



▶▶▶▶ **Mastering Your Messages  
for the Media and Beyond**

MLA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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**“The most important single ingredient  
in the formula of success is knowing  
how to get along with people.”**

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Theodore Roosevelt

**“By failing to prepare,  
you are preparing to fail.”**

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Benjamin Franklin



WV WATER CRISIS

**LIVE**

**GARY SOUTHERN**

PRES., FREEDOM INDUSTRIES



## UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

# Changing newsrooms

Newsrooms are no longer full of hundreds of people like you see in the movies. Instead, you'll see "one-man bands" and rotating weekly staff furloughs due to cost cutting.

- Fewer resources means less time to fact check and less time to investigate.
- The news cycle is 24/7. Outlets can post online and on social media channels any time of day.
- Outlets are introducing paywalls and limiting content to subscribers only.
- Newsrooms are concerned about balance — don't want to be labeled as biased or "fake news."



## UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

# What makes a 'good' story?

### REPORTER'S DEFINITION

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- Accurate, balanced and interesting
- True, if possible
- Short and sweet - on page one, or lead story in the newscast, easy to tweet, get on the website
- Controversy or unusual is fine. Scandal is terrific!

### YOUR DEFINITION

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- Favorable, positive
- Accurate, balanced and true
- Spokesperson looks and sounds good
- Your key message gets through

# Bottom Line

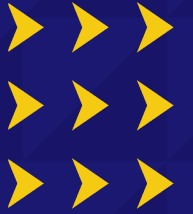
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Reporters have limited resources and tight time constraints.

A reporter is going to do the story – with or without you.

Working with the media is still an effective way of generating positive news.

A call from a reporter is an opportunity to communicate.



WHAT TO DO WHEN A REPORTER CALLS

# Your Checklist

*Before you answer any questions from a reporter:*

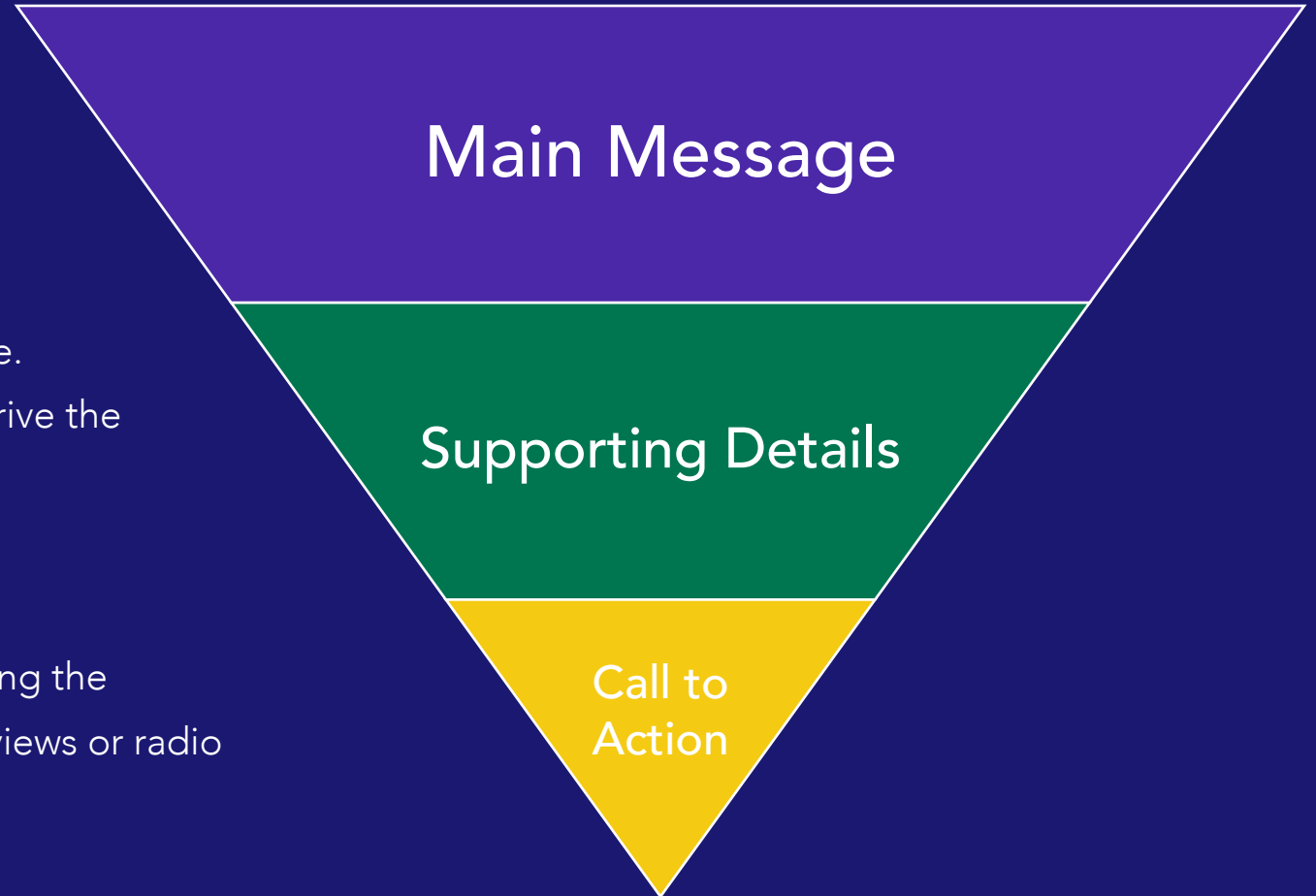
1. Gather information: WHO, WHAT, WHEN.
2. Thank the reporter for reaching out and let them know you'll be back in touch shortly.
3. Start your research.

## CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE

# Inverted Pyramid

- Main Message: The #1 takeaway for your audience.
- Supporting Details: Messages or facts that help drive the main message home.
- Call to Action: What you want people to do.

Write out your key messages and refer to them during the interview, if possible. Use notes during phone interviews or radio interviews but avoid notes on camera.



## CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE

# Anticipate & Prepare

- Have a single overriding communications objective – the key point you want to make – in mind.
- Anticipate the questions you are likely to be asked, including follow-up questions to your key messages.
- Anticipate the questions you are nervous about being asked and practice pivoting to your key messages (see next slide for **sample pivot phrases**).
- You do not have to answer the question. It's okay to say, "I don't have that information at this time, but I can follow up with you on that."



CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE

# Prepare to Pivot

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Practice using pivot phrases to transition to your key messages:

“What’s important to remember is...”

“I think the key issue you’re addressing here is...”

“The bottom line is...”

“What’s really at stake here is...”

“To go a step further...”

“Let me share some relevant facts to that point...”

“We’re here today to discuss...”

## CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE

# Practice Makes Perfect

- Don't memorize; internalize. Understand your key message and how your secondary messages support that key idea.
- Practice messages, timing, body movements and eye contact.
- Practice out loud — make sure the way you plan to say it feels natural to you (see **short statements tests** on next slide).
- Practice while doing other things — in the shower, at the store, at the gym, etc.





CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE

# Be Short & Sweet

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Use as few words as possible,  
but do not sacrifice clarity for brevity.

**One Breath Test:** Can you say your statement in one breath?

**35-Word Test:** No sentence should be longer than 35 words.

**4th Grade Level Test:** State your message, then restate it so  
that a 4th grader can understand.

## CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE

# Rely on the ‘Why’

- You care about your work for a reason: *that’s your why*.
- Always connect what you do back to residents / your community.
- Your tone should reflect that care and compassion.
- When crafting your message, don’t just say what it is. Include why it matters and let your tone reflect that.
- Especially in high stakes interviews, your tone must reflect an appropriate level of empathy. Put yourself in their shoes.
- Talk to the reporter as if he or she were your aunt, your neighbor, your child’s teacher – someone you respect, but who has little idea of the issue you are discussing.



## CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE

# Language Nuances

### WORDS TO USE

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“Our community” or “residents”

“elected officials”

“better X, stronger Y, or higher quality Z”

“areas of improvement”

### WORDS TO LOSE

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“taxpayers”

“legislature”

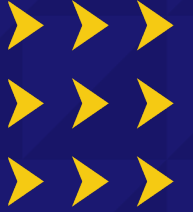
“more funding”

“deficiency”

## INTERVIEW TIPS & TRICKS

### General execution tips

- Always tell the truth. NEVER lie to a reporter!
- Be empathetic, not bureaucratic.
- No industry jargon or acronyms.
- Respond to the question you WISH you were asked, then pivot back to your message.
- Repeat your messages before you conclude.
- If you feel you're being misunderstood or misinterpreted, fix it by clarifying your position immediately.
- "No comment" is no good. You can almost always say something positive.



## EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

# Read, Listen, Watch & Improve

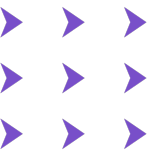
- Read your clips, listen to broadcast stories, and watch newscasts.
- Check your quotes for accuracy and request corrections, if necessary.
- Commend accuracy — follow up with the reporter and thank them, especially for accuracy on an issue.
- Remember: the more interviews you do, the less daunting they will be!

# Mastering Your Message with Patrons



# Changing Patrons

- Security incidents at public libraries are rising.
- Increasing partisanship.
- "...systemic issues of inadequate behavioral health and substance use resources."
- Library workers are being forced to play the role of social worker and are developing secondary trauma.





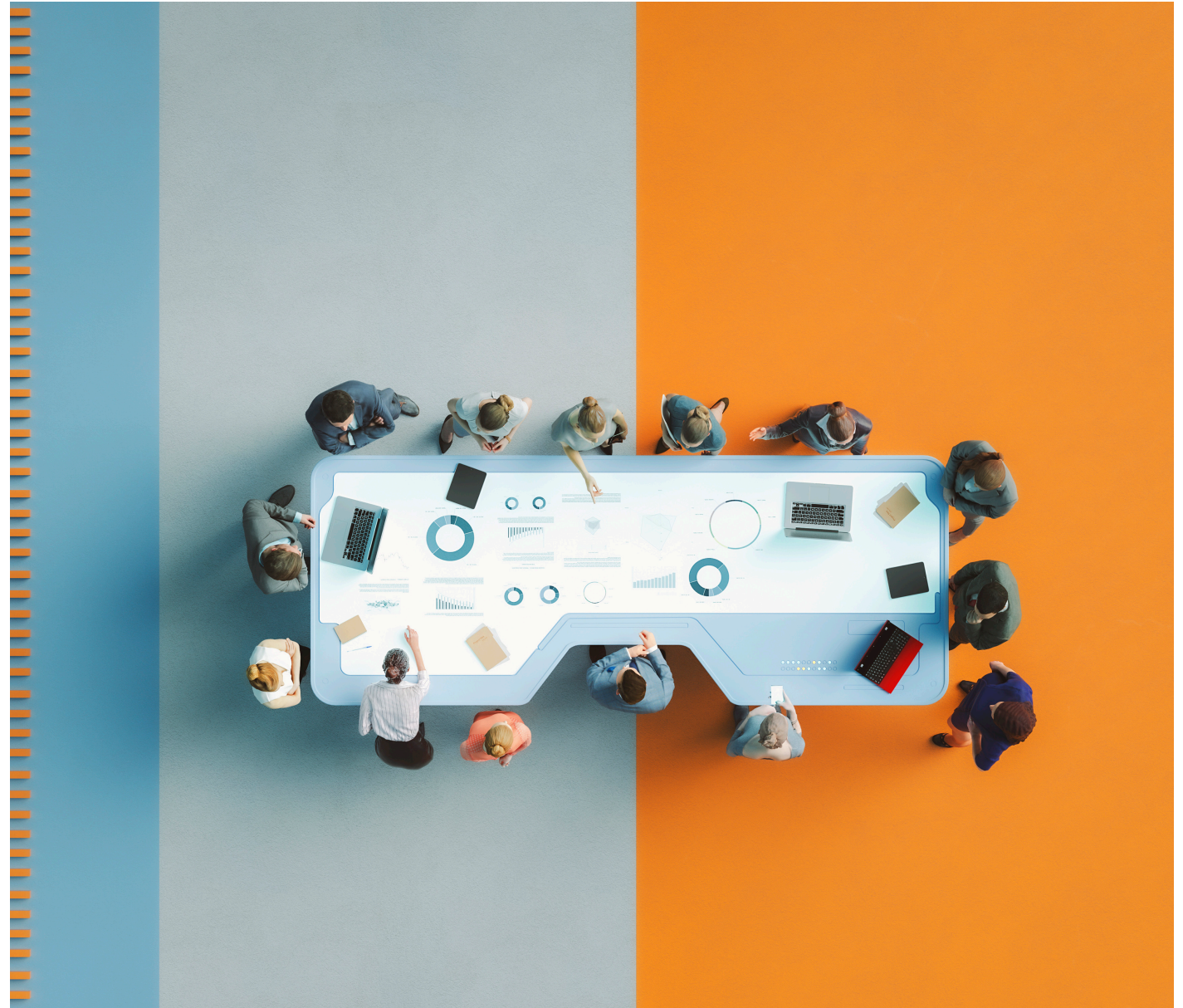
## Your Library Story

- *Crafting your message*
- Strategic Plan
- Clearly defined behavior policies
- Trauma-informed approach
- *Consistent and Transparent*



# Patron Prep

- Formalize and train staff on your “Library Story.”
- Adopt a trauma-informed approach.
- *Practice every possible scenario.*
- Develop “exit” plans.





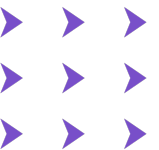
## Managing The Patron

- Stay calm.
- Be an active listener.
- *Be empathetic.*
- *Body language, tone, and eye contact.*
- *Do not sacrifice clarity for brevity.*
- *Prepare to pivot back to the main concern. Key point!*
- *Repeat the issue back to patron.*



# Post Patron

- Take time afterward to decompress.
- Review interaction with your team.
- Use a trauma-informed lens.
- Don't take it personally.

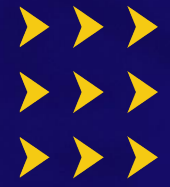




# Final Tips

- Be respectful.
- *You do not have to fully resolve the patron issue.*
- *Always tell the truth.*
- *No industry jargon.*
- *Always clarify.*





**Thank You!**