Communications 101: Framing and Messaging
[Program]

Trainer Names:

Learning Objectives:
Skills, Knowledge, and Attitude which learners should take away from this session.
- Understand what strategic messaging and frames are and why they are important
- Understand the crucial role of values in campaign messaging
- Learn to tailor messaging to a particular audience

Achievement Objectives:
Tangible steps learners will take to advance real or simulated campaign work.
- Write messaging for a practice campaign or issue
- Create and use a message box

Time: 105 mins

Normal = say out loud
<u>Underlined</u> = flipchart this!
Italics = trainer notes/instructions
Bold = key point

> **Anchor:** The ANCHOR step invites learners to reflect on past experiences which relate to the learning of the session. (e.g. "Think back to a time when ____. What did that feel like?")

1. Spot Assessment [5 mins]

Ask the group to think about a time they tried to convince someone of something that person wasn't sure about. (Examples: asking a teacher for an extension, asking a friend to go somewhere with you when they were feeling lazy, talking politics with a family member over a holiday.)
- *Ask a few people to share their examples with the group.*
- *Ask them to reflect:* How did you approach the conversation? What worked, what didn't?

Campaign-based relationships and personal relationships have a lot in common. In each of these personal examples, it was all about trying to get your target (your friend, uncle, teacher, etc.) to understand and eventually agree with your perspective. That's also what campaign messaging is all about.

2. Introduction [5 mins]

Trainers introduce themselves by sharing a few of the most important values they hold that inspire them to work on environmental and social justice issues. Explain that this training is about communication for campaigns, which has a lot to do with understanding the role of values in communication.

- *Refer back to an example that was shared in the anchor activity. Point out how understanding and appealing to the other person's values was important in that example.*
- *Note that this training is based on ideas from George Lakoff's book* Don't Think of an Elephant*, and that the first chapter is included in their Sprog packets.*
- *Explain: A lot of the skills covered in this training are very intuitive — you already use them all the time! This training will show you how to put those skills to use in campaign work.*

Review objectives (<u>Flipchart Objectives</u>).

[Optional] Flipchart and read aloud this quote: <u>"Activists assume that because something is true, it will be meaningful to the people we're trying to reach. But In fact, the opposite is often the case: if something is meaningful, people believe it to be true." —Center for Story-Based Strategy</u>

Add: The ADD step introduces new information and tools for learners to consider.

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1. What is a frame? [5 mins]

Go over the definitions of Frames and Framing and the explanations below. Make sure that participants understand these concepts, as the rest of the training builds on them.

<u>**FRAME DEFINITION:** Frames are mental shortcuts that guide how people interpret the world and make sense of new information.</u>

- <u>Frames work like mental shortcuts that help us make sense of the world.</u> We all have ideas about how the world works — ideas that shape our perceptions of all new information we encounter, guide how we think about issues, and influence what details we choose to pay attention to and which ones we choose to ignore. These conceptual frames act like mental shortcuts. They allow our brains to organize information so we can make sense of the world around us. Whether or not we realize it, we use frames all the time.
- <u>Everyone already uses frames all the time</u>. When it comes to learning new information, nobody is a "blank slate". People come to everything they see or hear with existing ideas and notions about how the world works — anecdotes, experiences, stereotypes, and values that they rely on to understand issues and events. Because everyone uses frames all the time, it's important for us to know how to use them to our advantage.
- <u>We can use language to create frames.</u> Frames don't just show up in our thinking — language is full of them too. If we can use language to present the issues we care about in ways that make sense according to the frames that people already have, we have a better shot at getting people to understand and agree with our views. That's called framing.

<u>**FRAMING DEFINITION:** Framing is using language and messaging to present an issue in a way that gets people to understand and agree with your views by appealing to their existing values.</u>

- Framing is all about values. People are much more likely to pay attention to information that fits into their existing frames, so the best way to get people to agree with your position is to use language they understand and speak to the values that are important to them.

Questions to ask yourself when figuring out how to frame an issue:
1. What are your audience's values?
2. Based on those values, what concerns do you think they would have with regards to your issue?
3. How can you talk about the issue in a way that speaks to those concerns and gets them to act?

2. Frame Practice [5 mins]

Activity instructions:
  Present the following framing examples from the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign (or a different campaign of your choice). Present the opponent's message first, and ask the group what values are being appealed to in that message. When they get to the right answer, have them brainstorm framing for the Beyond Coal campaign that appeals to the same values, but carries our message. Write down their answers, then reveal example answers. (Flipchart the messages & examples)

Opponent's messages	Values	Beyond Coal messages
● "If coal plants and mines shut down, hardworking people will lose their jobs." ● "The economy is bad enough already." ● "This coal plant will provide our town with jobs that we desperately need."	Jobs	● "Investment in clean energy will create new jobs." ● "The clean energy transition is already happening. In fact, more workers today are employed in the wind industry than in the coal mining industry." ● "As our economy shifts away from fossil fuels and toward clean energy, we must ensure economic justice for all workers, including access to good, family-sustaining union jobs for fossil fuel workers."
● "Electricity saves lives and improves people's quality of life." ● "Scrubbers and other technology can make 'clean coal' even cleaner."	Health	● "Coal makes us sick." ● "Coal is a major trigger of asthma attacks and the #1 source of mercury pollution." ● "There are cleaner and safer energy sources than coal, and our communities deserve better."

Tip: Make sure that your frame does not repeat the opponent's frame!

Invoking the opponent's frame is playing into their game. If your message brings up your opponent's frame, even if it's to argue against it, you're already invoking all the ideas that go along with the frame your opponent crafted. This is the idea behind the title of Lakoff's book: if you say "Don't think of an

elephant," it's impossible for your audience *not* to think of an elephant. Before you're done with your sentence, they're already thinking about floppy ears, circuses, and everything else that they associate with "elephant". Similarly, if you say "Clean coal is a dirty lie," you've already repeated the frame of "clean coal" and associated "clean" with "coal" for your audience. That's the opponent's story, and we need to tell our own story. Instead, say "Coal is dirty!" or "Coal makes us sick!"

3. What is strategic messaging? [5 mins]

> *MESSAGING DEFINITION*: Strategic messaging is a set of statements that uses intentional **framing** that works with people's **values** and makes them want to take **action**.

Strategic messaging is the language we use to talk about our issues. In campaign communication, it is designed to bring people over to our side, to influence policy, and/or to win a campaign. It is meant to help us connect with people by meeting them where they're at, by using language they understand and speaking to their values — but it can also share new information or ideas.

The end goal is to make your audience agree with your perspective, feel empowered, and want to make a difference in the direction of your issue.

Tip: Never underestimate the power of positive messaging. It can be easy for us to get bogged down in the doom and gloom of what is happening, but giving people hope and the ability to envision solutions can make a world of difference. It's important to show the problems, but it's good to help people think forward towards a better future. For example, take the name of the Beyond Coal campaign. Even the name uses positive messaging to show that there are solutions to the problems we face.

4. Tips for Crafting a Message [5 mins]

F.R.A.M.E.S. = tips for crafting a message! *(source: Center for Story-Based Strategy)*

F = Frame Your Story
    Introduce the issue on your terms, and reinforce the values you are addressing.

R = Reframe Opponent's Story
    Make sure your message is not reiterating your opponent's frame (remember the elephant!), but instead telling a new story — your campaign's story.

A = Accessible to the Audience
    Tailor the message to your audience and their values. You'll be using different messaging when talking to politicians than you would talking to your neighbor.

M = Meme
    It's not just about cat pictures on the internet! The definition of a "meme" is a phrase, slogan, image, or piece of information that spreads from person to person through repetition. Your messaging should be memorable and easy to spread, something people will remember and talk about with their friends. Think of catchy, memorable slogans or phrases that reinforce your framing — for example, *Beyond Coal*.

E = Emotional

People won't take action because of charts or statistics alone. Appeal to people's values and create a message that has an emotional impact.

S = Simple & Short

Your message should get right to the core of your issue and focus on the most important points.

> **Apply:** The APPLY step invites learners to utilize the new information in a task, challenge, or focused conversation. (e.g. practice, application, case studies, compare, etc.)

1. Messaging Practice [15 mins]

Activity instructions:

Divide participants into small groups to practice creating messaging for the Campuses Beyond Coal campaign (or your own example). Using the info provided, participants should come up with (1) a list of some of the values they identify for their target audience, and (2) several key messages to use when targeting that audience. Flipchart the information below.

Campuses Beyond Coal Campaign
- You are college students working on a Campuses Beyond Coal campaign, which is focused on moving your school off coal-generated electricity to 100% clean energy.
- The university buys all of its electricity from the local utility, which gets 80% of its energy from coal-fired power plants in the region. The coal used in these plants is mostly from southern Illinois and central Appalachia, where mountaintop removal mining is prevalent.
- The city your university is in was recently ranked among the worst in your state for air quality compared to other cities its size. The coal plants are a significant source of pollution, but they also provide many jobs in the region.
- Last year, the university upgraded to more efficient lighting in several academic buildings, and now construction is almost finished on a new dorm that meets green building standards.

*Small groups should choose one of these three target audiences:*

1) **Other students,** who you want to join the campaign by coming to your kick-off meeting.
2) **Community members,** who you want to sign your petition.
3) **School administrators,** who you want to make a commitment to transition the school off coal-generated electricity and install renewable energy systems on campus.

Alternative: If your Sprog program is doing SIM, you can use SIM as the example. Have participants break into their SIM teams and brainstorm framing and messaging for their SIM campaigns. Remind teams to choose a specific target audience (e.g. Ward 5 residents, FBU students, commissioners, etc.).

> **Add:** The ADD step introduces new information and tools for learners to consider.

1. Intro to Message Box [10 mins]

(Flipchart the blank message box)
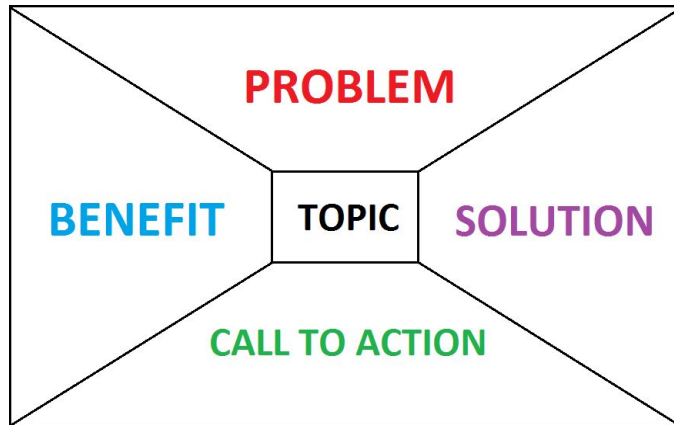
This is a blank message box. A message box is a visual tool for organizing strategic messaging, an alternative to having a long laundry-list of of talking points. It can help us be more nimble and able to respond to questions while staying on message.

This message box has 4 parts, with the topic in the center. Together, these 4 components tell a persuasive and comprehensive story. Each part should have a main idea and several specific talking points.

Remember: **There are lots of ways to create a message box — this is just one example.**

PROBLEM – identifies and frames the issue.
   ● Starting at the top of the box is the "problem" your campaign is trying to address.
SOLUTION – identifies and frames concrete steps to fix the problem.
   ● The right side of the box is the "solution" to the problem you've defined. This is important! Research shows that it's not enough to just "raise awareness" or get people upset about problems. If we want people to take action, we also have to present solutions and show people that they can take action to make a difference.
CALL TO ACTION – shows how target audiences can work together to implement the solution.
   ● The bottom of the box is the "call to action" – showing how we can change things, together.
BENEFITS – connects with the audience over shared benefits.
   ● The left side of the box is the "benefit" – how we as a group, campus, community, or nation will benefit if we do solve this problem and act together.

2. Using a Message Box [10 mins]

Pollution from coal plants causes asthma attacks and makes kids sick.

- Asthma affects 1 out of every 10 school kids.
- Asthma is the #1 illness that causes kids in the U.S. to miss school.
- Coal pollution causes 12,000 emergency room visits and $100 billion in health costs every year

We will all breathe easier with clean energy.

- Clean air means lower health costs and a healthier economy
- With stronger pollution standards and clean energy, our kids will breathe easier.

Health impacts of coal pollution

(Beyond Coal campaign)

The path to reducing health risks is clean energy.

- There are energy sources available that are better and cleaner than coal
- The cost of coal is going up, and wind and solar are getting cheaper; a clean energy transition is possible

We need better clean air protections.

- New clean air standards from the EPA would protect public health and reduce pollution from coal-fired power plants
- We need our politicians to renew the promise we made to future generations when we instituted clean air protections: that our air will be safe and our kids will be healthy. Sign on to the Clean Air Promise at sierraclub.org/cleanairpromise.

Flipchart the example message box for the Beyond Coal campaign (or create your own example), and reveal the 4 parts one at a time. Then act out an interview, with one trainer posing as a reporter and one as the campaign spokesperson who answers questions using the message box. After the mock interview, ask participants what parts of the message box they heard. You could also have the trainer interviewee talk for a minute about how they used the message box to help them.

Trainers should prep for this in advance! Sample questions for the reporter:

- *"Why do people need to be concerned about coal-fired power plants?"*
- *"What can we can do to improve air quality?"*
- *"Is renewable energy really a feasible alternative to coal?"*
- *"Won't a shift to renewable energy cost taxpayers money?"*

Apply: The APPLY step invites learners to utilize the new information in a task, challenge, or focused conversation. (e.g. practice, application, case studies, compare, etc.)

1. Activity: Create a Message Box [35 mins *(5 intro + 15 work + 15 interviews)*]

Working in the same small groups from section VII, participants will create a message box for the example campaign or SIM. They should work with the same target audience as before and use the list of values/messages from section VII. Groups should draw their message box on a sheet of flipchart paper.

If there's time, have a trainer pose as a reporter and interview a few people in front of the whole group.

Post the interviewee's message box within view during the interview. Afterwards, ask other participants which points from the message box they saw being used in the interview and what they thought worked. Ask the interviewees for their reflections too. (Note: they haven't had a media or spokesperson training, so it doesn't need to be a perfect interview – the goal is to get people comfortable using a message box.)

If you do interviews, share these public speaking tips:

- Clearly connect the 4 parts of the box. Show how the Problem connects to the Solution, or how the Call to Action will lead to the Benefits, etc.

- Try not to get stuck in one section of the box, especially the Problem section. Instead, be sure to bridge back to the Benefits and values that people care about, or the Call to Action and Solution that will inspire your audience.

- Stick to the message box during the interview. If your mind goes blank, try visualizing the box and jumping to one of the sections.

Away: The AWAY step invites learners to connect their new understanding to the real world context of their lives. (e.g. a personal action plan, commitment, projection into future, etc.)

1. Debrief [5 mins]

Come back to the full group for reflection/debrief. Hear a few answers to each of these questions:

- How did making a message box help you think about the way you talked about your issue?
- When would you use a message box in a campaign outside of Sprog?
- WHY is it important to be intentional about messaging?
- What was the most important takeaway from this training?