

## Developing messages for advocacy

Advocacy requires clear, consistent and effective messages. To do this you need to think about what you want to say, and how you should say it. Advocacy communication should seek to inform, persuade and move people to take action. Importantly, advocacy messages should not only persuade through valid data, sound logic and concrete evidence, but should also describe the action the audience is being encouraged to take. The audience needs to know clearly what it is you want it to do.<sup>1</sup>

Developing messages is a continuous part of an advocacy initiative. Messages inevitably need to be revised as you learn more about your policy issue and what appeals to your target audiences. First, you need to develop one clear primary message, which clearly summarizes your position and the changes you want to bring about. This will then guide the development of more specific, secondary messages that will be directed at different audiences, perhaps on different aspects of the primary message. The primary message will also guide potential slogans, sound-bites or stories used in advocacy work. The stakeholder analysis may provide important information that should assist you in the preparation of effective messages.<sup>2</sup>

### **The primary message consists of: Statement + evidence + action desired**

The statement is the central idea in the message.

The evidence supports the statement with (easily understood) facts and figures.

The action desired is what you want your target to do.

### **Example of a Primary Message:**

*Your policy decision has an impact on people's lives. 1 in 3 policies fail because they don't look at evidence.<sup>3</sup>  
The immediate priority is to use evidence from evaluation when making policies.*

Summarize and present the advocacy messages in 3-4 sharp sentences, especially for situations where there is limited time to present the case (such as when you bump into an important bureaucrat at an event, during TV interviews etc.). This will help you to deliver your message in the most effective manner. This is also called the one-minute message.

The primary message may also be used to develop slogans<sup>4</sup> or short claims. For example:

**'Evaluate before you decide.'**

**'Year of Evaluation for Better Lives.'**

**'Evaluation is cost-effective. There is 'value' in evaluation!'**

In the context of building an enabling environment for evaluation, several themes can be used as a basis to develop new messages.<sup>5</sup> For example:

1. Give evaluation the role it deserves in improving development outcomes.
2. Support the development and implementation of a national evaluation policy.
3. Achieve better allocation of resources and increase aid effectiveness through evaluation.
4. Obtain appropriate and sustained financing from national budgets for evaluation.
5. Use evidence from evaluations to develop policy frameworks.
6. Improve coordination between donors on evaluation.
7. Increase financial and technical assistance from donors, within the context of evaluation.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Gosling L., Cohen D. (2007). *Participant's Manual: Advocacy Matters – Helping children change their world*, International Save the Children Alliance.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Toma C. (2012). *Advocacy Toolkit: Guidance on how to advocate for a more enabling environment for civil society in your context*, Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness.

<sup>3</sup> Hypothetical figures only.

<sup>4</sup> EvalPartners. (2013). *Building an Enabling Environment for Evaluation: An EvalPartners Advocacy Strategy*

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from PARIS 21. (2010). *Advocating for the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics, Country-level Toolkit*.

## Framing messages for different audiences

The primary message can be framed differently according to the audience the message is aimed at. This is known as a secondary message. It provides further explanation or is used when a particular audience needs a primary message to be reinforced. Secondary messages often explain how the objectives of the primary message will be met, including the actions that should be taken by the audience addressed. Several secondary messages may be needed, each tailored to the specific needs of an audience. Here are a few examples of such messages:<sup>6</sup>

Audience	Message
Members of Parliament, legislators	Using evidence from evaluation will give more weight to political arguments. Evaluation can demonstrate that your policy works from the beginning. Use evaluation to prove that government spending and policies are working to create better lives.
Ministry of Finance	Investment in evaluation will pay for it many times over by improving the efficiency of resource allocation. Evaluation is cost-effective.
Directors of Planning	What can't be evaluated cannot be managed. Put evaluation in the forefront to improve policy planning and decision-making.
Donor group	Better evaluation will improve the allocation and monitoring of aid.
Civil society	Advocate based on evaluation. Partner with your local VOPE to promote evaluation quality.
Media	Better evaluation will improve the means to hold the government accountable for its policies.
General public	Governments can be held accountable using evaluation results.
Private sector/ investors	Better use of evaluation will improve decision-making, productivity, and efficiency and lead to greater profits.

A few rules can help you choose the content of your message wisely:<sup>7</sup>

- **Know your audience:** Find out what they know, their concerns, their values and priorities, what kind of evidence they seek and what kind of language they use.
- **Know your political and policy environment and moment:** What are the big controversies, the big issues and fears in your context? How might they affect your messaging? What is considered left, right and center?

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from PARIS 21. (2010). *Advocating for the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics, Country-level Toolkit* and EvalPartners. (2013). *Building an Enabling Environment for Evaluation: An EvalPartners Advocacy Strategy*.

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from VeneKlasen L., Miller V. (2002). *A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*. Just Associates. Washington, DC.

- **Keep your messages simple and brief:** Make sure someone who does not know the subject can easily understand the information. Avoid jargon. This is particularly important when advocating on some of the more technical issues relating to monitoring and evaluation.
- **Use real life stories and quotes:** The human element makes a problem, or issue, real. Quotes and personal stories bring to life the challenges faced by those directly affected. They also help to make the message locally relevant by presenting information relating to the local context and therefore more easily understood by your audience.
- **Use precise, powerful language and active verbs:** For instance, “there is ‘value’ in evaluation’.
- **Use facts and numbers accurately and creatively:** The facts you choose and the way in which you present them to make your case is very important. Saying “1 in 3 policies fail because they don’t invest in monitoring and evaluation.....”, rather than “over 30% of policies fail.....” conveys the same fact more clearly.
- **Adapt the message to the medium:** Each medium has its own possibilities and limitations. For example, sounds and different voices and background noises will be very important when conveying your message on the radio, whereas making full use of the visual element of your message will be crucial on television and more frequently on the internet.
- **Allow the audience to reach their own understanding:** Provide basic details as too much information may appear dogmatic and may cause you to lose your audience’s attention.
- **Encourage the audience to take action:** You must be clear about what action your audience – whether it’s the policy-makers or the civil society – can take to support your cause. Offer straightforward suggestions like “support the evaluation bill in Parliament”, “sign our online petition for the national evaluation policy.”
- **Present a possible solution:** Always tell your audience what you propose in order to advance better use of evaluation and keep it simple. For instance: “The government needs to show its commitment to the national evaluation policy by allocating appropriate funds for its implementation.”