

VALUE OF HERITAGE

MESSAGE PLATFORM



How to use these messages

This messaging platform is designed to help you communicate the value of your heritage work. It includes sample messages and a framework of how to use them.

Why use it?

Making the connection between your heritage work and its impact on the community is essential for building support and understanding. This guide will help communicate both what your organization does and why it matters.

How to use it?

This message platform is designed as a menu of options to choose from. Like a menu, the guide offers “courses” that should flow in a specific order, but for each course, you can choose language that matches your specific needs. As with dishes at a restaurant, you can also mix and match parts of each message.

Use these messages, or your own, like topic sentences. Next time you need to prepare testimony, an email, op-ed, press release, speech, or even a social media post, start with one of the messages in this platform. Under each message, you can add a specific story, example, additional details, calls to action, or a fact with impact (an easy to understand piece of data). Examples of how to put this message platform into action are included at the end of this document.

As you create communications, remember that the most compelling language resonates first with people’s emotions – through their deeply held values, beliefs, and aspirations – before appealing to logic and reason. Effective messages also use language that people can visualize or otherwise sense, and skip over unnecessary details in favor of succinct statements that inspire audiences to act. It is better to nurture desire for more information, rather than risk overwhelming your audiences with too much information before they are ready for it.

Opening Messages

- Grab attention
- Connect to broad values
- Set the stage

Impact Messages

- Create excitement
- Demonstrate value
- Make your case

Approach Messages

- Explain “how”
- Share project goals
- Synthesize mission

Opening Messages

The first messages of any communication are most important because they evoke a set of associations, assumptions, and feelings that set the stage for the content that follows. These Opening Messages frame the issue and determine if your audience listens with an open mind. Use broad statements that grab your audience's attention. Opening messages may relate to topics such as: communities, storytelling, authenticity, critical thinking, economic development, or engaged citizens.

Examples of Opening Messages Guiding Principles

Before talking about heritage specifically, you should first connect with people's broad values and aspirations. Everyone has a different idea of heritage and why – or even if – it is important. If you lead the conversation with heritage itself, you may miss an opportunity to connect with audiences who don't already value heritage or see it the way you do. Instead, you can generate interest and passion among these audiences by first speaking to broader ideas they care about.

- ▼ Every community has stories to tell.
- ▼ People want to understand the world they live in.
- ▼ People seek authentic experiences.
- ▼ People want to feel connected to the place they call home.
- ▼ A strong community is made up of people who identify with the place they live.
- ▼ We live in a complex and continually changing world.
- ▼ Everyone is a historian at heart.

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Impact Messages

Impact Messages create excitement and optimism about the future. They make the case for joining with you by illustrating what you make possible in the world. Once you set the tone about what is important with your Opening Messages, use Impact Messages to show the value of preserving and sharing Oregon’s heritage. Consider using your vision statement as an Impact Message.

Examples of Impact Messages Guiding Principles

Emotions influence our decisions. We experience emotions as feelings and gut instincts, and these impulses are ways we process information. When we feel in agreement with something, we are quick to say, “Yes – it makes logical sense.” When we feel in conflict with something, we are quick to logically dismiss it as untrue. Lead your messaging with emotional arguments about values and aspirations, and use logical arguments – such as economics – as “icing on the cake.”

- ▼ Heritage connects us to the people and places around us.
- ▼ Stories allow us to understand and connect with each other.
- ▼ We draw meaning from the past to navigate the future.
- ▼ Examining the past helps communities navigate difference.
- ▼ Understanding the past helps craft better solutions for the future.
- ▼ Experiencing Oregon’s many traditions inspires appreciation for our neighbors, our state, and ourselves.

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Approach Messages

Finally, once you've described what is important and what heritage creates in the world, you can let people know more about the day-to-day work you do. These Approach Messages explain how you do your work and how you move toward realizing your vision. You can do this broadly by synthesizing your organization's mission statement, or more specifically by sharing the goal of your current project. These messages are best saved until after you've created an emotional connection with your audience.

Examples of Approach Messages

- ▼ We provide a space for people to experience the traditions, cultures, and history of our community.
- ▼ We care for the buildings that make our community unique and help us tell stories about the people who inhabited them before us.
- ▼ We help Oregonians understand the history they discover in their own backyards.
- ▼ We bring together people in our community to learn about each other's history and traditions.
- ▼ We collect and share stories that give us new perspectives about our community.
- ▼ We help people examine our history and traditions to guide future generations.

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Models of These Messages in Action

Review the following examples to see how you can choose messages from the menu above. Note how they lead with a broad opening statement followed by an impact message and specific story. Also, note how these examples mix parts of the above messages to form new sentences while keeping the themes consistent.



Testimony to a city council to convince them to fund a heritage activity:

A strong community is made up of people who share a common bond.

As more people move to Oregon, we need to tell stories that allow us to understand and connect with each other.

That is exactly what happened in Southern Oregon, where they used community conversations and an oral history program to **find common ground and build compassion for each other.**

In recent years, land management in Southern Oregon has become a divisive topic. Instead of allowing politics to tear them apart, communities in Southern Oregon came together to share stories of their past, and all of the cultural traditions related to the land that have been handed down over generations. The project, Stories of Southern Oregon, gave people the perspective they needed to imagine the world they want to live in and come together to create it.

Participating in Oregon's heritage inspires appreciation for our neighbors, our state, and ourselves. That is why we are hoping to develop a storytelling project here in our community. By creating a space for people to share stories about their heritage, we will not only bring people together, but we will also foster a sense of pride in our community and encourage people to participate in making it a better place.

An opening message is used to grab attention and set the stage.

An impact message is mixed in early to demonstrate value of this type of work.

Adding an additional impact message supports the value and creates excitement.

In this case, the approach message demonstrates how the group plans to accomplish this work in the future.



Social media post announcing the preservation of a historic building:

#ConnectingOurCommunity. We can preserve the James Building and its stories that **help us find common ground.** Future generations will have ***#ourtownpride*** and an appreciation for each other.

An impact message is used directly as a hashtag.

This approach message shares the goal of the project.

An additional impact message is used to make the case.

A second hashtag is an additional opportunity to insert an impact message.

Message Key: **Opening**, **Impact**, **Approach**



Newsletter article sharing impact of mission-driven work:

Everyone wants to feel connected to the place they call home.

For many years, Linn County Historical Museum told the story of westward expansion and Oregon Trail migrations exclusively from the Euro-American experience. Despite the fact the museum owns historical documentation that shows that many pioneers were non-Euro-Americans, the exhibits were told through the eyes of the dominant culture that created them. That meant some people in the community saw themselves in our exhibits and others didn't. It also meant vital stories for understanding our community's past were missing.

Last February, we partnered with Oregon Black Pioneers to begin researching the presence of African Americans in Linn County starting around 1850. Fascinating stories of African Americans settling in the Linn County area emerged, such as: Cora Cox and Amanda and Ben Johnson who arrived as slaves and entered a region that was hostile to Black People and openly discouraged them from living in Oregon; Minor Jackson who set up a barbershop in Brownsville and was a well-known and respected businessman; and Rufus and Bessie Hale who were local legends in downtown Albany.

With research in hand, how to portray these untold stories became our challenge. As we discussed our desire to have this history become a permanent part of the museum, we talked about a variety of options, including an African American section. However, we agreed that these stories are woven into Linn County's fabric and should, therefore, be incorporated into the existing museum model. We want more community members to see their history reflected over time, creating this community. Encountering the Museum's displays is now a visitor experience that reinforces a more accurate story of Linn County's early settlement.

Through this process we have seen that ***sharing more complex stories of our community's past allows us to understand and connect with each other.***

Reactions from Museum visitors to learning the personal histories and struggles of Linn County's Black Pioneers have ranged from astonishment ("This isn't how I learned it in school,") to shock at the disparity between the traditional knowledge and the truth. The one thing all visitors have told us is they learned something new about their community and their neighbors.

This project has encouraged us to continue to do what we do best: ***collect and share stories that give us new perspectives about our community. We look forward to more research and telling more of Linn County's untold stories.***

An opening message is used as the title to grab attention and set the stage for the body of the newsletter article.

The body of the article shares specific details about a recent initiative at the museum.

An impact message is inserted after the body of the message to clearly summarize the value of the work that was done. This sentence stands alone for emphasis.

The approach message explains how the organization accomplishes this work by synthesizing the organization's mission statement.

Message Key: **Opening**, **Impact**, **Approach**



Annual appeal to fund historic downtown association

People seek authentic community.

In Dayton, our historic courthouse square is the center of our downtown. Six years ago, to capitalize on this asset, Dayton Community Development Association started Friday Nights, a free, family-friendly celebration every Friday night from June through August that includes live musical performances, activities for kids, and a market in the park. The idea was to build community, create a sense of place, and strengthen the local economy by drawing visitors and residents to downtown Dayton.

This is where we met Mary. Mary is a retired banker and life-long resident of Dayton. At age 86 she doesn't get out of the house as much as she used to, but she loves the Friday Night concert series. When we were getting the program off the ground, she was our guaranteed regular, sitting in the front row with a smile on her face. She has become a favorite of the kids who like to dance by the band, and the vendors know her by name.

Last June we had an incredibly rainy evening and weren't sure it was worth starting the concert. But, sure enough, there was Mary, in the front row, holding an umbrella, with a smile on her face. Our team quickly upgraded her to a golf umbrella to keep her a bit dryer. Soon one of the food vendors came over and assembled a pop-up tent over Mary's bench. It didn't take long before a few other community members emerged from restaurants surrounding the park and joined Mary under the tent. As the rain cleared up, Mary was at the center of a group of other smiling community members enjoying the music.

Bringing community members together in our historic downtown helps create our vibrant community. Attendance of Friday Nights has increased steadily over the years. We see local residents who come every week as well as folks who drive in from surrounding communities. When we speak with locals and visitors alike we hear the same thing: people come to Friday Nights because they love the atmosphere and community feel. They like eating ice cream at the historic shop on the corner and popping into the mercantile to pick up a birthday gift. While they may not know we have 41 buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places, they know they like the feeling of where they are.

Dayton Community Development Association connects people to downtown, creating a sense of place and community. By supporting the Dayton Community Development Association, you're helping fund events that foster a sense of community and appreciation of historical aspects.

An opening message is used as the title to grab attention and connect to the listener's broad values.

Sharing a story about a specific person is a strategy to create an emotional connection with the reader and increase the likelihood they remember the story.

An impact message is used as a topic sentence. The remainder of the paragraph provides logical details that help support the statement.

An approach message is used to conclude the communication by summarizing the organization's mission before making an appeal for financial support.