

Campaign Skills Trainer's Guide

Module 6 Message Development *Creating Powerful and Persuasive Messages*



CAMPAIGN SKILLS TRAINER'S GUIDE

MODULE 6: MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT *Creating Powerful and Persuasive Messages*

SESSION OVERVIEW:

As a candidate, having a compelling message is essential to persuading targeted voters to vote for you. This module covers the fundamentals of political communications and teaches participants what a message is, why it's important, and how to come up with an authentic and persuasive message for their campaign. Participants will practice crafting their own messages and using the message box tool during this module.

SECTIONS:

1. What is a Message?
2. Criteria for Effective Messages
3. Know Your Audience
4. The Challenge: Getting Heard
5. Developing Your Message
6. Testing the Message

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Understanding what message is and the difference between a message and a slogan and a political platform
- Recognizing criteria for an effective message
- Understanding your audience
- Skills and tools for developing and testing a message

TIME: 90 minutes

MATERIALS:

- Flipchart and paper, markers and tape
- Training agenda (optional – can be written on the flipchart)

HANDOUTS:

- MENA Regional Campaign School Workbook

PREPARATION:

- Writing on the flipchart in advance:
 - Agenda (optional – if it is not copied)
 - Learning Objectives
 - What is a MESSAGE?
 - A message is a short, truthful statement that lays out for voters why they should vote for you, and provides a contrast between you and your opponent(s).

Slogan

- **Very short**
- **Limited information**
- **Seen by all voters**

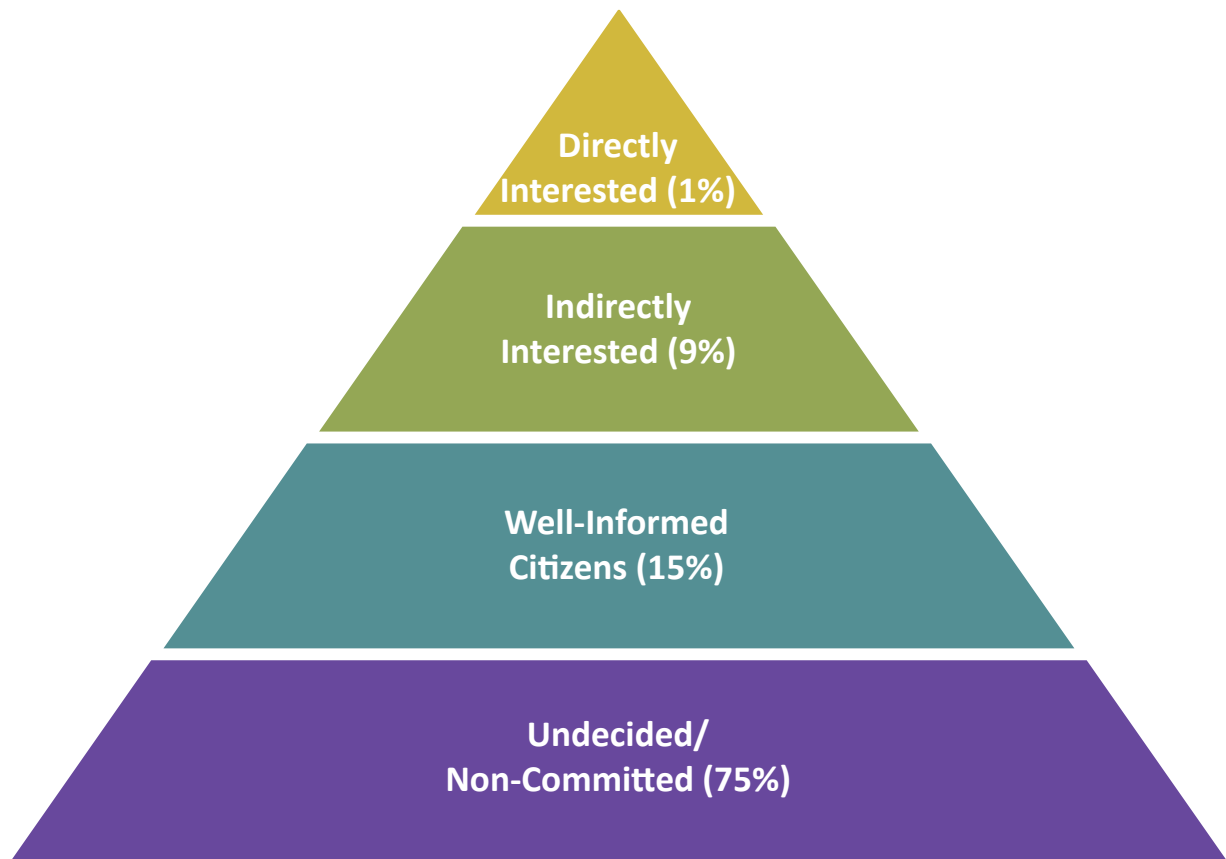
Message

- **Short**
- **Substantive**
- **Tailored to target voters**

Platform

- **Long**
- **Comprehensive**
- **Not many people read it**

- Criteria for Effective Message:
 - Short and Simple
 - Truthful and Credible
 - Important to Voters
 - Shows differences
 - Speaks to the Head and Heart
 - Targeted
 - Repeated
- The pyramid:



- The Message Box

What we say about us	What we say about them
What they say about us	What they say about them

KEY FOR THE TYPE OF ACTIVITIES INCLUDED IN THIS WORKSHOP:

TP – Trainer’s Presentation

PEE – Participants’ Experiences or Exercises

DBR – Facilitated Discussions, Brainstorming and Reflection

CLL – Conclusions and Lessons Learned

ANK – Application of New Knowledge

TRAINING ACTIVITIES

SECTION 1 – What is a Message? – 9’

Steps	Description	Type	Min	Note to the Trainer						
1	Introduction to the session and learning objectives.	TP	1							
2	Ask the participants to think about what they would answer if asked: Why should I vote for you? Ask volunteers to share their answers with the group. Get one or two answers.	DBR	2	If nobody wants to volunteer you can ask if among the participants is somebody who ran for an office before and ask that person to share what was his or her message. Or, if there is nobody who ran you can look for somebody who actively participated in an election campaign before and who was explaining to people why they should vote for his/her party or a candidate.						
3	<p>Introduce a message saying that, in its simplest form, a message is a statement of why someone should vote for a party or a candidate on election day: Once you have decided who your target audience is, you need to decide what you will say to persuade them to vote for you. This is your campaign message. It tells the voters why you are running for office and why they should choose you over your opponents for the same position.</p> <p>Read a definition of the message written on the flipchart.</p>	TP	1	<p>Definition of a message:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>What is a MESSAGE?</u></p> <p>A message is a short, truthful statement that lays out for voters why they should vote for you, and provides a contrast between you and your opponent(s).</p> </div>						
4	<p>Continue explaining the difference between a slogan, a message and a platform, which you have prepared on the flipchart.</p> <p>As you clarify the characteristics of a slogan ask the participants to share some well-known slogans as an illustration.</p> <p>After you explain the characteristics of a platform as the participants if their family members who would support their party have ever read a party’s platform (as a confirmation that it is too long for many people to read it).</p>	TP	5	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="background-color: #e67e22; color: white;">Slogan</th> <th style="background-color: #27ae60; color: white;">Message</th> <th style="background-color: #34495e; color: white;">Platform</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="background-color: #f1c307;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very short • Limited information • Seen by all voters </td> <td style="background-color: #d4edda;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short • Substantive • Tailored to target voters </td> <td style="background-color: #d1ecf1;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long • Comprehensive • Not many people read it </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Slogan	Message	Platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very short • Limited information • Seen by all voters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short • Substantive • Tailored to target voters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long • Comprehensive • Not many people read it
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SECTION 2 – Criteria for Effective Messages – 25’

Steps	Description	Type	Min	Note to the Trainer
1	<p>As you have already mentioned few characteristics of a message, elicit those from the participants by asking what they think would be criteria for effective messages.</p> <p>After you get some answers say that a campaign will spend the majority of its resources getting the candidate or party’s message out to targeted voters. To ensure the message will reach the voters with whom you need to communicate, it is important it meets the following criteria (have the criteria written on the flipchart in advance):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short and Simple • Truthful and Credible • Important to Voters • Shows differences • Speaks to the Head and Heart • Targeted • Repeated <p>Explain each of listed criteria:</p>	TP	5	<p><u>Criteria for effective messages:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short and Simple • Truthful and Credible • Important to Voters • Shows differences • Speaks to the Head and Heart • Targeted • Repeated
	<p><i>Make it Short and Simple</i> Messages must be concise. If you cannot effectively deliver your message to a voter in less than one minute, then you are likely to lose that voter’s attention and possibly their vote. Your message must also be delivered in language the voters use and understand easily. Don’t use technical words that the voters do not understand or have no real meaning to them. Creating a visual image in the minds of voters is much better than talking about abstract ideas. For example, talk about people, things and real-life situations to validate or illustrate your message.</p> <p><i>Must be Truthful and Credible</i> The message needs to authentically reflect the values, practices, policies and history of the candidate or political party. It must be consistent with what has happened in fact. In addition, your message should be believable; candidates and political parties that make unrealistic promises simply add to voter apathy. Voters must believe that what you say, both about yourself and what you will do, is true. One way to establish trust is to back up your statements with validators such as proof of past experience and knowledge or know-how on issues relevant to your message.</p>			

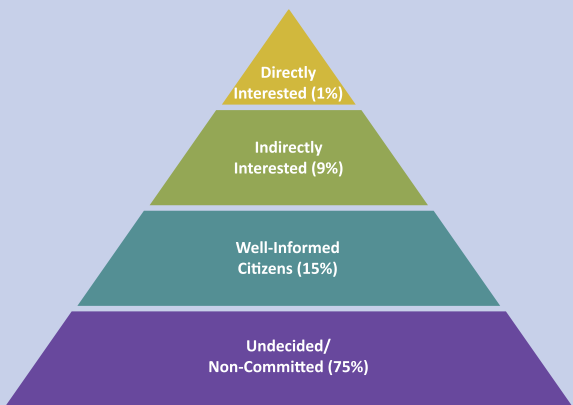
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<i>Steps</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Note to the Trainer</i>
2	<p>Divide the participants into smaller groups (up to 5 people) and ask them to write down 2-3 political, or even commercial, messages they find especially compelling. Give 10 minutes for this activity.</p> <p>Ask each group to report back on the strongest example they came up with and the rest of the participants to give their feedback evaluating how much the example meets the criteria of an effective message.</p>	ANK	20	As you are facilitating participants' feedback and discussion if examples meet the criteria of an effective message, it is most likely that different people will find different messages strong. Always ask who was target for each message reminding them of targeting and setting the basics for the next section.

SECTION 3 – Know Your Audience – 10’

Steps	Description	Type	Min	Note to the Trainer
1	<p>Referring to the points about targeting a particular audience previously made, tell the participants you will now picture the audience describing a persona who belongs to that audience.</p> <p>Regardless of how you will organize this activity, the participants should be given the following instructions: In your mind, begin to draw a mental picture of what a typical person from the audience looks like. How old are they? Are they male or female? What is their level of education? What do they do to earn a living? What clothes do they wear? What cars do they drive? What do they do for leisure or pleasure? What TV programs do they watch?</p> <p><u>Let them know it can be helpful to create a detailed profile of a persona representing a targeted audience, because it is easier to come up with effective messages for a person, even a fake one, than for a faceless audience. This is a technique widely used in the advertising industry.</u></p> <p>The more descriptions participants come up with the better. At the end you can ask them to try to draw a picture of a persona or personas described.</p>	DBR	10	<p>There is more than one way you can organize this exercise and it depends on circumstances:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If you are doing this training as a part of multi-days long capacity building effort and you are working with the same group of participants who have previously heard about targeting and have gone through that module, you can organize this activity by asking them to go back to their findings in the exercise done in demographic targeting (Module 3, section 6) and start with writing down the groups of individuals that they identified as their target groups, which they will then describe and picture; 2. If you are doing this training separately from the rest of the topics elaborated in this Guide, you can ask each participant to think of the groups of people they need to persuade to vote for them picture people who would vote for him or her and make this exercise individual.

SECTION 4 – The Challenge: Getting Heard – 5’

Steps	Description	Type	Min	Note to the Trainer
1	<p>The introduction to this section and to the pyramid explanation should include following:</p> <p>Targeted voters receive thousands of messages every day – from the news, entertainment media, family, friends and neighbors, billboards, posters, television advertisements, radio, etc. Political parties are not just competing with their opponents, but with all of the other messages out there just to be heard.</p> <p>The fact that most voters are not very interested in politics makes things even more challenging. The pyramid on the flipchart gives a general breakdown of the level of interest in politics in most societies around the globe.</p> <p>And the explanation of the pyramid is:</p>	TP	5	<p>Draw the pyramid on the flipchart:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>THE PYRAMID</u></p> 
	<p>At the top of the pyramid are the people who are eagerly interested in politics. This makes up about 1% of the population. These are people who have a direct interest in the outcome of the elections, as it might affect their jobs or way of life. It includes political leaders and activists that spend a huge amount of their time and financial resources campaigning, or political analysts who make a living by commenting on what’s going on in politics. These people are going to listen to every word your campaign says, no matter how complicated you make it sound.</p> <p>The next segment on the pyramid is composed of people who are indirectly interested in politics. They make up about 9% of the population. This is a wider group that includes members of political parties, civil society organizations, trade unions, some employees of state-owned companies and public institutions, and professional organizations that could be affected by a change of state policies. The results of the elections might affect them, but won’t necessarily change their lives. This group will also be very interested in what you have to say.</p> <p>The next group is well-informed citizens, making up about 15% of the population. This segment of society includes all of those who like to read beyond the catchy headlines and who like to know what is going on in their societies. It frequently includes lawyers, journalists and school teachers, but it is not limited to these professions as you can find well-informed citizens in just about any social group. They are interested in what parties are saying in their campaigns and they will make sure they learn about you no matter how you craft your message.</p> <p>These first three groups usually already know who they are voting for. They understand the environment, follow politics and usually already have a political stance that is unlikely to change. Together, these three groups comprise 25% of the population.</p>			

Steps	Description	Type	Min	Note to the Trainer
	<p>It is the next and largest group on the pyramid that often has the biggest impact on politics. These are the people who can decide whether you win or lose the election. This group is 75% strong and includes ordinary citizens who live ordinary lives. They go to work if they have jobs, they spend time with their families and neighbors, and they watch popular shows on television.</p> <p>A big portion of this group doesn't vote and may never vote, but those who do make all the difference. Sometimes, as in the illustration below, they are simply busy with their own lives and don't have a lot of time to think or worry about politics. Keep in mind as well that at the same time your campaign is trying to communicate with them, they are also receiving multiple messages from other campaigns and other media. This can mean that they don't have a lot of information when it's time to vote, and can support a candidate or party based on information that's easily accessible to them, such as affiliation, appearance or who is likely to win.</p> <p>These voters typically don't have the time or the interest to pay much attention to political campaigns, and give volunteers little opportunity to actually talk to them. This is why, if you have a chance to talk to these voters, you need to make sure that your message is clear and relevant.</p> <p>This is why research and preparation are such important parts of your campaign. Voters in the base of the pyramid are not going to listen to you if you are not talking about issues that matter to them, which means they will not remember your message or recognize you on the ballot when and if they come out to vote.</p>			

SECTION 5 – Developing Your Message – 20'

<i>Steps</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Note to the Trainer</i>
1	<p>Tell the participants that now they have enough information to be able to develop their own messages. Introduce them to three steps process:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Answer the essential questions (which you either handout or you have them written on the flipchart); 2. Choose three words to describe yourself; 3. Write you own message using information from the previous two steps. <p>Allow 20 minutes for this activity.</p>	PEE	20	<p>The essential questions:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Why are you running for office? What problems are you running to solve? b. How will you solve these problems? c. What makes you a better choice than your opponents? </div>

SECTION 6 – Testing Your Message – 20’

Steps	Description	Type	Min	Note to the Trainer								
1	<p>Draw the message box on the flipchart and explain how to use this tool:</p> <p>The message box helps you determine what you will say when you talk about who you are and what you stand for in the context of a campaign, when voters are also hearing your opponents’ messages. It is a tool designed to help candidates and political parties design their messages and think through their election strategies thoroughly and methodically. Using the message box, you can determine what you will say during the campaign and how you will respond to your opponents’ attacks.</p> <p>The message box is a simple square with four separate quadrants, each of which covers a specific aspect of electoral communication between a candidate or political party and their strongest opponent: what we say about us, what we say about them, what they say about us, and what they say about themselves.</p> <p>The two quadrants at the top of the box are about what we are going to say in our campaign. The first box is what we are going to say about ourselves: our strengths, values, and agenda: the reasons people should vote for us. Next to it is what we might choose to say about our opponents: their weaknesses and vulnerabilities: the reasons people should vote against our opponent. The bottom half is what our opponent is saying. On the left is what they say about us: our weaknesses and vulnerabilities: the reasons people should vote against us; and on the right is what they say about themselves: their strengths, values, and agenda: the reasons people should vote for our opponent.</p>			<table border="1" data-bbox="938 353 1501 1084"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="938 353 1230 443">What we say about us</th> <th data-bbox="1230 353 1501 443">What we say about them</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="938 443 1230 719"></td> <td data-bbox="1230 443 1501 719"></td> </tr> <tr> <th data-bbox="938 719 1230 801">What they say about us</th> <th data-bbox="1230 719 1501 801">What they say about them</th> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="938 801 1230 1084"></td> <td data-bbox="1230 801 1501 1084"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	What we say about us	What we say about them			What they say about us	What they say about them		
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Steps	Description	Type	Min	Note to the Trainer					
1	<p>Ask for two volunteers – somebody who believes they have developed a strong message. Once you have selected two participants to volunteer ask them to come up in front and introduce them to the participants as two opposing candidates. And the other participants are voters.</p> <p>Say that two of them will help you practice use of the message box. The group will first hear their messages, and then fill out the message box quadrant by quadrant.</p> <p>Draw the message box on the flipchart and instead “volunteer 1” and “volunteer 2” write their names.</p> <p>Let the two volunteers read their messages.</p> <p>Facilitate the participants’ feedback and write their comments in corresponding quadrants for about 12 minutes.</p> <p>At the end you can ask the volunteers what they would change in their messages.</p>			<table border="1" data-bbox="938 264 1506 824"> <tr> <td data-bbox="938 264 1225 539">Volunteer 1 about himself</td> <td data-bbox="1225 264 1506 539">Volunteer 1 about Volunteer 2</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="938 539 1225 824">Volunteer 2 about himself</td> <td data-bbox="1225 539 1506 824">Volunteer</td> </tr> </table>		Volunteer 1 about himself	Volunteer 1 about Volunteer 2	Volunteer 2 about himself	Volunteer
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CONCLUSION – 1'

Summarize the session:

- Having a compelling message is essential to persuading targeted voters to vote for you.
- A message is a short, truthful statement that lays out for voters why they should vote for you, and provides a contrast between you and your opponent(s), which is repeated throughout your campaign.
- Understanding your voters and their preferences, as well as your and your opponents' strengths and weaknesses are crucial for developing an effective message.