

# How to Create a Core Message

## FOR YOUR CAUSE

### Related topics:

- How to identify audiences
- How to customize your message



*This worksheet is a complementary guide to help you put into practice the advice found in our “How to Create a Core Message for Your Cause” video. Each 3-minute video is packed with information and is designed to be watched multiple times—even while you are completing this worksheet.*

**WHAT** Create a strong, clear core message for your cause.

**TIME REQUIRED** 40 minutes

**WHO IS INVOLVED** We suggest brainstorming responses as a team. Alternatively, you can start this process alone, and then refine with a larger group.

It’s hard to stand out. Advertisers spend millions to devise ways to get you to remember their products. You may not have their budgets, but you can cut through the clutter with a strong, simple core message. Many causes make the mistake of devising a dozen complex messages that even they cannot commit to memory. If those close to the issue or organization cannot remember your message, how will anyone else take notice? When creating a core message that can be easily repeated it’s good to ask yourself the following question: **“What makes me unique?”**

This worksheet provides three questions that will help you formulate a core message, so you can talk about your cause in a simple, relatable way that will inspire people to learn more and support you.

1. What need or challenge do you address?
2. What is your solution or approach?
3. What benefits or results do you create?

### Here is an example:

Centralized Nonprofit Services (CNS) helps nonprofits get the funding they need to succeed. Their mission statement is “to facilitate the fiscal health of the social sector in the tristate region.” Not much of an attention-grabber. After brainstorming responses to the three questions, here is the core message they created:



*Do you know how hard it can be for a small business to get loans from banks? Well, the same can be true for nonprofits and social ventures. CNS helps nonprofits and others working for social good get the funding they need to grow. With a repayment rate of over 95%, our program ensures the financial health of nonprofits and secures the vital services needed in our community.*

→ For more help, contact Cause Communications at [info@CauseComm.org](mailto:info@CauseComm.org) or visit [CauseCommunications.org/tools](http://CauseCommunications.org/tools) to see other Bite-Size Courses.

Made possible through the support of the Annenberg Foundation, the Ahmanson Foundation, Dwight Stuart Youth Fund, and the Joseph Drown Foundation.



# How to Create a Core Message

## FOR YOUR CAUSE

Define yourself before someone else does. An effective core message will open conversations that lead to great relationships. Answering the following three questions will help you create a message for your cause that is compelling, is succinct, and will inspire people to learn more.

### 1. What need or challenge do you address?

*Brainstorm for five minutes about why you exist in the big picture, why people come to you. Also think about why it's important for this need to be addressed. Push yourself to name why this matters, especially today.*



# How to Create a Core Message

## FOR YOUR CAUSE

### 2. What is your solution or approach?

*Brainstorm for five minutes on what is different or unique about your work. Avoid programmatic details that get you into the weeds. Instead, think about how, where, and in what ways your organization is addressing needs and challenges.*



# How to Create a Core Message

FOR YOUR CAUSE

### 3. What benefits or results do you create?

*Brainstorm for 10 minutes about the impacts on individual lives and on the community overall? What has changed because of your cause's work?*

*Now, summarize these into your core message, using just three short sentences (or no more than 75 words). Share your draft with colleagues and refine. It will be sharpened over time as it is used by you and others.*



# How to Create a Core Message

## FOR YOUR CAUSE

→ EXTRA TIPS

### Tips for writing a core message:

- Focus on people
- Tell a story
- Highlight benefits and results
- Keep it simple so it can be remembered and used consistently
- Make sure the message resonates with you

### Tips on how NOT to write a core message:

- Do not use your mission statement
- Do not rely on facts and figures
- Do not go into a detailed description
- Do not use jargon
- Do not list all of your programs