





- Communicating without a message is expensive noise
- Multiple issues compete for attention
- Make your message compelling
- Educate for future organizational needs

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### Incident Reporting v. Communicating Strategically

Incident Reporting	Communicating Strategically
Immediate	Long-term
Factual	Persuasive
Situational	Story telling

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### Why Key Messages?

- Key Messages
  - Drive your agenda
  - Control the discussion
    - Proactive vs. reactive
  - Focus audience attention
  - Help people understand your position
  - Keep an agency organized



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- Brief and specific
- Easy to understand
- Memorable
- Persuasive
- Truthful



- Jargon or acronyms
- Spin
- Lies
- Overly dramatic
- Negativity
- Condescend

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- Static content
  1. Who you are, and what you do
  2. Why you are deserving
  3. Educate on funding and revenue restrictions
- Variable content prepares public for future revenue or organizational goals
  - Levy or bond
  - How are/have you spent that revenue?
  - Contract, merger or regionalization
  - Other – Changes in management, staffing, resources, etc.

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**Static Content: Message #1**

- Who you are and what you do
  - Thank your community
  - Size
    - Population and square miles
  - Services provided
  - Number and type of personnel
  - Mission or value statement
    - What makes you proud of your agency?

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**Sample A**

Thank you for supporting XXX.

XXX provides fire and life safety services to 44,000 people over 120 square miles. In 2017, our full-time, part-time and volunteer emergency personnel responded to 5,600 emergency calls. Our team brings 160+ years of emergency experience at the state, regional and national levels to our community. This means that you benefit from the most advanced emergency response possible right here at home.



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**Sample B**

It's an honor to serve our community.

XXX serves 10,000 people over 60 square miles in the unincorporated areas of XXX, XXX and XXX. Nine full-time, six part-time and 18 volunteer emergency personnel provide fire suppression, emergency medical care and other rescue services. We are able to provide better service than most agencies our size because of your support. Whether its firefighting, EMS, motor vehicle accidents, wildland fires or hazardous material spills – we have the skills or connections to save lives and property.



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**Write your first key message!**

- Who you are and what you do
  - Thank your community
  - Size
    - Population and square miles
  - Services provided
  - Number and type of personnel
  - Mission or value statement
    - What makes you proud of your agency?



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**Message #2**

- Why are you deserving?
  - Financially responsible
    - Debt free
      - Refinanced debt to save money
    - Passed audits
    - Cash for apparatus instead of loans
    - Utilizing volunteers
    - Cutting costs or improving efficiencies
  - Awards received
  - Innovative programming
    - Prevention and public education
  - Community involvement




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**Sample A**

We are transparent and accountable to our taxpayers.

XXX operates under a balanced budget and has passed all its independent audits by the state. We actively look for ways to save our taxpayers money, such as applying for grants and saving money to pay cash for apparatus to avoid interest payments. We refinanced bonds, saving our taxpayers almost \$250,000. We improved our community's insurance rating, reducing premiums for home and business owners. We also partner with neighboring agencies to save money on administrative and training costs.




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**Sample B**

We live within our means, just like you.

Our agency operates under a balanced budget and is proud to be debt-free, paying cash for capital items instead of costly financing. Volunteers build our fire stations and staff facilities, which provides a significant cost-savings to our taxpayers. We actively seek grants, and share costs with neighboring agencies for training, wildland firefighting and other fire-related activities. Our maintenance shop is one of the best in the region, building, maintaining and refurbishing apparatus to save money. For example, we purchased and rebuilt a used ladder truck, saving taxpayers \$625,000.




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**Write your second key message!**

- Why are you deserving?
  - Financially responsible
    - Debt free
      - Refinanced debt to save money
    - Passed audits
    - Cash for apparatus instead of loans
    - Utilizing volunteers
    - Cutting costs or improving efficiencies
  - Awards received
  - Innovative programming
    - Prevention and public education
  - Community involvement




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**Message #3**

- Educate on funding and revenue restrictions
  - Levy rate/s
  - Bonds
  - Excess levy?
  - 1% revenue restriction
  - Compare to other taxing entities




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**Sample A**

State law limits us to a one percent revenue increase per year, which isn't keeping up with inflation.

Daily operations at XXX are funded primarily through two voter-approved levies paid through property taxes for fire and EMS. These levy rates fall over time as property values rise. This limits the fire district to roughly the same amount of revenue each year plus a one percent annual increase allowed by law. (Inflation is currently 2-4%.) If the demand or cost for emergency services exceeds the revenue to provide them, voters are asked to increase funding by returning the levy rates to a previous amount through a "levy lid lift."




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### Sample B

We want you to understand how emergency services are funded.

Emergency services are funded through two levies (one for fire and another for EMS) paid through property taxes. Over time, these levy rates fall as property values rise to limit the fire district to roughly the same amount of revenue per year (plus a one percent increase as allowed by law). For example, voters in XXX approved a fire levy of \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value in 2008. That levy rate has fallen to \$1.29/\$1,000 in 2018.



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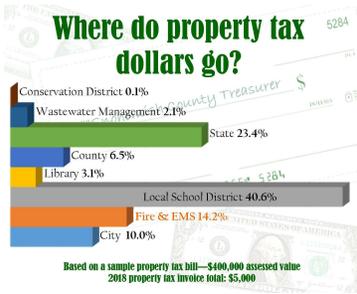
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### Info Graphic Example



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### Write your third key message!

- Educate on funding and revenue restrictions
  - Levy rate/s
  - Bonds
  - Excess levy?
  - 1% revenue restriction
  - Compare to other taxing entities



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**Variable Content Scenarios**

- Revenue request - levy or bond
  - Maintain communication after the election
- Contract, merger or regionalization
- Other - Changes in management, staffing, resources, etc.




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**Message #4: Revenue Request**

- Describe challenges
- Propose solutions
  - Restore or return
- Provide amount
- What will the money support?
- Where to find additional information
  - Accessibility is key




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**Sample A: Fire Levy Lid Lift**

We want to maintain emergency service levels for our community.

Emergency calls in our fire district have increased by more than 31.5% in five years. Additional staffing is required to maintain emergency response times and service levels for our community. This year, the fire district will ask the community to return the fire levy to \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. The 27-cent lid lift would cost the owner of a \$325,000 home \$7.31 per month (\$87.75 per year). More information can be found on our web site at XXX, or contact Chief XXX personally at XXX.




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**Sample B: EMS Levy Simple Renewal**

EMS accounts for 77% of our emergency calls.

Our EMS levy will expire at the end of the year. We are asking voters to renew it at the same rate of 50-cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value (or \$10.42 per month for the average homeowner). Funding will be used for personnel, apparatus maintenance, medical equipment and supplies. Chief XXX is available to answer your questions personally at XXX.



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**Sample C: Bond**

Our community is growing, and we have a plan to respond.

Call volumes have increased 62.5% since 2010. In the western part of our district it can take almost 17 minutes to respond to an emergency. We are asking voters to consider a bond to build and equip a station in the area, and purchase three fire engines for some that are approaching the end of their usable lives. The bond is expected to last for 20 years and cost 28-cents per \$1,000 of assessed value, or approximately \$84 per year (\$7 per month) for the owner of a \$300,000 home.



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**• Thinking about going to ballot?**

1. Update Capital Facilities and/or Strategic Plan
  - Inform community of the process and your findings
2. Identify organizational assets and liabilities
3. Conduct survey research
4. Determine election timing, taxing option, amount
5. Develop a strategic communications plan
  - Start communicating 8-12 months before the election
6. Maintain communication with voters after the election



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**Message #5: Contract, Merger or Regionalization Efforts**

- Describe challenges
- Propose solutions
- What are you doing already?
- How will efficiencies be improved?
- Where to find additional information




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**Sample A: Proposed Merger**

Long-term, we continue to look for ways to be more efficient and improve emergency services.

It's critical that we are able to meet the demand for fire and EMS as our community grows. XXX is looking at partnerships or mergers to be more efficient and provide better service. We currently share a maintenance shop, fire marshal services, training programs, and a Community Resource Paramedic with XXX. We are considering whether this partnership would improve our emergency response capabilities and be more efficient for our taxpayers in the long run.




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**Sample B: Contract Renewal Issues**

Our roots run deep with the City of XXX.

We provide emergency services to the city through a regional partnership that saves taxpayers money and improves our emergency response system-wide. This contract accounts for 17.7% of our budget and funds the city fire station and staffing for 20 firefighters, a fire engine and a paramedic unit. Without this partnership, families and businesses we serve will face significant cuts to emergency service levels and programs.




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### Sample C: Station Closure

We work to be as efficient as possible with your tax dollars.

Fire District X has five stations throughout its service area. Two are staffed full-time, and one part-time to be closest to where and when emergencies occur. One station is staffed if we have enough volunteers, and the last is used for storage. We are proposing to sell the unused station and use the proceeds to provide additional space for personnel and apparatus at facilities in more strategic locations.



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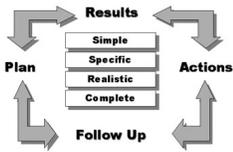
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### Strategies & Tactics for Message Delivery



- How will you share these messages?
- Develop a strategic communications plan
- Five components
  - Paid communications
  - Earned media
  - Owned and social media
  - Public outreach
- All are important for a comprehensive plan



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### Paid Communications

- Anything the agency pays to produce and send
  - Newsletter, direct mail, information brochures, banners, advertising/inserts
- Pros
  - Control of message, timing and delivery
  - Less invasive than email
- Cons
  - Costs money
    - Budget for it



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### Earned Media

- How you interact with the news media
  - Media releases, opinion-editorials, public service announcements, letters to the editor, community blogs
- Pros
  - Cost-effective
  - Third party credibility
  - Builds relationships
- Cons
  - Limited control over message, timing and delivery
  - Labor intensive to monitor responses

Looking for a reason to vote for Benton fire district levy? Start with your family

By [Name] | [Date]

The Board of Fire Commissioners for Benton County Fire District 1 unanimously approved a resolution to place a levy for emergency medical service on the Aug. 7 primary election ballot.

We recently held three public meetings to share information about how ambulance service would improve emergency medical care and response times for our citizens.

Overall, people were surprised to learn that we don't own any ambulances. Currently, we rely on neighboring agencies to send an ambulance to transport patients to area hospitals. This sales helps to reach you in an emergency, which is why we are trying to improve service for area residents and purchase our own.

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### Owned and Social Media

- Assets the fire district owns to share information
  - Web site, signage, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube
- Pros
  - Cost-effective
  - Control message, timing and delivery
  - Reach target audiences, key influencers
  - Creates a sense of community
- Cons
  - Can lose control of message
    - "Going viral"
  - Labor intensive to monitor

Benton County Fire District #4

Published by A.J. Chase III · July 1 · 18

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF: This is a personal appeal to people living in our fire district. Please do not set off fireworks for the 4th of July. Fire crews are battling wildfires fires throughout the state in Benton, Douglas and Grant Counties currently, some of which were caused by fireworks. The resources that are on these fires impact our ability to receive assistance for our emergencies locally. Our state is experiencing record high temperatures and critical low water levels. Enjoy the 4th of July by celebrating at the following public events instead of setting fires and properties at risk by creating your own. Thank you for considering our request. — Chief Bill Whelan

The River of Fire Festival at Columbia Park <http://tririveroffire.com/>

Pasco's Grand Old 4th Celebration GESA Stadium <http://www.pasco-wa.gov/> - Grand Old 4th of July Celebration

Prosser Old Fashioned 4th of July Celebration Art Fair + Music at Stadium <http://hourprosser.com/> - 8-latest\_400-celebrate-4th

247,497 people reached

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### Public Outreach

- Inviting people into our house
  - Open houses, public presentations, community events, citizen advisory groups, schools
- Pros
  - Cost-effective
  - Make personal connections
  - Identify key influencers
  - Transparent/accountable
- Cons
  - Can lose control of message
  - Labor intensive for low turnout
  - Audience response

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**Conclusion – Q&A**

- Any ballot measure or issue that you want to discuss?
- Now's the time



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**Thank you!**

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