reach.

2

Who are the primary and secondary audiences?

3

Why do you want to reach them?

4

Why should they care about what you tell them? What might they object to?

5

What else is being said about this topic?

Different audiences care about different things

The second question is why should they care?

If the standard procedure is to send the same message to everyone for all instances of formal organizational communication, then it may inadvertently cause information overload. Your messages, while important to you, may not receive attention from your intended audience, simply because people don't know why they should care. During audience analysis, walk in the other person's shoes: Why should they care about what you want to tell them?

In our example about the parking lot, people who are in your organization but who rarely come to the office are your tertiary audience. What they need to know is much different than what your employees who work at that location daily need to know.

One way to tailor a message is to think about why you want to convey this information to your primary audience and think about why they would care about this information.

In our parking lot example, audience analysis might look like this:



- Why would office employees want to know about the parking lot?
- Why would office employees care about the parking lot being closed?
- Why would vendors want to know about the parking lot?
- Why would vendors care about the parking lot being closed?
- Why would the traveling staff want to know about the parking lot?
- Why would the traveling staff care about the parking lot being closed?

The answers may or may not be the same for your primary and secondary audiences. Whatever the answers are to your questions, the answers will assist you in composing a message that is relatable and important to your target audience.



MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER 2

Message Development

Key ingredients to effective communication are focusing on the most important points; delivering information about those points simply and consistently; and making your message relevant to your audience.

In this chapter, we will review:

- Key messages,
- Addressing concerns, managing misinformation,
- Tips for applying key messaging to advocacy work.

Effective key messaging is achievable when you carefully consider and simplify your core messages. It's essential to communicate these messages in a way that resonates with your intended audience by addressing what is most important to them. Additionally, being aware of potential objections and proactively addressing them ensures your message is both persuasive and well-received.

We will discuss these ideas in this chapter.



Why is message development important?

You are likely to be very knowledgeable about the information you want to convey. Indeed, you may even be passionate about certain topics. That is exactly why it is easy to go down rabbit holes of information and complicate your message. One idea leads to another, to another, and so on.

Through audience analysis, you determine what aspects of your topic are important and relevant to them. The next step is developing three key messages about your topic stated as simply as possible. Key messages force you to limit your information to the most important things you want others to know and understand.

Whether you are advocating for your ESA or teaching a child to fish, to be effective you need to convey your key messages in terms that are relevant to the intended audience.



One size rarely fits all

Tailoring your message to different audiences is key. Consider who you are talking to and shape your information accordingly. Make it relevant and relatable to them. Engaging content speaks to their interests in language they understand.

Identifying key messages

Really think about what you want people to know and understand.

It sounds easy, but it's not. The first thing you must decide is what it is you want the other person (or group of people) to know and understand about your topic. Then, think about why they would care about your message. What part of your message is important to the other person and why? That is how to decide upon what areas of the overall information to focus on.

Steps to Success: Key Messages



Identify three key messages that you want your audience to know and understand.



Write them down!



Simplify the message into terms the audience can relate to and understand.

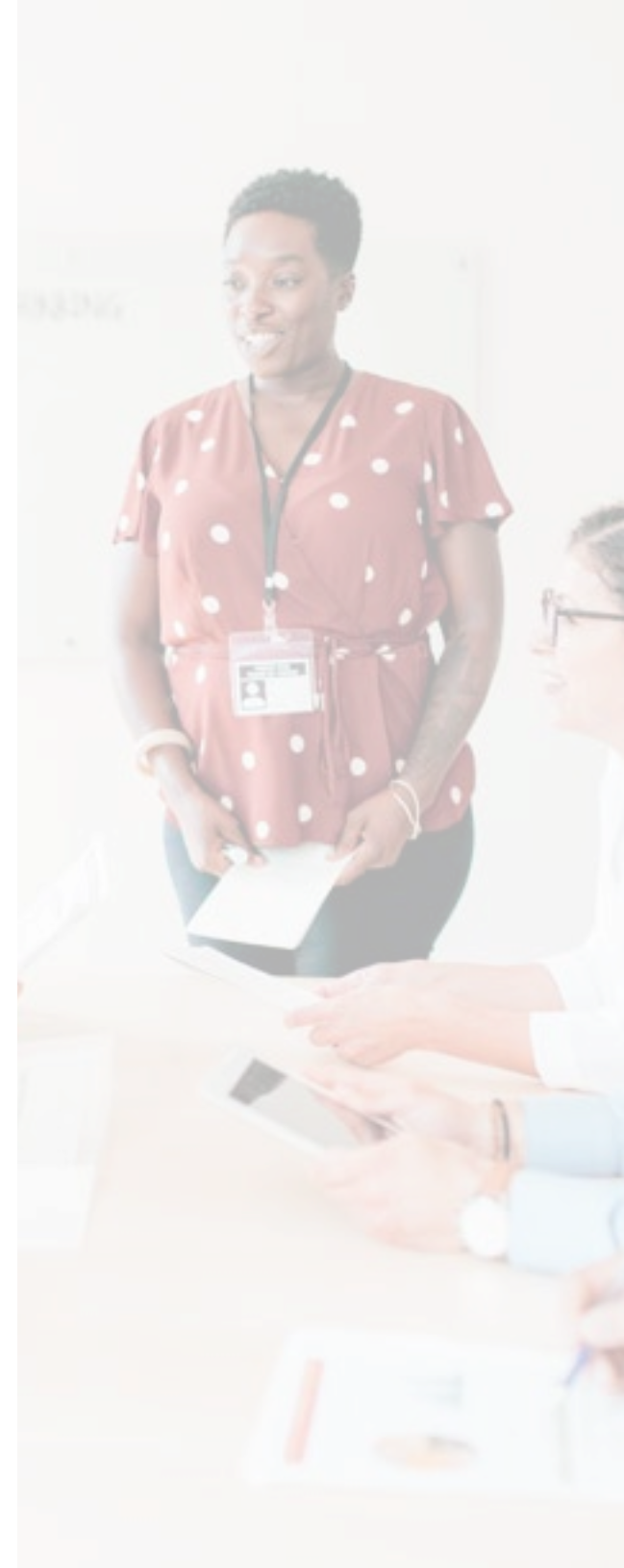


Once you have your key messages, stay on message throughout your communication.



TIP

Try to limit yourself to three key messages about your topic. Any more than that will make your overall message too complicated.



Stay on message.

Staying on message is more difficult than it sounds.

Let's pretend for a moment that you are going fishing with a 6-year-old child. He is very excited to have a pole -- complete with a hook on the end of the line--some worms as bait, and you as his teacher.

Perhaps these are three things you would like that child to know and understand:

- There is a hook on that line so be careful to always control the pole, the line, and the hook.
- When you get a bite, set the hook, but don't yank it out of the fish's mouth.
- Be careful to watch where you are stepping so you don't fall off the pier!

Now imagine you and the child are on a fishing pier at a small lake, equipment in hand – a line with a baited hook ready to be swung into the water. You really don't want to end up with the hook in your skull, so you repeat the key messages:

- "Watch where you are swinging that pole – you don't want the hook in the back of your head!"
- "Stay away from the edge of the pier – you'll fall in!"
- "Ok, now . . . remember, if you get a bite, gently pull up, don't yank that hook out of its mouth!"

Ok, maybe it **is** easy to remember to be consistent with your messages when your scalp is on the line!

Right now, all that matters to the child is that he catches a fish. While there may be much more that you want to teach that child about fishing - such as what bait to use for which species, sportsmanlike behavior, etc. - for this first entry into the world of fishing, you consider his perspective and excitement, stick to the basics, and make it easy to understand.

The same is true for your advocacy communication:

First, know what messages you want your audience to know and understand. Then think about the information that is most relevant to your intended audience and why. Finally, write down your key messages and stay on message.

Addressing concerns and managing misinformation

We can't discuss message development without addressing misinformation.

User-generated content (podcasts, social media, and many other digital sources) makes misinformation, disinformation, and rumors prevalent and influential.

No matter what the topic, it is easy for anyone to find a source, valid or not, to support or oppose a viewpoint you support. Whether from a talk show or news channel, a podcast or YouTube interview, there is surely information out there to support, rebut, or counter your message.

Being aware of multiple viewpoints allows you to consider what other information your intended audience might be receiving.

This groundwork helps you become more prepared to address objections presented by opposing viewpoints.

How can you make sure that your viewpoint is heard in the sea of other information floating around in the world? It would be arrogant to think anyone knows the answer to that question in a time of information overload. However, knowing your key messages, communicating them simply, and having a clear understanding of objections will better equip you to convey your message effectively.



Techniques to help stay aware of misinformation about your topic.



LISTEN

to programs and channels of communication that might present an opposite or other viewpoint(s).



TALK

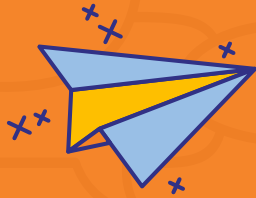
to people with alternative views, and truly try to understand.



MONITOR

social media channels and get a handle on what others are saying, including the comments.

CHANNELS & CONTENT



CHAPTER 3



Channels and Content

Telling your story: Technology has changed everything!

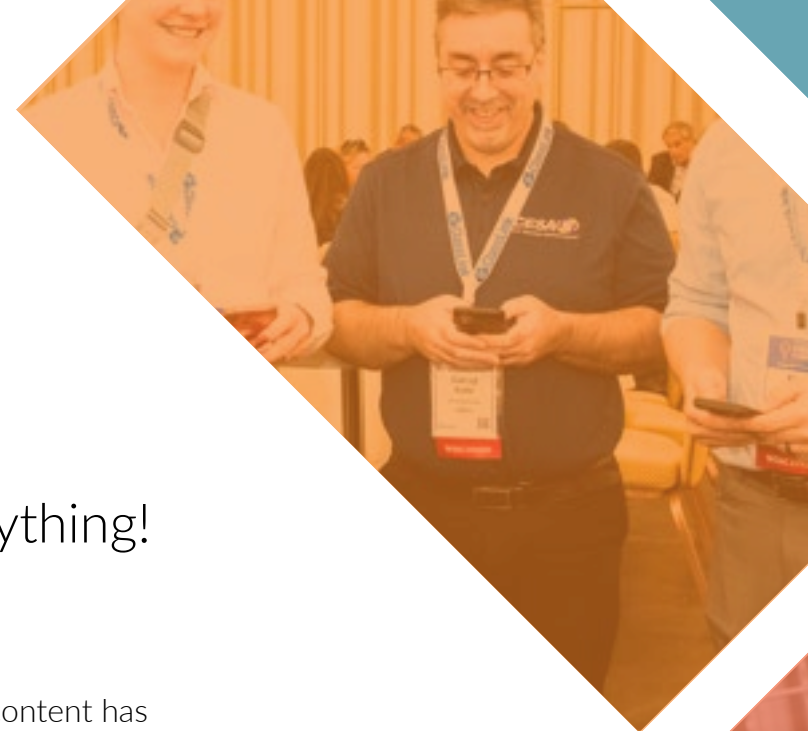
Technology has given us our preference for how we receive and send information.

Instant communication has accelerated communication. The ability to self-publish content has exponentially increased the variety of information readily available, regardless of accuracy. Amongst the many other societal changes caused by technology, it has expanded how we receive and send information. The sheer number of messages being sent has exponentially increased the difficulty of being heard.

In this chapter, we examine:

- What is a communication channel?
- Selecting the right tool to carry your message.
- The significance of content, particularly visual and digital content.

Effective communication depends on choosing the right channels and using appropriate tools and tactics to ensure your message resonates with your audience. By connecting through the channels where your audience is most engaged and using clear, persuasive tactics, your message becomes more impactful. Visual and digital content further enhances the appeal and accessibility of your communication, making it more memorable in today's media-rich environment.



Communication Channels

What is a communication channel?

A communication channel is the method by which one person conveys information to another. It can be oral, like face-to-face conversations or phone calls, or written, like letters and postcards. Information can also be transmitted in "hard copy" form, such as newsletters, or digitally, through websites, social media, and texts. Additionally, it can be a combination of formats, such as videos and animations.

Here are some ways organizations might typically convey information:

- Letters
- Emails
- Text messages
- Websites, blogs, podcasts, etc.
- Social media
- Direct mail newsletters or postcards
- Short-form videos

Why is selecting the right channel important?

This time in human history poses its unique communication challenges, amongst which is how technology, and the resulting information explosion, affect our sending and receiving of communication. Further, we are living and working side by side with multiple generations. How we grew up communicating typically becomes our preference for communication. The preferred communication channel is likely different for different people or groups. For efficiency, or because we are familiar with a particular communication channel (e.g. email, words, videos, etc), we naturally default to that channel. That is where we are comfortable.

However, we must go where our audience is - rather than expecting our audience to come to us.

Select the Right Tools

Fact Sheets and Brochures

Create easy-to-read documents that outline the services offered, success metrics, etc. These should be tailored for different audiences such as school administrators, educators, and policymakers.

Success Stories and Case Studies

Document and share real-world examples of how your agency has positively impacted schools and students. Include testimonials, data points, and narratives that highlight your agency's role in these successes.

Digital Content

Develop a content strategy for your website and social media channels. This includes blog posts, videos, and interactive content that educate your audience about your services, industry trends, and success stories.

Press Kit

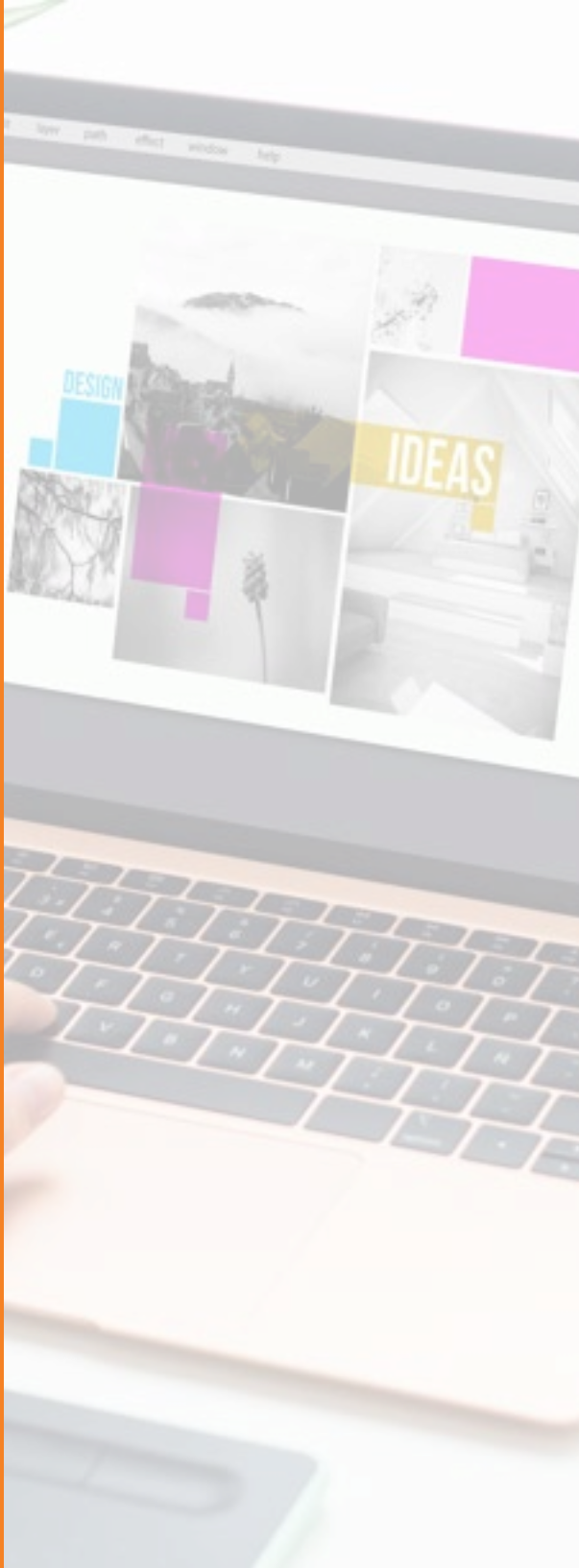
Assemble a press kit containing press releases, high-resolution images, leadership bios, and contact information for media inquiries. This makes it easier for journalists to cover the target issue of your advocacy effort.

Reports and White Papers

In-depth reports or white papers on educational trends and challenges, along with how your agency's services address these issues, are important. They position your agency as a thought leader on these specific issues and within the education sector more broadly.

Email Newsletters

Regular newsletters to your audiences can keep your stakeholders informed about recent developments or related information.



Using Visuals in Communication

Likely you will need to convey your message in multiple ways, using a combination of channels and tactics so that you effectively tell your story.

Technology has made it easy to produce graphics, videos, gifs, and other visual items to convey our messages. Now people prefer it.

Our attention span for complex writing has been greatly reduced. As a result, while the content of what we communicate is most important, presenting the information in bite-sized chunks is important, too.

Visual communication helps convey large ideas.

Whether engaging through email or social media platforms, the quality of your content is paramount. In a world where attention spans are limited, avoid lengthy blocks of text, so that at the very least, your core message is consumed.

Visuals can be used to break up text and illustrate the information, too.



- 1 Write what you want to say to your targeted audience.**
(After audience analysis, of course.)
- 2 Rewrite it with 5 fewer words. Repeat twice.**
(Usually, after the third rewrite, you are much closer to the key message.)
- 3 Move the key message to the beginning of your narrative.**
(Rewrite it so it is fluent.)
- 4 Give a few details.**
(Bullet points work well!)
- 5 Incorporate visuals that emphasize your key message.**

Visual communication increases reception and retention.

Visual communication increases retention and understanding of your message.

“When a reader takes in information in a visual format, there is a greater likelihood that they will create a long-term memory associated with it.” ¹

Often, when advocating, it is crucial to convey complex information clearly and get to the heart of your message. Effective visual communication forces us to reduce our message to easily-understood small bits that can be retained.

Less is best.

Also when you incorporate visuals, you increase the likelihood that your intended audience will look at the information. “The amount of resistance to communication often correlates with the amount and quality of information being communicated.” ²

Our attention span is a whopping 47 seconds! ³

So, not only is what we say crucial but **how we say it** makes all the difference. That’s why visual communication is important in today’s world.

1,2: <https://www.techsmith.com/blog/why-visual-communication-matters>

3: <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/how-video-consumption-is-changing>



Add Visuals to Support Your Content

Photos

Videos

Infographics

Simple Charts,
Pie Charts,
and Graphs

Subheads to
highlight key
facts

Bullets & Lists
(rather than long
paragraphs)

Digital content: Keep it simple

When devising digital content such as web pages and e-newsletters, remember that “web visitors read about 20% of the words on a webpage.” ⁴

Avoid those long paragraphs of gray text by using:

- Subheads and visuals to attract attention to key facts.
- Bullet points rather than long paragraphs of gray text.
- Infographics, graphs, and other graphics to simplify large sets of numbers, key facts, important quotes, etc.
- Highlight and simplify your message.

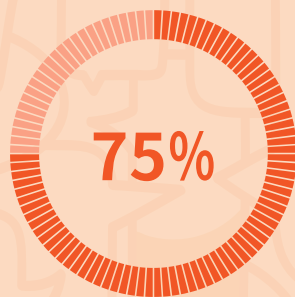
Regardless of your chosen platform, remember that visual elements capture attention.

Thoughtful incorporation of design elements, colors, images, and illustrations can help the consumer focus on the key messages and help people understand your message, too.

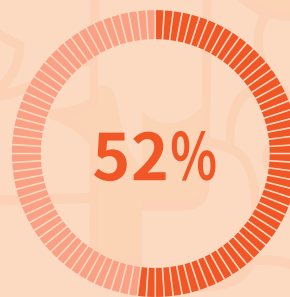
4: How Little Do Users Read?, 2008, <https://www.nngroup.com>

Get to the Heart of Your Message with Visuals:

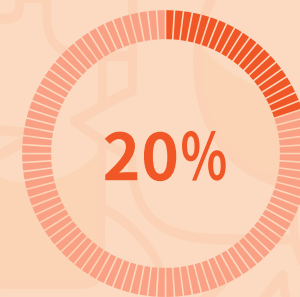
Visual communication increases retention



75% of people watch short-form video on mobile devices



52% of people share videos



20% of the words on a web page are read (including e-newsletters)

ADVOCACY TACTICS

Integrating Communication
Principles into Advocacy
Strategy & Tactics



CHAPTER 4

Advocacy Tactics

Throughout this guide, foundational information provides insights into effective communication principles. This section applies effective principles to **ADVOCACY TACTICS**. These tactics are the hands-on work ESAs must do to have their voice heard if they are to influence public education policy. It is not an exhaustive list but provides detailed information so ESAs can begin developing a local, regional, statewide, or national advocacy effort.

This final chapter includes five sections which cover the following:

- Be Your Own Best Advocate
- Make Connections and Amplify Your Message
- A Day at the Statehouse
- Legislative Visits
- Public Testimony

To influence policy and advocate for your cause, clearly articulate your message and build strong connections. Amplify your message through networking and strategic communication to gain support. Activities like spending a day at the Statehouse, legislative visits, and public testimony offer direct opportunities to engage with policymakers and make a meaningful impact.



Establishing Your Agency's Value Today Will Serve You Tomorrow

Telling the value of your ESA in this noisy world is a large job. Many ESAs do not have a formal communication department, or its focus is not solely on promoting the value of your ESA.

Still, it is very important to tell the ESA story on multiple channels, and keep your information up to date.

If you and your agency are to become a trusted resource, tell people about the work of your ESA and build your agency's reputation as a trusted and valuable resource.

Be Your Own Best Advocate

1. Audience Analysis

The most fundamental advocacy work all ESAs must do is tell their own story. The next three pages prepare you to begin your advocacy campaign for **YOUR OWN ORGANIZATION**.



List individuals or groups of people you want to reach.



Who are the primary and secondary audiences?



Why do you want to reach them?



Why should they care about the value of your ESA?



What might they agree with? What might they disagree with?



How will you reach them?



Where else do they get information?



Who else might help you amplify your message?

2. Establish Your Key Messages

Take a moment and practice developing key messages.

Who are your audiences for your general organizational information:

Primary:

Secondary:

Tertiary:

What do you want the primary audience to know about your ESA?

What are three key messages:

1.

2.

3.

What contradictory information may exist about your organization?

3. Make a Plan and Implement It!

There is no one way to tell your ESA story: You must tell and retell it in multiple ways to make a difference. There are many tactics and channels available to you, and there are some ideas in Chapter 3 of this toolkit.

Telling the value of your ESA in this noisy world is a large job. However many ESAs do not have a formal communication department, or its focus isn't solely on promoting the value of your ESA. Still, it is important that you tell your ESA story on multiple channels, and keep your information up to date. If you want to become a trusted resource, you must tell people about the work of your ESA and build your agency's reputation as a trusted and valuable resource.

When time is a limited resource the best solution is a time-bound strategy.

Sample time-bound plan

Intended Audience

Key Message(s)

Tactic (channel)

Who is responsible

Resources needed

Due dates

What does success look like?

4. True Stories Make Your Messages Relatable

We often must tailor the message to fit our audience. For example, when discussing direct student services with legislators on the more progressive end of the political spectrum one might focus more on what services their agency delivers and how they impact the education of preschoolers, students with disabilities, incarcerated youth, and other high-risk student populations to improve outcomes. More conservative policymakers may be interested in how you deliver the services through itinerant staff or other shared service delivery models that demonstrate efficiency and cost-savings along with greater accountability for improved outcomes.

- What is the overarching idea (key message) you want your story to convey?
- Provide relatable examples that illustrate your main idea or key message.
- Identify and resolve any potential objection or conflicting information that the audience might have with your solution or position by demonstrating how your idea/solution/position addresses the objection.
- Use real-life examples and simple data to emphasize your key message.
- Relate to the audience: consider their point of view and watch your overall tone -- it should be respectful and relatable.



Find Power in Numbers.

The power of advocacy lies not only in the voice of single educators but also in the strength of strategic alliances.

Make Connections and Amplify Your Message

Forming partnerships with like-minded organizations, parents, and community leaders can significantly amplify the impact of advocacy efforts, fostering a united front for positive change in public schools.



Stay engaged with the legislative process from legislative action to agency implementation.



Build relationships with state departments of education, education committee members, state-level education associations, and other agencies that impact education policy in your region or state.



Engage on social media: Share your experience and the importance of the issue on social media platforms and other appropriate communication channels.



Build strategic alliances with other advocates for your cause.

**Organize a Day.
Impact the Future.**

Organizing a "Day at the Statehouse" empowers educators to engage directly with legislators and policymakers, fostering dialogue and influencing decisions that shape the future of education.

A Day at the Statehouse

Engage directly with legislators and policymakers.

Outlined below are steps to organizing a successful day at the statehouse.



Step 1: Prepare and Plan

- Begin by establishing clear goals.
- Coordinate with fellow educators, education organizations, and community allies to maximize impact.



Step 2: Understand the Legislative Process

- Know the legislative calendar, plan accordingly.
- Understand how bills are passed.
- Identify key committees and legislators involved in education policy.



Step 3: Schedule Meetings with Legislators

- Identify and schedule meetings with legislators critical to your goal.
- Legislature's websites and Ballotpedia identify relevant information and contact details for state legislators.



Step 4: Prepare Your Advocacy Message

- A clear and concise advocacy message outlines concerns and what is requested such as: policy changes, funding requests, or general support for educational initiatives.
- Prepare talking points and data to support your arguments, emphasizing the impact of policy decisions on students and schools. Prepare “leave behinds” - flyers or briefs with the main ideas outlined.
- Never leave a meeting without making your “ask.”



Step 5: Build Coalitions

- Coalitions can provide a broader base of support and additional resources.



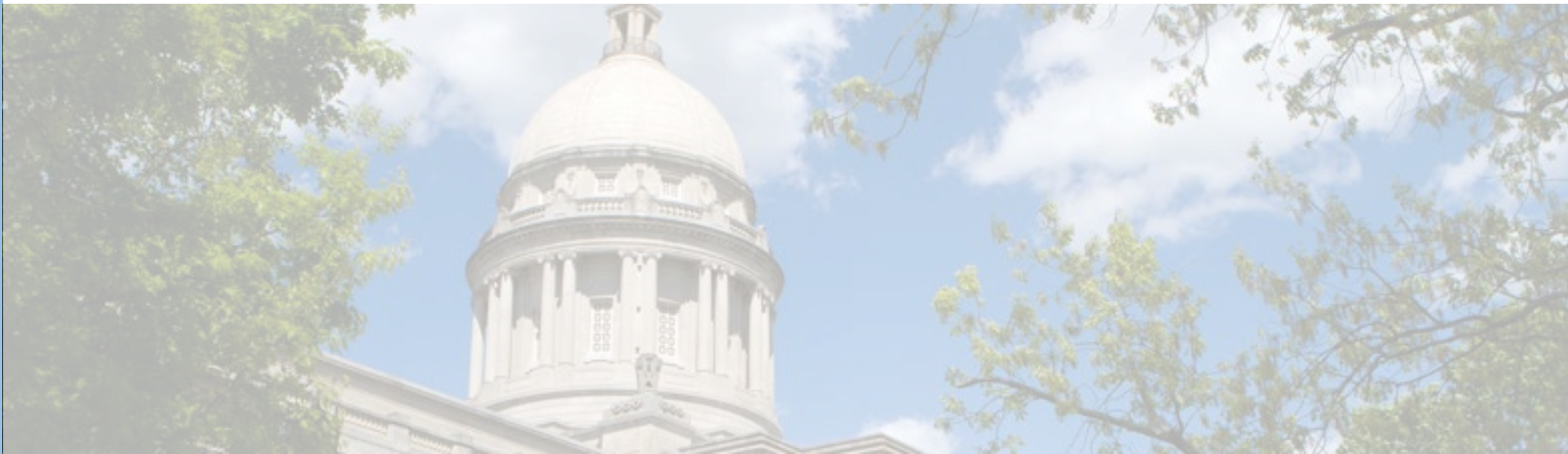
Step 6: Raise awareness of key issues and generate support for advocacy efforts

- Engage with local media outlets through press releases, op-eds, and social media updates.



Step 7: Follow up with the legislators

- Thank them for their time reiterating key points from the meetings
- Continually engage and provide updates on educational issues.



It's all about relationships.

The best time to build relationships with legislators and their staff members is when you don't need anything.

Build respectful relationships and establish yourself as a trusted resource.

Legislative Office Visits

In the realm of education advocacy, one of the most impactful tools at your disposal is the legislative office visit.



Research and preparation

- Know your audience.
- Research the policymaker's background, including their stance on education issues, voting record, and any relevant committees they serve on.
- Understand any opposition positions and prepare to address those positions.



Craft your message

- Focus on three key messages (talking points).
- Align with the policymaker's priorities.
- Relate your position to their values and that of their constituents.
- Tell the benefits and value of what they care about and their district constituents.



Preparation

- Practice your testimony, and ask for feedback.



Build Relationships with Legislators and Their Staff

- Take the time to introduce yourself and establish rapport.
- Express your willingness to serve as a resource on education issues.
- Never underestimate the influence of legislative staff. While they may not always be able to advance your cause directly, they do have the power to deny access to policymakers you are trying to influence.



Be Solution-Oriented

- Offer constructive solutions that address the challenges facing education.
- Present data, research, and best practices to support your recommendations and demonstrate credibility.
- Remember: policy making is incremental. There will be other opportunities down the road to advance your priorities.



Bring Personal Stories

- Humanize your message by sharing personal anecdotes and stories that illustrate the real-world impact of education policies and funding decisions.



Make the Ask

- Clearly articulate what you're asking the policymaker to do and why it matters.
- Do not ever leave a visit without knowing whether that legislator is for you, against you, or neutral.



Follow Up

- After the meeting, send a thank you note expressing your appreciation for the opportunity to meet and reiterate your key messages.



Be There. Be Heard.

Whether you write a letter or deliver oral testimony, your voice is important to the public policy-making process.

In both written and oral testimony express yourself with:

- Clarity
- Brevity
- Personalization
- Gratitude

Public Testimony

Here are tips to help you make the most of your public testimony and your time with state policymakers:



Preparation

- Contact the Committee Chair: Committees often require registering in advance to testify. Know the rules of your legislative bodies.
- Research and understand the issue: Know the bill or issue inside out, including who supports or opposes it and why.
- Know your audience: Tailor your message to resonate with their priorities. Familiarize yourself with the committee members, legislative staff, and the bill's sponsor. Research their recent work; context matters.
- Craft a clear and concise message: Focus on the 2-3 key points you want to convey.
- Practice Your Testimony: Rehearse your testimony aloud to gauge timing and delivery.
- Prepare for Questions: Be ready to answer questions from the committee members. Prepare thoughtful, evidence-based responses.



This can serve as a structured outline for oral or written testimony:

- Introduction: Greet the committee and introduce yourself. State your name, residence, and connection to the issue.
- Identify the issue or problem statement: Develop 2-3 Key Points and focus on conveying key messages clearly and provide supporting evidence or data.
- Position statement: Clearly state whether you support or oppose the bill or issue. Be sure to include your “ask” on the front end of your testimony – be clear about the action you want policymakers to take.
- Personal story or expertise: Share a relevant personal story or your expertise. Storytelling can be impactful.
- Stick to the facts: Present irrefutable facts and avoid jargon or acronyms.
- Recommendations: Summarize your recommendations and then provide explanations/rationale and the benefits of implementing the proposed solution.
- Conclusion: Wrap up with a closing statement, summarize your position, and reiterate your call to action by asking lawmakers to make a specific vote for or against the measure.



Delivery

- Arrive early: If your state’s committees allow same-day testimony, arrive early and sign up to testify if required. Use your prepared testimony (as outline previously).
- Be respectful: Address the committee chair and members courteously and follow the testimony structure.
- Time management: Keep your testimony within the allotted time, usually 2-3 minutes.
- Promise to follow up: If you do not know the answer to a question, do not fake it. Promise to get information back to the committee through the chair’s office.



Follow Up

- Submit a written copy of your testimony: Adhere to any submission guidelines.
- Provide requested data: Follow up on any commitments made during the testimony including any additional information requested.

