

Making Presentations

Guidance in the [Media Outreach Guide](#) also applies to making presentations to live audiences in the community:

- ❖ Communicate clearly to the audience
- ❖ Specify your request
- ❖ Provide a reward that your audience cares about
- ❖ Make the reward believable by providing evidence to back it up
- ❖ Use vivid and appropriate images
- ❖ Choose the right moment
- ❖ Choose the right messenger

Plain Language is More Persuasive than Jargon

In presentations, “plain language” is more easily understandable and interesting to consumers, reporters, elected officials, colleagues in other fields, business people, health care workers, and others you are addressing. Research shows that listeners give greater credence and respect to experts who express ideas in simple terms than to those who indulge in a lot of technical and bureaucratic terminology.

Keep Statistics to a Minimum

Use fewer rather than more statistics, so the most powerful numbers aren’t lost in an overabundance of figures. Make the statistics as simple as possible; for example, in all but the most technically demanding situations, use “two out of three” instead of the numbing “65.53 percent,” or say, “the number of new cases tripled,” rather than the confusing “we experienced a 200-percent increase.” Repeat the statistics you do use, to imprint them on listeners’ memories. Trends or comparisons such as “rates fell from 24 to 16 percent” tend to be convincing.

Research results and data can be strongly persuasive.

For example:

“Binge drinking on campus is a growing problem in our town. In the past three years, alcohol-related arrests among 18-22 year-olds rose by one-third.”

“Our county is second in the state in the percentage of HIV/AIDS cases per population. One in 70 residents has been diagnosed.”

“The 2010 census shows that nearly one in five residents in the quad-county area is over age 65. We need to provide more preventive services for elders.”

The Power of Storytelling

Statistics alone seldom convey a complete message. To stimulate awareness, and stir people to action, a speaker should:

- ❖ Say what has to be done
- ❖ Announce why it has to be done soon
- ❖ Inspire those who must do it

Stories can be especially effective in accomplishing these ends. Consider the following examples—one relatively strong, the other weak—seeking volunteers, contributions, and a generally active community response to the arrival from a neighboring state of several hundred refugees who lost their homes in a weather disaster:

Strong:

"These families are in the same calamitous position we would be in if the weather had followed a slightly different path. They need shelter, they need nutritious food, they need medicine and health care, they need counseling and support. Brian S. is 17 years old, autistic, separated from much of his family and his familiar routines. Edna M. is 83, widowed just one month ago, diabetic, with heart disease, and no children to help her. Jackie D.—these names are made up, but the people are real—is a teacher who broke her leg trying to rescue a student. They all need the services our community is able to provide. They all need a heart and a hand."

Weak:

"The incident command center directed the immediate transfer, by motor coach, of individuals determined to be in need of temporary lodging. Our department did not participate in the transfer decision. The budgetary impact of any assistance we furnish is unclear, and so we are concerned about the need for

federal support. Many of these persons are immigrants and speak languages that are not widely spoken here. Our plan is to provide packet meals that meet applicable standards of caloric content and vitamin sufficiency. Medical attention and inventories of pharmaceutical requirements can be supplied through volunteer effort. Tents have been ordered, if needed. The attorneys tell us that, if we do those things, we will fulfill our legal responsibility."

The first example was strengthened through:

- ❖ Induce empathy ("same calamitous position we would be in")
- ❖ Say what has to be done ("they need shelter . . . ")
- ❖ Stories (Brian, Edna, and Jackie)
- ❖ Compliment the audience ("our community is able to provide"), and
- ❖ Offer an inspirational message ("a heart and a hand")

By contrast, the second example was weakened through:

- ❖ Flat language ("individuals determined to be . . . ")
- ❖ Deflection of responsibility ("our department did not participate . . .")
- ❖ Emphasize the financial rather than human aspects of the tragedy ("budgetary impact is unclear")
- ❖ Put the problems before the solution (" . . . immigrants and speak languages")
- ❖ Limit vision ("meet applicable standards")
- ❖ Only a tentative and indirect appeal for help ("can be supplied through volunteer effort")
- ❖ Accept of second-best conditions ("tents have been ordered")
- ❖ Legalistic framework ("fulfill our legal responsibility")

Stylistic Pointers for an Effective Presentation

An interesting presenter welcomes questions that insert breaks into the presentation. If you use PowerPoint or other slides, avoid letting them substitute for your own words and responses to audience concerns, and keep the number of slides to a minimum.

It's an especially good idea to start and end on a strong note. Audiences most remember the beginning and conclusion of a presentation or interview.

Tip: Be a Moving Target When Speaking to Groups: When introduced, start talking while walking to the lectern; vary gestures, inflections, and facial expressions; step down from the podium occasionally to directly face different sides of your audience.

The key to effective presentations is preparation. If you are very familiar with your information and line of argument, you will feel more at ease rearranging, cutting, adding, and adjusting the content to suit the circumstances. (You won't, for example, feel that you have to fit in every slide, even if that means rushing blindly through them.)

This flexibility will allow you to accommodate most challenges, such as:

- ❖ An unexpectedly indifferent or negative attitude on the part of your audience
- ❖ A reduction (or expansion) in the time allotted to you
- ❖ Equipment problems
- ❖ Being sandwiched between two highly anticipated and exciting speakers (other than yourself, of course)

Preparation also will help you to respond with agility to difficult questions, rather than having to shuffle through your notes to find the right piece of information or pausing for several seconds to think of an answer. Be sure to identify the question you fear most. Once you develop an answer to that, you'll be ready for anything!

Presentations for a Partnership or Coalition

Presentations on behalf of a partnership or coalition require special tact. The trick is to turn the group's diversity of views into a strength, rather than letting the group appear shaky or discordant or misrepresenting some members. To show a partnership or coalition to advantage and make as persuasive a case as possible, a speaker representing the group should strive to:

- ❖ Demonstrate the group's breadth and appeal to a broad range of concerns ("we come to the issue of air pollution from different directions and have different priorities, but we all are fully committed to making our air healthier and purer")
- ❖ Ground the argument for action in a few compelling facts, statistics, and stories, to defuse any perception that the group is just a loose amalgam of special interests ("last month's vicious murder of a young mother, who was one of five fatal victims of domestic violence in the past three

years, leads all of us—women's rights advocates, law enforcement agencies, civic organizations, and the health department—to demand greater protection for women at risk of sexual abuse")

- ❖ Anticipate tough questions about the group's structure, cohesion, degree of shared commitment, and willingness to set aside individual demands for the good of the whole ("is it true that the sheriff threatened to walk out of the emergency preparedness coalition if he wasn't named to chair it?" "why did it take six months to agree on a statement of principles for improving end-of-life care?" "was the impetus for this new eat-healthy group the desire to attract funds for its member organizations?" "why are there no minority groups in this safe-streets coalition?")

Some of these tough questions are avoidable through responsible action. For example, a question about the lack of minority representation can be avoided by including minority members.