

Minute Message Model

Messaging for impact

“So, what does your organization do?” If these words strike fear in your heart, you’re not alone. Many nonprofit organizations have a tough time explaining the vital work they do in a way that really gets to the heart of why it’s important. They’re more familiar with how to launch into program details and statistics than with really connecting with their audience by conveying the impact their work has on the lives of real people.

Our Minute Message Model will change all that.

Developing effective messaging isn’t rocket science, and we’ve been helping good causes get better at it for decades. Whether you’ve got one minute to get your message across during a shared elevator ride, five minutes at a reception, or ten minutes while your audience reads your irresistible newsletter, our Minute Message Model will give you confidence that you’re using that time well.

Message Basics

USE YOUR FULL NAME. Your name typically conveys a great deal of information about your organization in a way that an acronym just doesn’t.

NEVER ASSUME. Your audience doesn’t know nearly as much about your organization as you hope they do. What’s the problem you’re addressing, and why should they care? Start there every time.

REPEAT, AD NAUSEAM. It’s a fact: you will be sick to death of repeating your message before it begins to sink in with your key audiences. We’re bombarded with thousands of messages each day, so it takes repetition to break through.

ADD BENEFITS, SUBTRACT FEATURES. Features are what your agency *does*. Benefits are what happens as a result. People do not donate to features; they donate to get results.

One Minute Message

DEFINE yourself

If you've only got a minute to share information about your organization, you need to make sure you're only covering the most important things. Often referred to as an "elevator pitch," your One Minute Message should convey simple, high-level information about your organization. It should build comprehension about the nature of your organization without going into too much detail. And it should suggest the problem you're trying to solve.

EXERCISE: One Minute Message

A compelling One Minute Message provides an introduction to your organization, its brand, and the work you do. This simple exercise allows you to create a Mad Libs—style One Minute Message that will leave your audience asking for more.

_____ *believes* _____.
Name of Organization Deeply Held Value

Every day we _____ *for* _____,
Verb Object Constituents

because _____.
Problem Statement

SAMPLE: One Minute Message

At Youth Outside, we believe a meaningful experience in nature can change the course of a life. We lead the field by counseling, coaching, and funding outdoor educators and thought-leaders to ensure that as many youth as possible can partake in the life-changing experience of the outdoors. Because when we do, we improve the lives of youth today and create dynamic outdoor stewards for tomorrow.

Two Minute Message

DEFINE yourself + tell **WHY** you exist

If you've got another minute with your audience, now's the time to go a little deeper. What problem does your organization exist to solve? What aspect of the problem is it that only your organization is addressing? You'll only have one One Minute Message, but you may have several Two Minute Messages. They lay out how your work solves specific problems and makes the world a better place.

They set the context for everything else you say about your organization, and you should return to them over and over again. Your Two Minute Messages are visionary. Your goal is to build an emotional connection with your audience by defining a problem in clear, simple language, so they want to help you solve it. Craft your Two Minute Messages by answering the question, "What's the challenge that *only* my organization can solve?"

Five Minute Message

DEFINE yourself + tell **WHY** you exist + describe your **IMPACT**

If you have a little longer with your audience—in the hallway at a conference, perhaps, in a formal presentation, or in a fundraising appeal—be strategic. Start the same way you would if you had one or two minutes. Begin with your One Minute Message and then share a Two Minute Message explaining the problem you aim to solve.

Then tell a story. Describe the impact your organization has on the lives of real people—not with facts, figures and pie charts—with emotional anecdotes. Explain how real people (or animals, or architectural treasures) are actually helped by the work you do every day. Don't explain what programs you offer; demonstrate the importance of those programs by showing what happens when they work.

Most importantly, end your story by describing how *only* your organization could have created this outcome.

Ten Minute Message

DEFINE yourself + tell **WHY** you exist + describe your **IMPACT** + *then* tell **HOW** you do it.

The Ten Minute Message leads up to the “Ask.” Tailor this message to your particular audience; you’ll be in a stronger position, when the time comes, to make them the heroes of the story: “This happens because of **you**.”

First, introduce your organization (your One Minute Message). Then, name a problem that you solve (a Two Minute Message). Next, add a story (a Five Minute Message) that shows your audience how it plays out in real life.

And then (and only then) you can get to your programmatic work, explaining in detail how your programs support getting the job done. If your audience wants to hear them, your Ten Minute Messages describe the nuts and bolts of how you achieve impact and put your values into action.

Be sure to explain the benefit of the program, not just its features. For example: “Our computer literacy workshop gives our low-income clients the skills they need not only to create a resume and look for a job, but also to become more self sufficient and relevant in a technology-charged world.” That’s much more compelling than, “We offer computer literacy workshops to low-income clients.”

End each Ten Minute Message by asking for what you need. If you’re speaking to donors, ask for money. Be concrete: how much, from how many, to accomplish exactly what? If you need volunteers, ask your audience to sign on. Use this moment. **Ask.**

CONCLUSION

No one knows your organization as well as you do. Even your most ardent supporters can quickly get lost in a stream of data about your programmatic work. The thing that they care most about is that you’re achieving your vision and making a difference. Every conversation, every newsletter, every annual report and news interview is a new chance to spend one minute, five, or ten reminding your audiences why your organization matters and how they can be a part of it. **Use your time well.**

Mission Minded is a branding firm that works exclusively with nonprofits. We believe that nonprofits, foundations, and independent schools only reach their highest potential if people understand the importance of their work—not just what they do, but why it matters.

Every day we partner with clients like National Federation of the Blind, Greater San Francisco’s Habitat for Humanity, OneJustice, Walter & Elise Haas, Sr. Fund, and Mile High United Way to help them determine the brand—or reputation—for which they want to be known. Then we help them bring that brand to life through key messages, logo design, web design, and more. As a result, our clients successfully raise more money and attract the support they need to reach their goals.

Have a question? We’d love to hear from you. Write to Jennie Winton at jennie@mission-minded.com, or give Jennie a call at 415.990.9360.