

A young man with short dark hair, wearing a blue t-shirt, is smiling and looking towards the right. He is holding a document. In the foreground, the back of another person's head and shoulder is visible, also looking at the document. The background is a blurred indoor setting with green plants.

Intermediary Communications:

How to Stand Out While Working Together



mission minded amplify the good

About JFF

JFF is a national nonprofit that drives transformation in the American workforce and education systems. For more than 35 years, JFF has led the way in designing innovative and scalable solutions that create access to economic advancement for all. www.jff.org

About Mission Minded

JFF partnered closely with Mission Minded, an independent branding firm that works exclusively with nonprofits, to create this guide. Intended for intermediaries advancing the Building Equitable Pathways portfolio, this guide provides specific recommendations and best practices for developing clear, consistent, and cohesive communications.

About Building Equitable Pathways

This work, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, aims to provide youth with the information and support they need to make informed choices for their futures—especially young people who have too often been denied access to these key resources. The goal is to dramatically increase the number of young people, ages 14 to 24, who are Black, Latinx, or experiencing poverty, who have the agency, social capital, skills, and credentials needed to thrive in the workforce and in life. A deep commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion stands at the heart of this initiative. For more information, visit: www.jff.org/equitablepathways

Why is messaging important?

As an intermediary, you share a vision with other organizations across the country working to build equitable college and career pathways, especially for Black, Latinx, and youth experiencing poverty. And though there are many things intermediaries have in common, there are also many details, solutions, and intricacies that make each intermediary unique.

So how do you advance these shared goals while further explaining the impact and importance of your work? The following guide provides communications best practices as well as sample messages that will unite partners in your network and give you the tools to stand out.

How will shared language help us achieve our individual and collective missions?

- Communicate the importance and impact of your work more effectively.
- Send consistent signals across the complex web of programs and initiatives, making it easier for target audiences to understand, engage with, and appreciate intermediaries.
- Align and re-energize internal stakeholders and current partners and supporters.
- Tell a story about how people see and understand their role in systems, not about the systems themselves.

What's your story?

Having a clear and concise story about who your organization is and why it matters in the complex web of intermediaries can go a long way. Clarity around your organization's individual brand is the cornerstone of effective communications. It provides a guide for building the messages and activities for which your organization will be celebrated. Defining your brand will help you tell the story of your work in a way that makes your mission clear and compelling.

Strong communications:

- Minimize competitive threats by making it clear to your constituents how you're different from similar organizations.
- Make people proud to align with, fund, or support your organization as they grow to truly understand why the role of an intermediary matters.
- Provide staff, volunteers, and partners with clarity about the "promise" being made by your organization, so that everyone associated with you can communicate the impact of your work.
- Help build a positive reputation that your audiences come to trust and rely on over time.



The Importance of Audiences

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You can't make good decisions about your work without first identifying your most important audiences. Too often, intermediaries feel they need to reach everyone in order to be effective. Smart leaders, however, know that focusing their limited resources on the audiences most important to their success improves the chances of that success.

The hard truth is that not everyone will care about the work you do (even if they should!). And even if everyone did care, no organization has the resources to reach every potential stakeholder. You have to be selective and smart.

Take the time to understand who your primary audiences are, both demographically (age, gender, income, etc.) and psychographically (their hopes, fears, values, etc.), and you'll have a better idea of what your brand must promise and deliver in order to appeal to them.

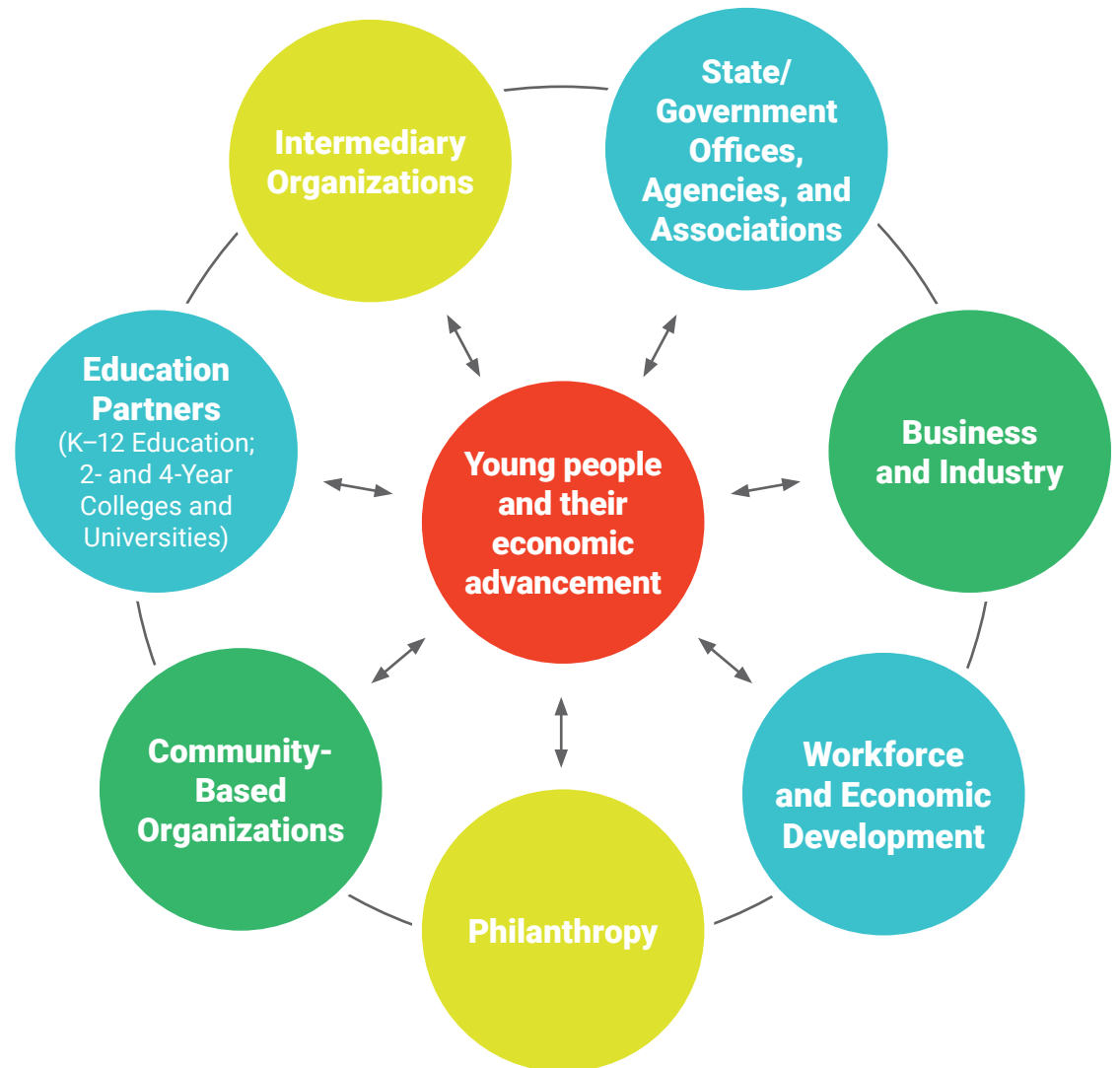
Prioritizing your organization's key audiences and favoring what they need to hear over what you want to say leads to brand engagement and mission success.

The Importance of Audiences

While all intermediaries will have their own, unique set of audiences, many will engage with a core set of stakeholders.

Regardless of that stakeholder set, all audience communications benefit from keeping the equitable economic advancement of young people at the center.

Though systems alignment is multifaceted and complex, communicating the importance of intentionally aligned work and learning experiences and how they directly contribute to a more equitable, prosperous economy will create a shared set of values with all stakeholders involved.



A photograph of two men in a professional setting. The man on the right, with dark curly hair and a beard, is wearing a light blue button-down shirt and holding a black pen. He is looking towards the man on the left, who is partially visible in profile. The background is a blurred office environment with bookshelves.

How to Create Clear, Compelling Messages

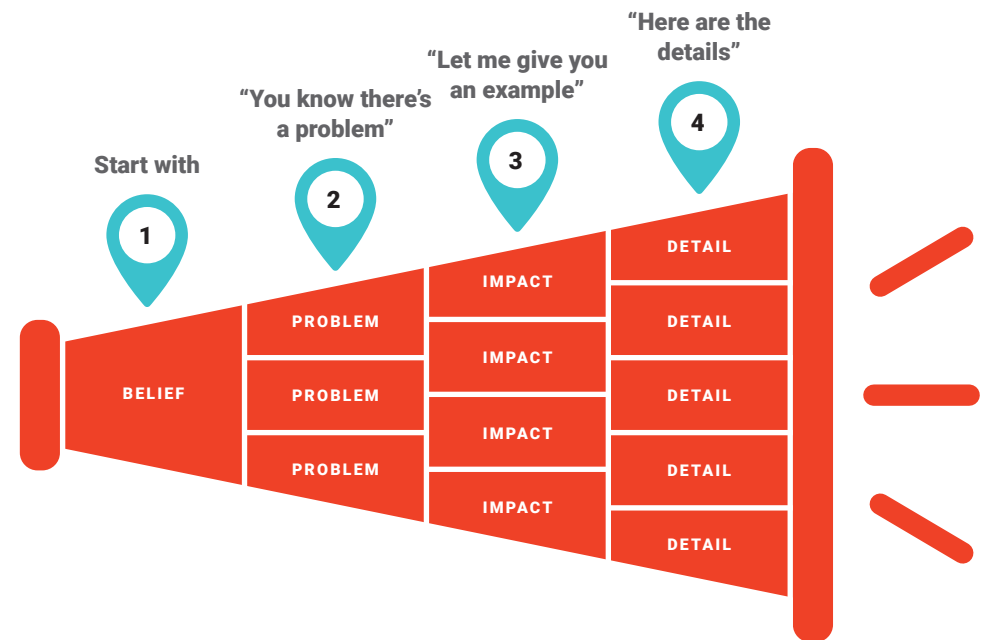
How to Create Clear, Compelling Messages

“So, what does an intermediary do?” If these words strike fear in your heart, you’re not alone. Many organizations know why their work matters but struggle to express it clearly and succinctly.

Many report wasting time expounding on insignificant details of their programs while they grasp for something compelling to say. And, just like that, they lose another opportunity to make a decisive impression. In our noisy, sound-bite culture you need a way to state your case quickly and memorably.

Certain intermediary organizations are further along in their work than others and may already have strong messages that can be further amplified by this guide. For those taking on a bolder, more clear commitment to equitable pathways work, this guide can help you focus and refine your messages rather than starting from scratch.

The following provides a framework for how to develop consistent, cohesive messages that will help others understand the importance of intermediaries in building and sustaining pathways ecosystems.



How to Create Clear, Compelling Messages

1. The Belief Message

This is the first and most important message that helps define your organization and what you believe. When you have just a minute to describe your work, say the most important things first; don't waste time on details. Instead, speak in clear, broad terms about the big, exciting idea—the belief—that motivates your organization.

Often referred to as an “elevator pitch,” your Belief Message should make you stand out from others in your field and make it easy to understand the basics of what you're here to accomplish, without going into detail. A good Belief Message will also refer to the problem you're trying to solve. You'll have one Belief Message, and everyone in your organization should memorize and be able to recite it. Doing so will ensure that you're all building the same brand.

2. Problem Messages

Now that your audience is intrigued and knows the basics about your organization, you have an opportunity to elaborate. What are the problems that exist in society, education, and workforce that your organization exists to solve? What unique aspects of these problems does your organization address? Your organization should have several problem messages to draw upon based on your audiences.

How to Create Clear, Compelling Messages

3. Impact Messages

If you have an effective Belief Message and a set of powerful Problem Messages, chances are your audience will want to hear more. Now's your chance to prove that the role of an intermediary and the work your organization does is important and effective. This is best done with a story rather than facts, figures, or charts. Your organization should have a library of Impact Messages that you can select from based on audience and that speak directly to your Problem Message.

4. Detail Messages

Once you've communicated what your organization believes, what problems it exists to solve, and how it makes an impact, only then is it time to talk about the details of being an intermediary. Whether it's about advancing equity, aligning systems, or providing hands-on work experiences, you need to lead with the benefits to explain why your programs are important. Your Detail Messages do this.

Detail Messages describe the nuts and bolts of how you achieve impact and give concrete, concise examples of how you put your work into action.

Your organization should write a Detail Message for every program or feature you offer. When using a Detail Message, make sure it directly correlates to the Impact and Problem Messages previously shared. This puts your audiences in a stronger position to understand why they should engage or take action on your behalf.

How to Create Clear, Compelling Messages

In Summary:

- Introduce your organization and the role of an intermediary through your Belief Message.
- Then use a Problem Message to identify the problems you exist to solve.
- Next, add an Impact Message that shows your audience how your work plays out in real life.
- Then (and only then) talk about program specifics using a Detail Message, explaining how your work as an intermediary helps solve the problem.

If you're speaking to donors, the time to ask for money is after the Detail Message. If you need volunteers, ask your audience to sign on. If you're looking to cement a strategic partnership with a peer organization, ask them to join you in your work. Be concrete: what exactly do you need and what will it help you accomplish?

A man in a dark suit and white shirt is speaking in a meeting. He is looking towards the right. Two women are listening to him. One woman is in the foreground, slightly out of focus, and the other is in the background, also slightly out of focus. The man's hands are clasped together in front of him.

Sample Intermediary Messaging

Sample Intermediary Messaging

The following is one example of how to structure your messages from belief all the way through detail. These example messages discuss the importance and value of intermediaries and can be used as is or adapted for use in your organization's own materials.

What is an intermediary?

An intermediary is the convener and organizer of partners building equitable systems and pathways to help young people achieve success.

Sample Intermediary Messaging

What do intermediaries believe?

Belief Message

As an intermediary, we believe that opportunities for young people can be realized and multiplied when we work together.

Every day, we work to streamline and leverage the expertise, power, and resources of educators, employers, and families. Together, we provide multiple practical options for young people to achieve their dreams through rewarding careers.

When young people are supported and empowered by the leaders in their community to carve their own path, they're more likely to achieve meaningful and equitable success in their personal and professional lives which supports the economies and communities we all depend upon.

Where to use it:

- **In an elevator**
- **At a party**
- **When introducing yourself to a group**
- **When speaking to donors, volunteers, students, or families**
- **On your home page**
- **On social media**

Sample Intermediary Messaging

Why are intermediaries needed?

Problem Message

Demand for a prepared workforce is outpacing supply

Every community depends upon local businesses. Local businesses depend on local talent. And though there are plenty of people to support the local economy, they aren't always prepared for the careers that ensure their community thrives. Economic forecasting shows that the gap between labor supply and demand is widening. This affects everyone. There must be an organizer at the table to connect the dots between educators, employers, government, community-based organizations, and individuals to ensure that people and our local businesses have what they need to succeed. Our communities depend on it.

Where to use it:

- **When the Belief Message piques interest**
- **In an appeal letter**
- **At the start of a meeting with your board, a donor, or partners**
- **On social media**

Sample Intermediary Messaging

What does this look like in practice?

Impact Message

Local Employer Strengthens Local Economy

Jason runs the manufacturing business that has held up the town's economy for 30 years by employing locals and paying taxes. At one time, the town was thriving and on track to be one of the most desired suburban communities in the region. But several years ago, Jason didn't have the staff to keep the business running at full capacity. At the same time, unemployment among young people was troublesome and on the rise. The entire town was struggling. Jason wanted to hire local talent to support his business and to help lower the unemployment numbers, but he often found that the young people looking for jobs weren't prepared with the technical and professional skills needed to work in his company.

When Jason connected with an intermediary organization through an industry contact, things changed for his business. The intermediary was able to convene and connect employers like Jason to educators who support career-connected learning. Now, there are programs that allow the town's young people to complete an apprenticeship in Jason's manufacturing company. They develop the specific skills Jason needs his workers to have, and he has a pipeline of well-trained and capable talent who will sustain his business for the future. As a result, the business is running at full capacity, young people are launching promising careers, and the community's economy is improving.

Where to use it:

- **When a donor or partner shows interest in knowing more**
- **During a speech**
- **In an article in your newsletter**
- **On your website (not your home page)**

Sample Intermediary Messaging

How do you get it all done?

Detail Message

Apprenticeship Program

When young people are given the opportunity to work in their chosen profession as part of their education, the benefits are vast for everyone. Employers benefit from having eager and dedicated team members who will be well-prepared to join their workforce. The student gains experience in a professional environment, makes connections in their industry that make them more likely to achieve meaningful and sustainable careers, and earns an income that alleviates other stressors in their lives.

Where to use it:

- **On your website
(not your home page)**
- **In a grant proposal**
- **In a specific request
to a major donor**

A young woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a purple patterned button-down shirt and hoop earrings, is smiling and looking towards a man whose back is to the camera. She is holding a blue pen in her hands. The background is a bright, out-of-focus window with greenery outside.

Communications Best Practices

Communications Best Practices

No one knows your organization as well as you do. Even your most ardent supporters can quickly get lost in a stream of data and programmatic jargon. What they care most about is that you're achieving your mission, solving problems, and making a difference. They care less about how you do it.

Every conversation, every newsletter, every annual report, video, tweet, and news interview is a new chance to use your time well by reinforcing why the role of an intermediary has value and why people should care or get involved.

Communications Best Practices

Use Your Full Name

Your organization's name can convey a great deal of information about what you do in a way that an acronym can't. Avoid using shorthand for your organization's name, even with audiences familiar with you.

Never Assume

Your audiences may not know anything about intermediaries or as much about your mission as you hope they do. What's the problem you're addressing and why should they care? Don't be shy about reminding them every time.

Repeat, Repeat, Repeat

You will likely get sick to death of repeating your message while waiting for your key audiences to absorb it. Remember that we're bombarded with thousands of messages every day and it takes a lot of repetition for any one message to really sink in. Make sure that message is yours.

Add Benefits, Subtract Features

Features are what your organization does. Benefits are what happens as a result of that work. Bring others in by leading with the benefits that an intermediary can offer its stakeholders. Doing so will help outside audiences understand the value of intermediaries and begin to share your impact through more informed conversations, direct action, strategic partnership, providing resources, and more.

Would you like to learn more about communications best practices or how to amplify your impact as an intermediary organization?

Learn more at Mission-Minded.com.



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