

VPSA Messaging Structure

At The Opportunity Agenda, we have developed a **messaging structure**, backed by decades of communications and messaging research, that takes audiences on a journey from **V**alue to **P**roblem to **S**olution to **A**ction in a way that really lands. Using this structure, you can develop messages that cut through the noise and help audiences understand their own place in the solutions you're proposing.

VPSA is a flexible framework that you can adapt across formats—whether you're writing an op-ed, scripting a campaign video, planning a press interview, or shaping a message for social media. It can even guide the creative choices behind an art piece, helping you express the values at stake, highlight what's being challenged, point to a vision for the future, and invite your audience to imagine or act differently.

No matter the medium, VPSA helps you build messages that are grounded in values, clear about the problem, focused on real solutions, and designed to move people to action.

It's important to think about how you balance these elements to craft the most persuadable VPSA message. Starting with values as an entry point to the rest of your message is imperative to prime audiences to listen and engage with what you're saying. We recommend spending the most time on solutions—it communicates your expertise and ensures audiences don't fall into apathy from being bombarded with more problems they can't solve. Leading with values and being solutions-focused are probably the two most important takeaways when you start implementing VPSA into your communications work.

On the next page let's look at each element of the VPSA structure individually, with the understanding that, in a complete and effective message, each of these elements works together to establish common ground and shared purpose with your audience, frame the problems we face, point your audience toward systemic solutions, and offer them a way to participate in solving the problem.

Connect to Your Solution With an Affirmative Story



Avoid myth-busting as it can reinforce the opposition's rhetoric.



An affirmative position centered around shared values is more powerful.

Art by Rommy Tarrico



TOA PRO TIP:

Restating a myth in an attempt to debunk it can create a stronger connection in audiences' minds between the topic and the myth. Myth-busting can backfire by repeating harmful frames. In the example on the left, folks mean well—but "Being poor is not a crime" steps into the opposition's narrative. The image on the right focuses instead on an aspirational vision: what it looks like when communities have what they need to thrive and collectively reach abundance. Affirmative messages keep you in control of the story.

Learn more in the Messaging Principles section on page 21.

Value

15%
of your message



Leading with values draws your audience into your message—it immediately makes clear why your audience should care. With so many pressing issues and injustices in the world, it's important to overcome compassion fatigue. By highlighting the important shared values under threat, you compel your audience to care and feel personally connected to the problem you're talking about.

Problem

30%
of your message



Describing the problems we face is where many communicators get stuck. Describe how the problem violates the shared values you've established with your audience. When those shared values are under attack, so is our shared future.

Bring in facts and research findings, but be judicious. Facts do not tend to change people's minds unless they are couched in values. You want the facts and figures you select to connect directly to the solutions you propose. Be careful not to myth-bust—offer an affirmative vision centered on shared values. How you frame the problem influences how your audience wants to solve it. Frame problems in a systemic way to prevent individualized solutions.

Solution

40%
of your message



Pivot quickly to solutions. Positive, accessible solutions leave people with ideas, choices, and motivation. Assign responsibility to the specific decision-makers and/or people who have the power to implement the solutions you propose. Make sure you're connecting the dots for your audience—does your solution directly address the problem in the way you've described it?

Action

15%
of your message



Assign an action to your audience—how can they be part of the solution? This is also Organizing 101—if you give people a way to be involved, they're more likely to see themselves as part of your movement, increasing the chance that they'll continue to take action in the future.

VPISA is not a rigid formula. The power of VPISA is its flexibility. You can shift the order, simplify it, or adapt it depending on your audience, platform, or purpose.

For example, if you're talking to folks who already share your values, you might lead with the solution to inspire them, then name the problem, and wrap with a clear action:



We can make sure everyone in our community has a safe, affordable place to live. But too many of our neighbors are being pushed out by rising rents and housing policies that prioritize profit over people. Because everyone deserves a stable home, we're calling on city leaders to pass rent protections now.

That version starts with solution + value, then moves into the problem, and ends with the action. Sometimes—especially in shorter formats like visuals or social posts—you might use a VSA approach and leave the problem implied. The point is: tailor it to what works best for your people and your platform.