

Legislative Toolbox



Framing Your Issues

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What do we mean by “framing”?

Oftentimes, issues and ideas are difficult to articulate and coherently communicate.

When you compound this reality with the fact that decision-makers are limited in time and knowledge on most subjects, the importance of clearly and concisely relaying your message becomes an important task.

Ultimately, we are left to our own devices to determine how to appropriately convey information. Without proper direction, this can be a daunting and confusing task. This is where “framing” comes into play.

Framing is a method of communication used to take issues and condense them into simpler ideas. Consider yourself a teacher, and your task is to educate others on your issues; you are the expert, and your job is to promote understanding. This is achieved by reducing your issue to an uncomplicated theme with an outline of both supporting arguments and counter-arguments to any opposition.

Framing is important because ...

Communications play a vital role in determining which issues the public prioritizes for policy resolution, which issues that move from the private realm to the public sphere, which issues that become pressure points for policymakers, and which issues that win or lose in the competition for scarce resources. Therefore, organizations cannot approach tasks like issue advocacy, constituency-building, or promoting best practices without taking into account the critical role that framed messages have in impacting public policy.

You should know that ...

Framing is not the same as spin; framing is about using ideas to influence the way people think. You need to compact your issues and communicate them in an easy to understand manner with good, accurate information. Use framing to open conversations that have the potential to persuade listeners to support your cause. Opponents will be doing this, so it is paramount that you clearly communicate your stance on issues.

Additional information

Your issues should be condensed into a one-page fact sheet that serves as an introduction to you, your work, and your agenda. Make it clear, concise and easy to read. It should discuss the following: Who are you? What does your organization do? Who are your clients? What geographical areas do you serve? What are your objectives (with supporting arguments)? This information serves to position your organization by telling your story, which reflects your mission and key messages. It should also include contact information.

Final tips ...

“Framing” helps define issues, explain who is responsible, and suggest potential solutions. Avoid perceptions of extremism by using reasonable tones; use numbers simply, wisely, and sparingly to help support your story; use simple visuals to reinforce the theme of your story; define problems so that community influences and opportunities are apparent; and use solutions to define responsibility for the problem.