

HOW TO COME UP WITH EFFECTIVE MESSAGING

imix

What you will learn

This resource explores the importance of clear and effective messaging in communicating with audiences particularly around complex issues such as the refugee and immigration system. It shares examples of existing messaging guides which have been developed with audience focus groups which will help organisations understand how to communicate better. There is also a step-by-step guide into developing a strong messaging guide for your own organisation and issues you are involved with which involves key stakeholders and partners.

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The importance of good messaging

Language is everything

Do you know what an endowment mortgage is? Or a bond yield? If the answer's no, think about how confusing it could be for an ordinary member of the public to understand the technical language of the immigration system. Most people don't know what a dispersal area is, let alone an Aspen card.

As well as the challenge of talking about bureaucracy, it can be hard to explain the complex reasons why people seek safety or end up undocumented. There often isn't a simple answer.

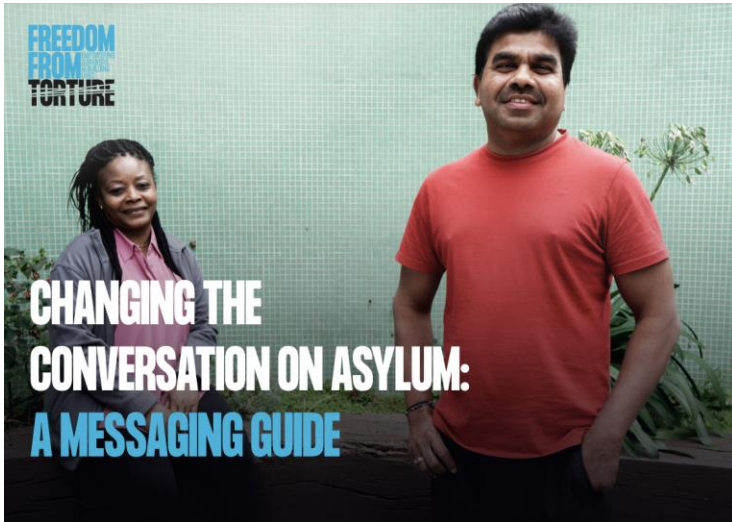
However, if you do hide behind jargon, the reality is that someone else will simplify it for you – and they will probably get it wrong.

You can avoid this by preparing messaging, which equips you with the words to explain the situation simply and clearly, and in a way that leads to real change.



Existing messaging guides

Some topics come up so much that there are already specific messaging guides, such as these examples below:



[Talking about asylum seekers and refugees](#)



[Talking about safe routes](#)



[Talking about why people become refugees](#)



[Talking about migrant destitution](#)

Creating your own messaging

Sometimes you will need to create your own messaging. Here's a step-by-step guide to how to do it.

STEP ONE:

Organise a time to discuss the conversation with the key stakeholders

Rather than discussing it over email or WhatsApp, try to hold a conversation, whether a Zoom call or in person, to hammer out what you want to say.

The benefits of speaking rather than writing are a) when talking about sensitive subjects it's easier to communicate and engage and b) when we speak, we naturally simplify jargon, so you're already moving towards a clearer message.

When you organise the meeting, try to include a wide range of perspectives. For example, if you're a frontline charity, invite service users, case workers, volunteers and senior leadership. You might also want to think about external voices who could help you craft your message, such as local councillors, faith leaders, teachers and or others involved in the community you're trying to reach.



Creating your own messaging

STEP TWO:

Structure the conversation

Once you've gathered your group, make sure you structure the meeting well to avoid it going off topic.



A strong message isn't just about saying things clearly – it's about shifting the status quo. If you're on the defensive because of negative press around asylum seekers, you may want to focus the conversation back on the positive impact of giving sanctuary to refugees. If you're campaigning for a policy change, you may need to start by identifying the problem you want to fix.

There are different ways to develop this messaging, but here is one method that has worked for us.

Once you have appointed a facilitator and a note-taker, you will lead the group through a series of questions.

Firstly, ask your group to give their views on the following questions:

1. What is the problem we want to address?
2. Why should we act?
3. What do we want our audience to do?

Creating your own messaging

STEP THREE:

Why are we the ones to be talking about it?

Write down or record as much as possible, as this will give you more material to work with. If participants disagree over the power of a message, note that down too.

Try to think about how each message might backfire. For example, if you use the word 'crisis', could people assume the situation is impossible to solve, when there are actually concrete solutions?



You can also challenge the participants to use simpler and shorter sentences by using the following prompts:

- Can you sum up what s/he just said, but in fewer words?
- How would you explain that to your granny?

You can even create 'personas', fictional characters that represent your target audience, and challenge your participants to talk directly to them as they explain the issue.



Creating your own messaging

STEP FOUR:

Craft your message

The reality is that if you're speaking to a journalist, or posting on social media, you'll have just a few seconds to get your message across.

Now it's time to take your notes, and distil them into a few short, clear sentences. Make sure that you are not just identifying the problem but calling for a solution. If possible, try to think of a three-word slogan that sums up everything you're trying to say.

You can test out your messages by getting a friend to ask questions and using your messages when you answer.

STEP FIVE:

Monitor impact

There's no perfect science to messaging. Larger organisations may commission focus groups to test out messages, but for smaller organisations, the best option is to try your messages out and monitor the reaction.

You could do this by talking to people outside your organisation or incorporating them into your social media posts, and checking if the audience responds the way you want it to.

Don't be afraid to tweak your messaging. Language is constantly evolving and reacting to the world around it.

Once you're happy with your message, repeat it and repeat it. Use it as a hashtag. Share it with your partners in the sector. Write it on badges. And hopefully soon other people will be repeating it too!

By preparing messaging, which equips you with the words to explain the situation simply and clearly, it can help lead to real change.

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Telling the human story of migration

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