

Message Framing, Focus & Discipline for Nonprofits

WFF Communications Capacity Building Seminar

May 2025 • Led by Julie C. Robbins





About Messaging

Messaging Defined

**What an entity says
about itself
to reinforce
its value promise**

- Set of convincing “key message” statements
 - Clear and concise
- Audience-centric
 - Written for the intended audience
 - Deployed on the audience’s preferred platform(s)
- Complements branding efforts
 - Must be consistent to be effective, regardless of audience or platform
 - Repeats key words, phrases and vocabulary
- Natural outgrowth of organizational mission and goal(s)

Seven “Must-Haves” of Compelling Messages

Bespoke Written for the audience and the platform, reflecting the audience’s decisionmaking factors

Concise A single sentence; a single idea

Strategic Articulates context to your value proposition – what you are and why you matter

Simple Easy verbiage and grammar for audiences to understand; no acronyms, jargon, and flowery or bureaucratic language

Convincing Believable information to stimulate action; active voice (vs. passive voice)

Relevant Appealing to the audience – both emotionally and rationally

Memorable Catchy but not kitschy; easily recalled



Messaging Purpose

1

Ensures that **everyone** in an organization who needs to communicate something can do it with **common key points** and understanding of **what audiences should hear**.

2

While messaging is usually created by the comms team, it should be used by **individuals and teams across an entity**, from executive leaders to grant and program managers, education and outreach, human resources, etc.

3

The primary purpose of messaging is to ensure that everything you communicate ultimately **ties back to the major points** you want **audiences to know and believe about you**.



About Framing

**“Meaning exists
at the intersection
of a text, a context
and a receiving audience.”**

Kathleen Hall Jamieson
“Communicating the Value and Values of Science,” 2015

Message Framing

Storylines that make your message pertinent to the audience

- **Framing a message is putting it in a context to which the audience can relate**
 - Taps into the human brain's way of sorting/ managing information
 - Enables the audience to determine the importance and accuracy of a message
 - Acknowledges the mental filters (personal beliefs, values, cultural influences, etc.) through which the audience will accept and respond to information
- **Audiences will receive your message through the lens of their own experiences**
 - How and why people come to different conclusions and make different choices, even when exposed to the exact same data
 - "That's how I see it."



Effective Message Frames

Values within a culture shape perception and understanding

Values are ideas about what is right and wrong, desirable and undesirable, normal and abnormal, proper and improper. **People in a particular culture share certain values, which shape the way they interact with, understand and process information.** When considering how to frame your entity's message, consider doing so within these recognized values of American society:

Freedom and Independence

Individuality/Individualism

Loyalty and Patriotism

Order and Control

Privacy

Egalitarianism (vs. Elitism)

Family

Time and Its Value/ Efficiency

Informality

Transparency

Competition and Achievement

Confidence and Directness

Practicality

Work, Ingenuity and Innovation

Acquisition and Materialism

The image features a large, bright yellow circle centered on a dark blue background. The background is composed of several concentric circles of varying shades of blue, creating a ripple effect. The text "About Bridging" is centered within the yellow circle in a bold, dark blue font.

About Bridging

Bridging Defined

Technique used to transition from a question or topic to a more advantageous or desired subject matter

- Helps you maintain control and ensure you convey your intended message
- Transitions topics
- Controls the narrative
- Shuts down potentially negative or irrelevant lines of conversation
- Builds rapport
- Demonstrates that you are thoughtful and engaged in the conversation

**“What questions
do you have
for my
answers?”**

**- Henry Kissinger
U.S. Secretary of State,
1973-77**



When Do I Bridge?

Whenever anyone seems
to be trying to get you
off-message.

- News Media
- Donors
- Board Members
- Employees
- Community Members
- Job Seekers
- Competitors
- Disruptors
- Antagonists
- Opponents

How Might Someone Try to Get Me Off-Message?

- Vague questions
- Personal questions
- Personal perspectives: "What would *you* do ...?"
- Emotional questions: "How do you *feel* about ...?"
- Silence
- Hypotheticals: "What if"
- Expecting a *statement* (vs. a question) to be responded to
- "Is there anything you'd like to add?"
- Leading questions/comments that presume an outcome/conclusion

Bridging Phrases

"That's a good point, but what's really important is..."

"I understand your concern, but what we've been focusing on is..."

"That's a valid question but let me tell you about..."

"While that's an important consideration, the focus really needs to be on ..."

"Let me put all this in perspective by saying..."

"Before we continue, let me emphasize that..."

"The heart of the matter is..."

"I think it would be more correct to say..."

"What is key here is..."

"Before we leave the subject, let me add that..."

"What I've said comes down to this..."

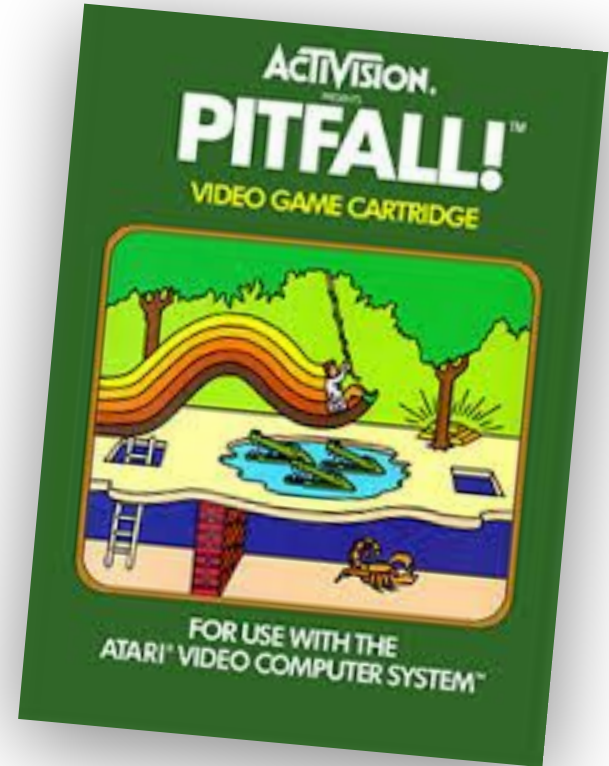
"Another thing to remember is..."

"And what's most important to know is..."

"The real issue here is..."

Bridging Pitfalls

- Not being prepared
- Not expecting questions that are outside your comfort zone
- Sounding evasive
- Being perceived as combative
- Responding to the question as asked
- *Not* responding to the question at all
- Fumbling the post-bridge message
- Rambling



Additional Sources

- ["Using the bridging technique to help answer difficult questions"](#)
- ["64 Bridging Statements you can use in a Media Interview"](#)
- ["How to use bridging phrases like a pro"](#)
- ["Bridging Phrases"](#)
- ["Master bridging phrases"](#)



**Thoughts?
Questions?**

RESULTS • STRATEGY • PERFORMANCE

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