Getting a Running Start: Bringing Strategic Communications to Our Mission

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Session Goals

• Explore challenges
• Introduce basics
• Discuss framing and messages
• Review of initial messages
• Forecast of upcoming support services:
  • Branding
  • “Boot Camps”
  • Webinar and assistance with proposal preparation
What I am Going to Cover

• Some typical problems
• Talking about low skilled adults, adult education
• Elements of framing and messaging
• Initial messaging and audience brief
• Your questions
What problems do we have trying to communicate about our work?
Down in the policy weeds
A REPORT ON THE FORESTRY POLICY OF STATE COLLEGE

The forests of North Carolina constitute one of its most invaluably natural resources, the area of our state growing trees being three times larger than the area growing all other crops combined. Our forestry practices are not backward, wasteful and unscientific; they are the actual forestry potentialities for income of our state and nation are now said to be only about ten per cent realized. It is of the chief purposes of the Consolidated University of North Carolina and especially the State College of Agriculture and Engineering, and to a statewide understanding and acceptance of improved forestry ideas, which should add millions of dollars to the state's annual income. To further the program of the State College in forestry education and forestry practices, a North Carolina Forestry Foundation was formed.

The North Carolina Forestry Foundation, Inc., is a non-profit corporation formed in 1939 by local trustees of State College with the object of promoting the work of the School of Forestry by acquiring forest tracts, etc., illustrating various types of forest and land management. Owing to disastrous financial reverses that followed the organization, these public-spirited trustees were left unable to carry out their purposes but have been subjected to serious financial embarrassment, solely as a result of personal-underwriting a plan to serve our institution and the public welfare. The school of Forestry has felt it proper to lend its aid in trying to remedy this situation. As soon as this temporary phase of its difficulties can be worked out, it is the desire of the Foundation to work towards:

- Literal sclerosis
- TMI (Too Much Information)
• Nothing new
• “Fear coma”
• Overload puts people to sleep
How Can We More Strategic?
Strategic Communications

• What resonates with people’s deeply held values and worldviews?
• When communications are inadequate, people default to the “pictures in their heads”
• If you effectively frame an issue, people can see it from a new perspective
Communicating About Values, Issues and People

- Avoid jargon
- Acronyms don’t work
- Policy speak does NOT appeal to broad audiences
- Use brief, clear, emotive terms and active verbs
What is Framing?

- People use mental shortcuts to organize information – like file folders
- Over time, shortcuts become durable models for thinking about issues
- The media creates and reinforces these models, or frames
Levels of Framing

• **Level I** – Big ideas, such as Freedom, Democracy, Family, Prosperity
• **Level II** – Issue types, Women’s Rights, Child Advocacy, Higher Education
• **Level III** – Specific initiatives, Adult Basic Education, Student Support Services, ESL/ELL, Career Pathways
Frame or Be Framed

• Start conversation on a high plain
• What kind of community do we want to create?
• How can we create an economy that works for all?
• America is about expanding opportunity for all, isn’t it?
• Our community will be stronger when everyone has a chance to succeed through education and training.
Crafting the Message

- Use frames & values-based messaging to win over readers and audiences
- Cue up the right responses by choosing a message framed to win
Targeting to Key Audiences

• Who are your audiences?
  – Specific groups of people able to help your campaign
  – Be careful not to lump audiences together (e.g. ‘policymakers’ is a big group)
Identifying and Inspiring Action

• Isolate what you want each audience to do
  – Specific actions (learn more, shape policy, develop curricula)
  – If you can’t figure out an action, they’re not an audience!
  – Actions must be critical to the success of your campaign
Questions? Discussions?
Creating Education and Job Opportunity Can be Framed in a Multitude of Ways
Helping the working poor
Ending poverty
Overall Values

Primary
• Jobs
• Economy
• Opportunity

Secondary
• Education
• Equity
• Democracy
From Frame to Messages

- Link values to action
- Something to care about
- Ways to get involved
What Makes a Good Message?

• True
• Believable
• Supported by facts
• Spoken by the right person
• Has an action component
• Is about “you”
Message Around Values

• Everyone in our country should have the opportunity to succeed in college.

• For millions of low income and adult students, community colleges are where they access this opportunity.

• Don’t limit our workers the opportunity to thrive in today’s workforce by under funding our community colleges.
Another Way of Organizing Your Messages

• Problem
• Solution
• Action
Key Messages

Jobs/Work – We are helping our nation get back to work by providing adults the credentials and skills they need to secure good, family-sustaining jobs.

Economy – We are helping drive economic recovery by supporting innovative educational models that better prepare adult workers for today’s jobs.

Opportunity – We are expanding opportunity for Americans across the country – regardless of age or background – by helping them earn credentials and learn skills that have real value to employers.
Questions?
Reactions?
Communications support services

• Branding
  – Design phase (working title)
    • Creative Process underway
    • Effort to unify multi-state, multi-million, multi-faceted initiative
    • Lead brand with goals and values
    • Brand will include logo, graphic elements, refined messages
Communications support services

• “Boot Camps”
  – Two Sessions, planning in progress
  – Sessions to include
    • Spokesperson training
    • How to use messages
    • Speaking in sound bites
    • Rules of engagement with media
    • Leveraging New Media
Communications support services

• Webinar and assistance with proposal preparation
  – Implementation proposals require communications planning
  – Session to present core elements
  – State-by-state assistance with drafting