



# All Eyes On You: How To Be a Spokesperson For Your Agency

Loosely based on a presentation developed by Rocketship Education

# Goals of This Training



- Prepare for communicating with external audiences.
- Know how Community Action fits into the broader anti-poverty movement in your service area.
- Know common misunderstandings of your CAP and the Community Action movement in general.
- Know key external messaging points that you can use.

# Housekeeping



**Please sign in to get materials  
e-mailed to you!**

**Also please provide feedback  
by completing the evaluation.**

**Intros!**



**Who's In the  
Room?**

# What's Your Story?



spokesperson 

*noun* | spokes·per·son | \- .pər-sən\

Popularity: Bottom 30% of words

## Simple Definition of SPOKESPERSON

: a man or woman who speaks for or represents someone or something

Source: Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary

# What Makes a Good Spokesperson?



- Trustworthiness
- Positivity
- Comfortability with public speaking
- Authenticity
- Kindness
- Knowledge of programs
- Willingness to help



## Homework Assignment

Learn basic information about each agency program and how the program can be accessed.

# What's Your Story?



# Let's hear it!



# Your Elevator Pitch



## Homework Assignment

Develop (or refine) an elevator pitch for your agency and make sure ALL your team members can affirm it confidently!

# Why Does Your CAP Need to Tell Its Own Story?



- There is a lack of understanding of poverty and anti-poverty initiatives.
- For your CAP to be valued by the community, you must talk about how our CAP adds value to the broader community.

# Why Does Your CAP Need to Tell Its Own Story?



- The more knowledgeable the public, the better for your CAP.
- Your CAP will have its critics. It's important that your CAP defines itself on its own terms.

# How We Do It



- Seize the initiative.
- Tell your story first.
- Always tell the truth.
- Tell your story *your* way.
- Get all the facts out about your CAP's successes.

# Know Who You Want to Reach



## Who is your audience?

- Community members
- Board members
- Legislators
- Community organizations
- Current and prospective program participants
- Current and prospective staff
- Media
- Third Party Validators

# Know Who You Want to Reach



## Remember

Your audience can/will change, but you must always be proactive, targeted and strategic in order to influence your audience, and ultimately influence public awareness.



# What's the Word On the Street?

# What's the Word On the Street?



## Homework Assignment

The public's perception is their reality until you prove otherwise. Do an assessment (formal, informal or anecdotal) of your agency's reputation among community members and key stakeholders. Is it positive/negative/non-existent?



# Know Common Misunderstandings About Community Action



## 1. Don't help people.

- Cherry pick program participants.
- Getting help is unnecessarily hard.

## 2. Short-term success.

- Program participants are only helped in the short-term.
- Handouts, not hand-ups

## 3. Uncaring.

- Staff are sometimes less than compassionate.
- Obstinate.
- Unwilling to help when we can make concessions.

# Know Common Misunderstandings About Community Action



## 4. Inefficient.

- Phone systems and websites not user-friendly.
- Multiple trips to bring documents.

## 5. No Accountability – “scandals.”

- Governance/conflict of interest.
- Misspending of taxpayer money.

# Know Common Misunderstandings About Community Action



## 6. Government bureaucracy.

- Wasteful.
- Ineffective.
- Biased.
- Government-funded programs breed laziness in the program participants who receive help and in the agencies who rely wholly on this funding to serve program participants.

## 7. Other...



**Once you know how your  
audience thinks, the  
retraining can begin!**

# Key Messages



- Your CAP is a leading non-profit Community Action Agency providing **basic needs, emergency services and self-sufficiency programs** for low-wage workers, retirees and their families.
- Your CAP's goal is **to eliminate the barriers** that keep individuals economically insecure.
- Your CAP currently serves over ---- **thousand individuals** in your service area.

# Key Messages



- Your CAP is the **highest-performing organization** serving low-income individuals with a variety of services.
- Your CAP **meets people where they are** to get them what they need to be to overcome poverty.
- Your CAP is diligently working to improve customer service and service delivery so program participants have a more **transformative interaction**.

# Key Messages



- Your CAP has been fighting the War On Poverty in your area for **50 years** (since 1964) or more.
- Your CAP is **constantly evolving** its service delivery and will only become more innovative and efficient in its utilization of technology.
- Community Action is a high-quality, proven successful model that's committed to fighting poverty **around the nation**.

# Key Messages



- Your CAP is **committed to meeting the diverse needs** of economically-disadvantaged citizens.
- Your CAP is able to do have such wide-reaching impact because of strategic **partnerships with non-profit organizations, private business, government and the faith-based community.**
- Your CAP works to **break the cycles** of situational and generational poverty.





**We do so much!  
Which programs  
should we highlight?**

# Three Pillars of Economic Independence



## ➤ Basic Needs

- Your CAP helps the citizens of your service area to meet their basic needs. By doing this, we allow them to focus on improving their future.

## ➤ Crisis Intervention

- Your CAP provides a firm landing spot when the bottom is falling out. We intervene in financial crises (with domestic violence assistance, homelessness prevention, the prevention of disconnection, etc.) to help good people out of tough situations when they have nowhere else to turn.

# Three Pillars of Economic Independence



## ➤ Financial Empowerment

- Your CAP provides people with the tools to become financially empowered. Your self-sufficiency programs teach them financial literacy principles they can use for the rest of their lives; employment and educational support that will improve the economic standing of their families; energy conservation that will save them money for years to come and will improve the environment; youth leadership skills that will help break the cycle of generational poverty; and home ownership that will build wealth for generations to come.



Remember

**NOBODY KNOWS YOUR JARGON!!!**

# How You Get the Message Out



- Talking with program participants and community members.
- Commenting on news articles or blog posts.
- Speaking at board meetings and community meetings.
- Writing letters to the editor or op-eds.
- Helping tell the story of your CAP to the press.

# What Story Do You Tell?



**The best stories are often the ones not told...  
People will care what you have to say!**

- What is your CAP doing for people in your area that no one else is?
- What does it feel like to be a member of the CAP community?

# Consistent Messaging = Desired Perceptions



When speaking to the broader public, it is important to convey what is **first, best, most** or **unique** about your CAP.

# Consistent Messaging = Desired Perceptions



**First:** We have been committed to fighting poverty long before many other organizations who serve our same clientele.

**Best:** Your CAP is one of the highest performing Community Action Agencies in the state. We also usually help more program participants than other organizations and are able to provide more assistance.

**Unique:** We have a unique service delivery system that allows for minimal fraud and maximum oversight.



# Tips for Communicating with the Media

(or anybody else!)



## Preparation: General Rules of Thumb

- Try to anticipate the reporter's questions.
- Tell your story – this is an opportunity for you to frame your position – before critics tell your story for you.
- Create a personal sound bite.
- Write down talking points—then memorize them.
- Practice.

# Tips for Communicating with the Media



## Basic Do's & Don'ts:

- Ask the reporter as much as you can prior to the interview.
- Know your key message points.
- Turn negatives into positives.
- Stay on message! The public usually only hears your answers and not their questions.

**Avoid making the 5 most common mistakes.**

# When Speaking To the Public...



# Avoid the 5 Most Common Mistakes

# Mistake #1: Displaying Anger



# The Correct Response



- Don't get your emotions get the best of you – it will rarely work in your favor.
- Focus on your demeanor.
- It's always best to relax. And smile!

# Mistake #2: Evasiveness



# The Correct Response



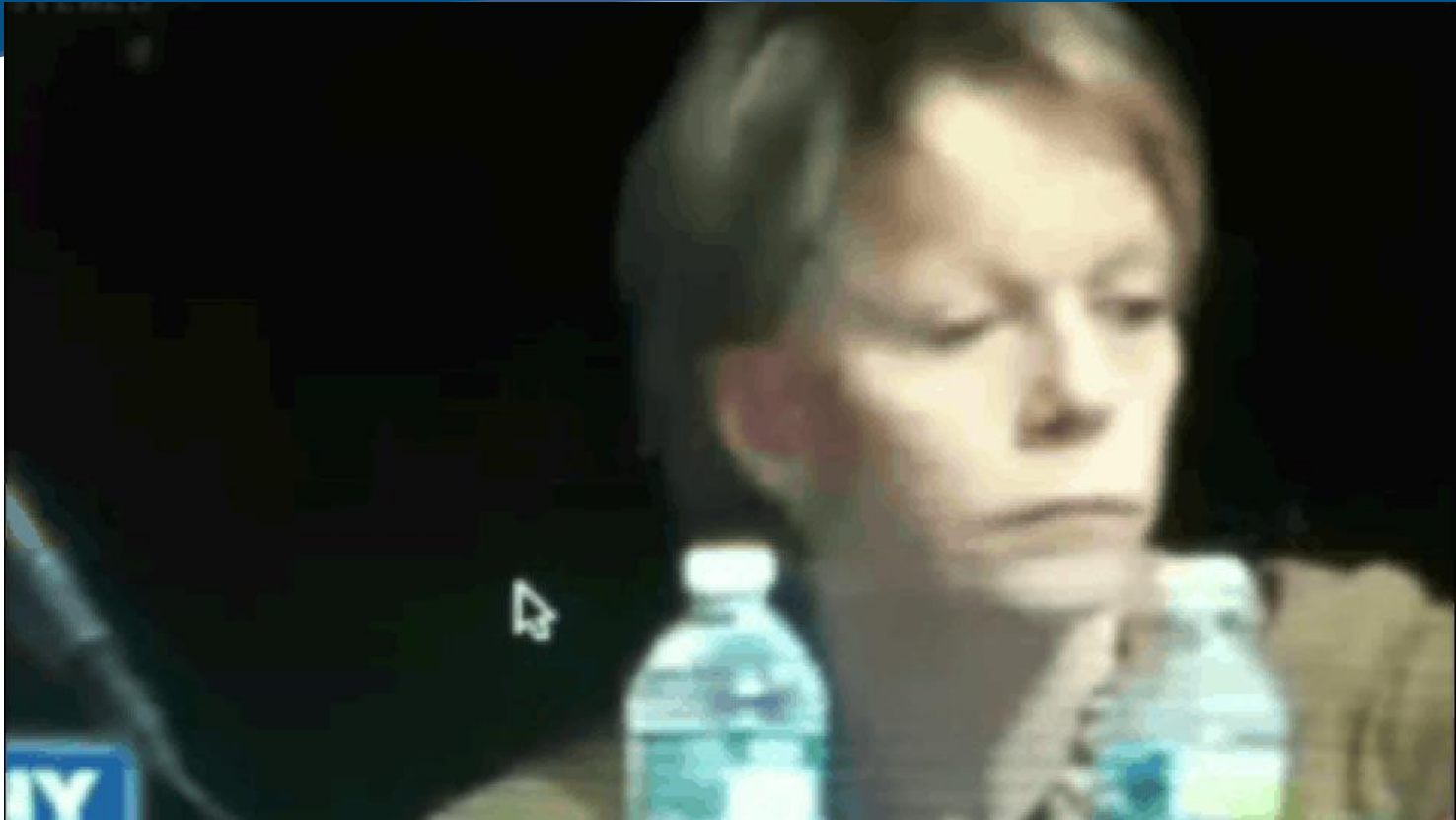
- Preparation is key! Know your messages.
- Answer the question! Know when you've said enough and stop there.
- Avoid the "siege mentality."
- Don't just make something up—that can lead to follow-up questions
- Be quick on your feet

# Mistake #3: Lack of Empathy/ Out of Touch/Insensitive





# Mistake #3: Lack of Empathy/ Out of Touch/Insensitive



# The Correct Response



- Display sensitivity. The public needs to know that you can understand and relate to them.
- Remain consistent throughout. Don't suddenly change your tone after you've been rattled.
- Never complain. The public won't be sympathetic to your plight.

# Mistake #4: Stonewalling/Defensiveness



# The Correct Response



- Be prepared. Know what you are going to say and exactly how you are going to say it.
- Be aware of current events and incorporate that into your messaging—*sensitively*.
- Never underestimate the power of an apology.
- Stay away from hostile media interviews.

# Mistake #5: Repeating the Negative



# The Correct Response



- Don't repeat the negative. This one statement helped define Nixon's presidency.
- Develop messaging that focuses on the positive.
- Remember that in many interviews, viewers hear the answer, not the question.

# Tips for Communicating With the Media



- Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know the answer to a question – instead offer to find the answer and get back to them.
- Don't respond to questions based on unfamiliar facts.
- Don't repeat negatives and don't use negative buzz words.
- Focus on good body language.
  - Smile.
  - Maintain a relaxed demeanor.
- Dress for success
  - Avoid busy patterns, bright pink and white.

# Tips for Communicating With the Media



- Public speaking.
  - Speak slowly and enunciate.
  - Avoid “Um’s.”
  
- Choosing a location
  - Good lighting, either in a well-lit room or outside in the sunshine.
  - Strategically place your logo or sign in the background for additional publicity.
  - Prepare for a ‘Skype’ interview.
  
- Protect the privacy of your program participants
  - Always get permission and a release





# Speaking of Program Participants...

# Program Participants



Someone whose life has been changed  
by your agency makes the **BEST**  
spokesperson!!!

# Program Participants



## Homework Assignment

Identify a program participant who can act as your spokesperson!

# Program Participants



## Keep in mind the following:

- Be respectful—not exploitative
- Avoid stereotypes
- Be honest
- Choose an actual success



# What To Do In a Crisis

# What To Do In a Crisis



## Examples of Crisis:

- False or real allegations of mismanagement, fraud or abuse
- Potential employee misconduct
- Disaster or violence
- Accident

# What To Do In a Crisis



## Steps to Consider:

- Take immediate action on behalf of the safety and security of staff and students and work with your site supervisor.
- Work with your leadership department to identify next steps for internal and external communications and other support efforts where necessary.
- Consult Crisis Response Team (usually your executive director)

# What To Do In a Crisis



- Contact parent(s) or family member of involved persons to obtain: accurate information about the crisis, what information can be shared, appropriate responses to family members and key community stakeholders, etc.
- Notify oversight agencies and associations.
- Be open and available. Recognize that “no comment” is a comment.
- Streamline communication by selecting one spokesperson.





## Homework Assignment

**Develop a Crisis Communications Plan**



## A Summary of Homework Assignments

- 1. Learn Your Programs**
- 2. Develop an elevator pitch**
- 3. Assess public perception of your agency**
- 4. Identify a program participant to act as your spokesperson**
- 5. Develop a Crisis Communications Plan**



# Questions?

# Contact Info



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Please use the link below to create a free Wiggio account so you can share resources and keep in touch with other CAP marketing professionals from around the nation.

[https://wiggio.com/group\\_open\\_join.php?groupid=3197197&password=sharethepromise&ref=3721850](https://wiggio.com/group_open_join.php?groupid=3197197&password=sharethepromise&ref=3721850)

(the password if asked is "sharethepromise")

Follow [Palmetto CAP](#) on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to learn how we're spreading the Community Action message!

# Thanks for Attending!



Now you're equipped to tell the  
***Community Action*** story !!!