



Messaging and Media for Housing Choice Voucher Advocacy: A Refresher

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Agenda

- Goals/Overview
- Why Message Matters
- Principles of messaging
- Messaging tools
- Getting coverage: local hooks, local strategy
- Connecting media to policy
- Next steps
- Q&A



Goals and Overview: Why Refresh?

- Practice makes perfect.
- Build a common foundation.
- Opportunity to reflect, clarify.
- Integrate good messaging into everything we do.
- Jumpstart the second half of the year.



Why Message Matters



July 8, 2015



Why Message?

- Helps make work relatable and understandable.
- Helps you prepare and provide consistency.
- Builds support for your cause.



Developing Your Message

- Who are you trying to reach?
- Be clear and concise.
- Make it tangible — who are you helping?



Message Pyramid

**Tier 1:
Topline
Message**

The topline message should quickly summarize the main point of your analysis. If you were only able to deliver the topline message, your audience should still walk away with a sense of the issue and the policy solution.

**Tier 2:
Supporting
Messages**

Outline two to four supporting messages that bolster the topline message. In many cases, the supporting messages will align with sub-points presented in a policy brief or sections of a presentation.

**Tier 3:
Details, Data, etc.**

For each of the supporting messages, provide some additional details that strengthen and illustrate the supporting message, such as further explanation, an especially meaningful data point, an analogy, or an anecdote. cbpp.org



Message Pyramid Worksheet

Topline Message:

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Supporting Point 1

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Supporting Point 2

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Supporting Point 3

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Housing Vouchers Provide Vital Help to Millions

Topline Message :

Housing Choice Vouchers provide an important stepping stone that helps struggling seniors, people with disabilities veterans and working families keep a roof over their heads and make ends meet.

Supporting Message #1:

Millions of Americans are unable to afford safe, stable housing without cutting back on other basic needs such as food and healthcare.

- The number of low-income renter households nationwide paying more than half of their monthly income for housing costs has risen dramatically (24.1 percent) since the beginning of the Great Recession.
- Over 1.2 million school-aged children lacked a stable home during the 2012-2013 school year. These children had to live with family or friends, in hotels, or in homeless shelters or on the streets.
- Homeless shelters are at or beyond capacity – not just in cities, but also suburban and rural areas.
- Housing vouchers sharply reduce homelessness, and lift more than a million people out of poverty.

Supporting Message #2:

Housing vouchers are carefully designed to help those struggling people who



Message 1



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Message 1: In the Weeds, Full of Jargon

Due to sequestration cuts, state and local housing agencies were helping about 100,000 fewer families in June of last year than before the cuts took effect in December of 2012.

Congress did provide enough voucher funding in 2014 to enable agencies to restore some lost vouchers, and, as a result, many housing agencies have begun to issue more unused vouchers to families on waiting lists. But, Congress needs to provide enough funds in 2015 to renew all of the vouchers issued in 2014 to make further progress in reversing voucher losses under sequestration.



Message
2



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Message 2: Concise, Tangible

Budget cuts have left thousands of **working families, children, seniors and veterans** without the help that they need to keep a roof over their heads: even while housing costs are at historic highs, wages are stagnating, and **less than a quarter of people in need of housing assistance actually receive it.**

If funding is not restored, **homelessness and hardship will deepen** in years to come.



Breaking Down a Message

Severe housing affordability problems have worsened across the country since before the Great Recession. In every state, at least one in four low-income renters paid more than half of their income for housing in 2013. Over 10 million low-income renter households had such **severe rent burdens** in 2013.

Same message said differently:

It has gotten more difficult for **families to keep a roof over their head** in nearly every state since beginning of the Great Recession. One in four renters—nearly 10 million households—paid more than half of their income for housing in 2013, increasing the risk of **homelessness and hardship**.



Think About Media

- Who is your audience?
- What's your message?
- What's your hook?



Questions?



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Translating Federal Asks into Local Interest

- Nina Arce, Media Coordinator at the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey





Translate Federal Ask into Local Interest

- Review organizational calendar of events & strategize
- Analyze local landscape





Formulate a Local Media Strategy

- Maintain a database of press contacts (ongoing)
- Tap into your allies, they can be your most effective spokespeople!
- Hone your message





Examples

- Right idea: “In NJ, the State’s Affordable Housing Trust Fund should be used for its intended purpose, housing production, rather than to fund the State Rental Assistance Program (SRAP) which should be fully funded separately. On the federal level, the Housing Choice Voucher Program should receive full financial support.”
- Better message: “Federal and state legislators should use their respective budgets to provide more affordable home opportunities for our hard working families, seniors, and special needs residents.”





Tying Vouchers to NJ Issues

Local Issue: Superstorm Sandy

Message: Housing Choices Vouchers can create more opportunities for renters struggling to make ends meet in communities where affordable homes are few and far between as result of Superstorm Sandy.

Local Issue: Out of Reach

Message: Federal and state legislators should use their respective budgets to provide more affordable home opportunities for our hard working families, seniors, and special needs residents.

Local Issue: Fair Housing Court Decision

Message: Everyone should have the opportunity to live in a great community, in a home they can afford. Investments in housing trust funds and the housing voucher program are investments in the future of our communities and our residents.





Connecting Media and Policy





Update on appropriations

House:

- Full House passed THUD bill in early June.
- \$665 million increase for voucher renewals.
- No vouchers restored.
- Language in report of bill supporting targeting more vouchers, including to FUP, homeless vets, and for victims of domestic violence.
- Amendment offered by Rep. Marcy Kaptur (OH) in full committee markup to fund the 30,000 targeted vouchers from the President's budget.
- Rep. Jerrold Nadler (NY) and Del. Eleanor Holmes-Norton (DC) offered amendments to restore all 67,000 vouchers lost to sequestration.



Update on appropriations

Senate:

- Advanced THUD bill out of Appropriations Committee. Likely won't go to floor.
- \$496 million increase for voucher renewals.
- 2,500 new FUP vouchers funded in bill.
- Amendment offered at markup by Senator Reed (RI) to fund 5,000 vouchers for victims of domestic violence.
- No amendment offered to fully restore the vouchers lost to sequestration.



Hoping for a budget deal

- Need a budget deal to raise BCA caps.
- Timing: likely at the end of the year.
- If there is a budget deal, need champions to make sure the money is spent to restore vouchers.



Connecting media and policy

- How does media fit into this?
 - Raises the public profile of vouchers and makes the case for why we need to lift the budget caps.
 - Keeps housing on the mind, even without a moving THUD bill.
 - Opportunity for key messengers to push a point: op-eds by elected officials, faith leaders, etc.
 - Opportunity to humanize the issue: real people use vouchers
 - Positive exposure: connecting media to site visits or other events.



Resources

Messaging Resources site:

- Messaging guides: talking points, sample message pyramid.
- Media placement guides.
- Template op-eds, LtEs.
- If you do not currently have access to this site, email Ehren: edohler@cbpp.org

CBPP's Website: www.cbpp.org.

- Housing Choice Voucher, Federal Rental Assistance Fact Sheets and other data: <http://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/national-and-state-housing-data-fact-sheets>



Next Steps

- Put theory into practice:
 - Find a good hook, try to capitalize on it.
 - Submit an LtE or an op-ed.
 - Use your next communication as a case study: are you using good messaging?
- We're happy to help! Email Ehren at edohler@cbpp.org.



Q&A



