



Demos.org Public Works Project

## Public Works: the Dēmos Center for the Public Sector

### Communicators Checklist

In any public communications designed to build public support for the policy goals you seek you must answer three questions quickly:

**What is the problem?      Why does it matter?      What is the action or solution?**

Answering these questions effectively requires paying close attention to how you frame your communications. As you sit down to write, or prepare for an interview, here are some key things to ask yourself:

- Are you leading with **“Level 1” Values** to shape a “big picture” understanding of the issue being discussed? Are you answering the “why should I care” question?
- Are you elevating notions of **shared fate, of working together, of the common good** – the values that give rise to public action and a role for government? Are you speaking to your audience as **citizens**, not just consumers?
- Are you telling **“system-stories”** that evoke the “landscape” of issues at play instead of focusing only on “portraits” of the individuals affected?
- Are you telling a story of **hope and aspiration** or an overwhelming crisis story?
- **Are there solutions?** Where are they in the piece – at the end or **beginning**? Do they seem attainable, with pragmatic steps for getting there?
- Are you using the **tools of good storytelling** – analogies, metaphors and the “public structures model” to address gaps in knowledge about the issue and why “public” solutions are needed?
- How are **numbers** used? Do they confuse or reinforce your story? Is there any **“social math”** to help give large or abstract numbers context and create understanding?
- Are you inadvertently **“cueing up” an opposing position** (the Elephant problem) and then attempting to refute it? If **“but”** is the first word of your second sentence rewrite your first sentence!
- What is your **tone**? Are you evoking partisanship, “just politics” and a “fight” between two sides or are you **reasonable and pragmatic**, focusing on collective solutions and government as a practical tool?

**And lastly, once you’ve crafted your message, talking points or speech:**

- If you boiled down the central idea to a single sentence, what would it be? Do you think the average reader/listener is taking away the desired understanding?

*“The challenge is to make things as simple as possible and not one bit simpler” – Albert Einstein*