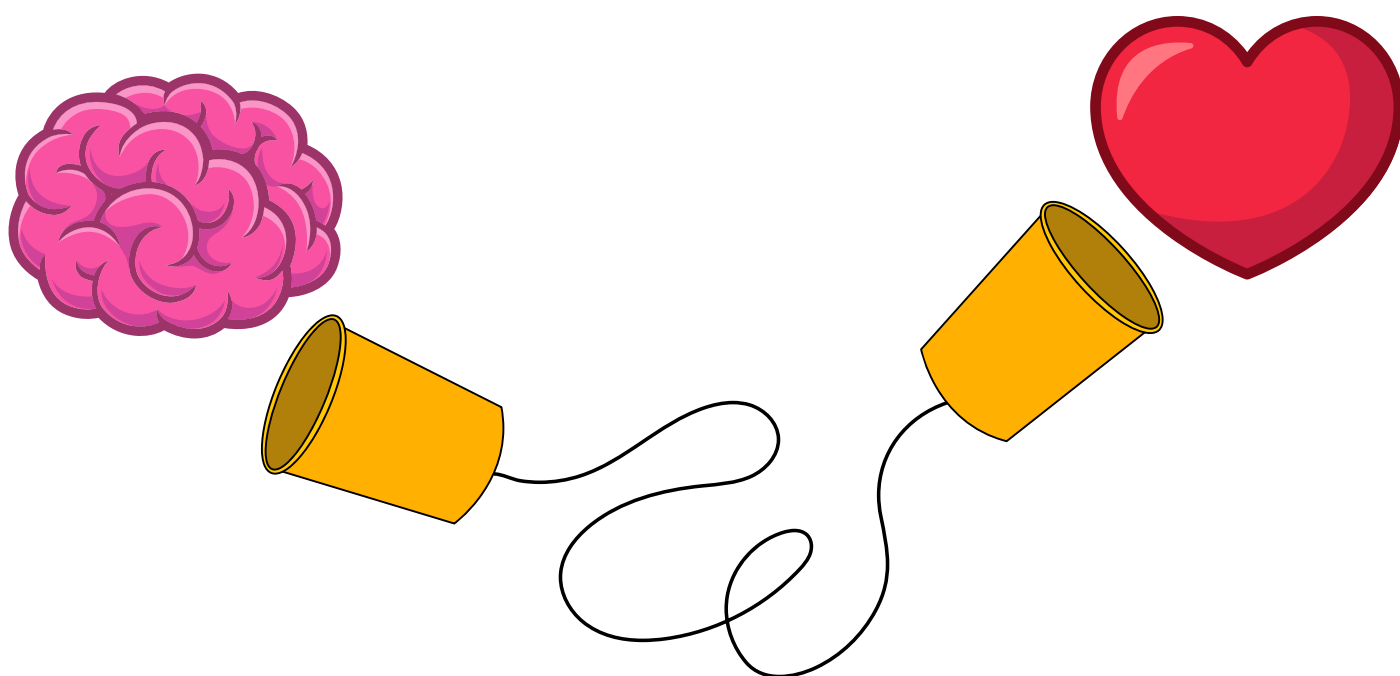


A Guide to Crafting Messages that Touch Hearts and Minds



Sogicampaigns Coaching Toolkit | 2025 Edition

FREE TO BE ME programme

**FREE TO
BE ME**

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

STEP 1: ANALYZE YOUR COMMUNICATIONS

- Consideration#1: Our Sense Of Identity:
- Consideration #2: Emotions
- Tips On How To Apply This Consideration Practically
- Consideration #3: Lived Experiences
- Consideration #4: Values We Hold
- Consideration #5: Our Beliefs

STEP2: UNDERSTANDING YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

1. Identifying Your Audiences
 2. Prioritizing Your Audiences
 3. Mapping The Mindset Of Your Priority Audience
 4. Understanding Conflict And Resistance
 5. Choosing Messengers Who Are Trusted
- How To Apply This Practically

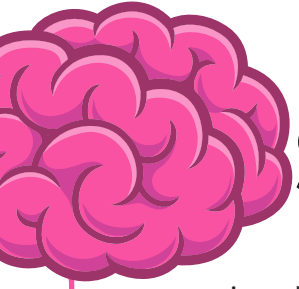
STEP 3: DESIGNING MESSAGES THAT TOUCH HEARTS AND MINDS

1. Begin With Clarity Of Purpose
 2. Anchor Your Message In Shared Humanity
 3. Framing The Message Using Four Core Elements
 4. Make It Emotional, Not Emotionalized
 5. Simplify Without Oversimplifying
 6. Use Storytelling As Your Most Powerful Tool
 7. Test And Refine Your Messages
 8. Ensuring Your Message Resonates And Delivers Impact
- Closing Reflection For The Toolkit

WORKSHEETS AND EXERCISES

- Step 1: Analyzing Your Communications Worksheet
- Step 2: Understanding Your Target Audience Worksheet
- Step 3: Designing Messages That Touch Hearts And Minds Worksheet

INTRODUCTION



Sogicampaigns provided coaching support to over 66 activist organizations across various African countries where the Free To Be Me Program was implemented. While the primary goal was to enhance their public communication within their respective contexts, Sogicampaigns was often tasked with specific assignments. One such task involved assisting organizations in developing messages that resonated emotionally and intellectually with their target audiences. This required an in-depth analysis of their existing communication strategies, target demographics, and advocacy objectives.

The following sections detail key learnings and a methodology that proved effective, practical, and adaptable to different contexts. This tool aims to assist activists in their communication efforts as they sharpen their messaging to touch the hearts and minds of their target audiences, with the intention of moving them to take constructive action in support of their advocacy agenda. For example, activists may use this framework to design values-based campaigns that speak directly to parents' hopes for their children, reframe public debates through shared community values, or build digital storytelling that makes inclusion relatable in everyday life. These practical illustrations show how communication can evolve from being merely informative to becoming deeply persuasive.

During the coaching process, it came to the fore that a fundamental question activist organizations grapple with is whether their messaging is effectively landing or resonating with their target audiences. This is a critical consideration for maximizing impact and ensuring organizations make progress in their advocacy journey. For a message to truly land, it must not merely be heard but deeply understood, accepted, and acted upon.

Whether organizations are engaged in large-scale public awareness campaigns, complex digital advocacy drives, grassroots organizing, or community sensitization workshops, it is vital to determine whether the core message resonates with their audiences. Resonance goes beyond comprehension; it means the message connects with the audience on emotional, intellectual, and personal levels.



Messaging that resonates elicits empathy and inspires collective action. When it fails to do so, organizations risk expending valuable time, effort, and funds on initiatives that fall flat or alienate the very audiences they seek to persuade and mobilize. Therefore, developing mechanisms to measure whether messages are landing or not is essential for realizing an organization's mission.

In this brief tool, we summarize the worksheets that guided our conversations with activists on how to craft messages that touch both hearts and minds. The worksheets are organized in three steps, each offering practical exercises to bring the lessons to life:

Step 1: Analyzing Current Communications.

Taking stock of the present state of communications and the audiences you seek to reach.

Step 2: Understanding Your Target Audiences.

Establishing, with intentionality, who is capable of giving you what you want, and mapping their nuanced characteristics so that your messaging aligns with the factors that influence their decision-making.

Step 3: Designing Messages that Touch Hearts and Minds.

Packaging messages in ways that open doors using frames rooted in values and shared human experience.

Let us now dive into the steps and undertake exercises that can bring to life the lessons contained in each.

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STEP 1:

ANALYZE YOUR COMMUNICATIONS

Building on the reflections above, the first step invites us to pause and take a clear, honest look at our current communication practices. Before we can do things differently and hence achieve different results, we must understand where we are-how we speak, who we reach, and what messages are landing or missing the mark. This diagnostic step lays the foundation for meaningful improvement.

By engaging in this exercise, organizations are able to identify their strengths, weaknesses, and potential areas for refinement so that their communications become more intentional and results-driven. During strategy-building sessions with organizations from the different countries, many teams realized that their materials focused heavily on describing problems but rarely evoked shared values or emotional connection. As a result of this awareness, in one campaign strategy for instance, the emphasis on “ending discrimination” was reframed to “building safer communities for all families”, instantly softening tone and inviting broader participation.

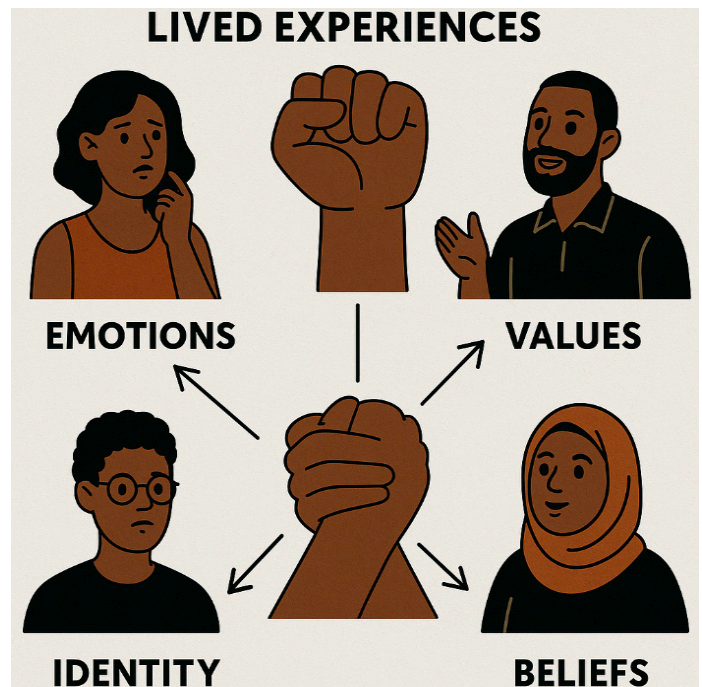
This kind of reflective analysis helps uncover not just what we are saying, but how it is being heard. It guides us to shift from transactional communication (pushing information and requesting change) to transformational communication (inviting empathy, reflection, and voluntary action).

The basis of our analysis will be informed by a set of five considerations that influence how people make decisions, especially on socially sensitive or controversial issues. Social science has shown that human decision-making is rarely linear or purely logical. These five elements often collide or collude to determine which direction our choices take.



Let's have a brief look at the five considerations that play a key role in shaping how people form opinions and respond to messages:

1. People's Sense Of **Identity**
2. The **Emotions** That The Issue Triggers In People
3. The **Lived Experiences** That Shape How People Interpret Reality
4. Inclusion Of **Shared Values**
5. The Deeply Held **Beliefs**



Herebelow, we take a brief look at each of the factors so that we understand how they play out. It is important to note that these factors rarely work alone, but often collude or even collide to shape which direction our decisions would go. Human decision making process is rarely governed by logic. It's never a linear process. When we understand how the process works, we can align with it, so that we influence what decisions are made.

CONSIDERATION#1: OUR SENSE OF IDENTITY:



This refers to how people see themselves in relation to the world around them. Messages that reinforce how we see ourselves are likely to be received with ease as compared to those messages that are contrary to how we see ourselves. So that our communications can land with our audiences, it is important that our messages speak to the way the audience sees themselves. The question therefore to be asked is how are you positively evoking shared identities that people hold? In order to answer this question, it is important to consider how your message resonates with and reinforces common roles and affiliations which shape people's identities. In discussions with activists, we found good illustrations of this:

Family Roles:Where audiences see themselves as mother, father, son, daughter, grandparent, aunt, uncle. When communicating, how does our message reinforce the notion of being e.g. a good Zimbabwean father?

'As a good Zimbabwean father, how do we teach our sons to protect, not punish, others who are different from them? When we remind fathers that strength is shown through fairness and guidance, not fear, we invite them to model inclusion at home.'

Community Roles: Where audiences may see themselves as community elder, neighbour, church member, local leader, volunteer etc. How are our messages resonating with the accepted idea of being a good e.g. church member?

‘As a respected church elder or neighbour, you are known for helping resolve conflicts and guiding the youth. How might you use that same trusted voice to remind others that every person in our community deserves safety and respect, no matter who they are?’

Religious Affiliations: Here audiences saw themselves as being Christian, Muslim, traditional believer, or other faith groups. As a good Christian, how are we expected to treat our neighbours?

‘As good Christians, we are called to love our neighbours as ourselves. That means treating everyone including those whose lives we do not fully understand with compassion and grace. True faith shows in how we extend kindness, not judgement.’

Social Connections: Friend, colleague, fellow citizen, someone who shares a common struggle or aspiration.

‘As a colleague and friend, you know how powerful it feels when someone stands with you. Supporting fairness for all people simply extends that same spirit of camaraderie, being the kind of friend who makes others feel safe and seen.’

National Identity:

For instance, for Zimbabweans, part of a proud heritage, resilient people.

‘As proud Zimbabweans, we have always been known for our resilience and ubuntu- our deep belief that a person is a person through others. Protecting one another’s dignity continues that legacy of strength and solidarity that defines our nation.’

An important strategy in our messaging therefore is to use language, imagery, and examples that portray these identities positively and inclusively. You should frame your message in a way that aligns with the values and responsibilities associated with these roles, making your audience feel seen, respected, and part of a collective.

Even as we do this, it would be important to note that people generally see themselves and their intentions as good. So a critical question to ask as you review your communications would be if there is anything in your content that might suggest that people who are conflicted are ‘bad,’ or that might otherwise conflict with how they see themselves? As a general rule, you should avoid accusatory, judgmental, or shaming language. Even when addressing challenging topics or behaviours, frame the issue in terms of a problem to be solved together, or a misunderstanding to be clarified. Focus on the impact of actions rather than labeling individuals as ‘bad.’ People are more receptive to messages when they don’t feel personally attacked or devalued. Validate their inherent goodness and capacity for positive change, even if their current actions or beliefs are not aligned with your desired outcome.



Emotions are the invisible currents that move people to act, resist, or stay silent. They are the heartbeat behind every decision, especially on issues that touch deeply held beliefs or social norms. In advocacy, facts inform, but feelings transform. This means that even the most logical or evidence-based message will fall flat if it fails to acknowledge how people feel.

Emotions such as fear, pride, love, anger, or shame can either build bridges or raise walls. Many campaigns that falter do so not because the content is wrong, but because they fail to anticipate or manage the emotional state of their audience. To be persuasive, activists must learn to listen for emotions beneath opinions so as to respond not just to what people say, but to what they feel.

From the coaching process, three emotional realities repeatedly surfaced: fear of change, pride in moral standing, and compassion when stories become personal. Each of these holds both a barrier and a doorway for effective communication.

1. Calming Big, Negative Emotions

Big, negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, or moral panic often block understanding. When people feel threatened, they stop listening. To calm these emotions, campaigners must acknowledge, normalize, and redirect them.

In Nigeria's community strategy sessions, for instance, one organization shifted its messaging from 'Stop discrimination against LGBTQI people' (which triggered defensiveness) to 'We all want communities where everyone feels safe and respected.' This reframing named a shared emotional goal of safety and helped reduce tension before introducing more challenging content.

Similarly, in Kenya, activists working with local media practitioners found that acknowledging discomfort openly was disarming. A phrase such as, 'We understand that this topic can make some people uneasy and that's okay. It's a conversation about dignity, not judgment,' helped listeners stay engaged rather than switching off.

2. Addressing Unfamiliarity and Avoiding Jargon

Unfamiliar terms can evoke unease, embarrassment, or alienation. Many communities are not hostile by nature; they are simply unsure, or afraid of saying the wrong thing. For example, in one focus group, a participant confused 'intersex' with 'international sex', a moment that was both humorous and revealing. It reminded us that confusion, not malice, often drives misunderstanding.

To manage such reactions, use language that invites curiosity rather than defensiveness. For instance:

- Replace insider terms like 'cisgender' with plain explanations: 'Some people identify with the gender they were assigned at birth; others do not and both are natural.'
- Add context when using community phrases like 'Kuchu' or 'Queer', explaining their origins and why they matter.
- Tell short, human-centered stories that show lived experiences instead of abstract definitions.

In Ghana's for example, activists from a youth led organization replaced technical terminology with everyday expressions of empathy, for instance 'seeing yourself in someone else's shoes' which made discussions on diversity more accessible and less intimidating.

3. Turning Emotional Barriers into Pathways

Once negative emotions are calmed and unfamiliarity addressed, messages can activate positive emotions such as hope, empathy, and pride. These are the true drivers of transformation.

In Zimbabwe, for instance, activists drew inspiration from the local concept of ubuntu, the belief in shared humanity, to evoke pride and connection rather than confrontation. Phrases like 'When one of us suffers, all of us lose something' reframed LGBTQI inclusion as an expression of cultural unity, not a foreign idea.

Likewise, messages in Kenya that focused on parental love 'Every child deserves to be safe and accepted at home' triggered empathy and reflection among listeners who initially viewed LGBTQI issues with suspicion. Emotional resonance shifted their posture from debate to understanding.



TIPS

ON HOW TO APPLY THIS CONSIDERATION PRACTICALLY

To design messages that skillfully navigate emotions, try this three-step practice:

1. Start by mapping emotional triggers.

Ask yourself: What feelings might this issue evoke in my audience? Fear, guilt, pride, confusion, or compassion? List them clearly before drafting your message.

2. Acknowledge before you persuade.

Use bridging language such as 'We understand that this can be uncomfortable,' or 'These are not easy conversations, but they matter because we all care about dignity and safety.' Acknowledgment diffuses defensiveness and opens a window for connection.

3. Anchor the conversation in shared emotional aspirations.

Focus on emotions people want to feel such as safety, belonging, pride in fairness rather than those they fear. Use relatable scenarios (family, work, faith, friendship) to ground the message.

When we manage emotions skillfully, advocacy moves from confrontation to compassion. It becomes less about winning an argument and more about building a bridge of understanding. In emotionally intelligent communication, empathy is not a soft skill, it is a strategic tool for social change.

CONSIDERATION #3: LIVED EXPERIENCES



Every message we share enters a world already shaped by people's daily realities. These lived experiences form the lens through which audiences interpret what we say and decide whether to trust, reject, or ignore it. When our communications fail to acknowledge this, they sound distant, abstract, or even disrespectful. When we speak from within people's lived realities, our messages come alive; they feel true.

Lived experience includes the social, cultural, and economic circumstances that define people's day-to-day lives. These might include the struggle to earn a living, the expectations of family, the influence of faith, or the memory of national hardship and resilience. Effective communication, therefore, must connect advocacy goals to what people already know through their own stories.

During the coaching process with the activists, several organizations realized that messages about inclusion were being rejected not because people disagreed with equality, but because they could not see how it related to their own realities. Once messages began referencing shared experiences such as family, work, community support, or economic well-being their meaning deepened and acceptance grew. Here below are a few tips to help ground your messaging to your target audiences' lived experiences:



Tip 1. Ground Messages in Everyday Life

In Ghana, a youth-led organization reframed its communication on workplace inclusion. Instead of saying 'every person has a right to non-discrimination', they started using the phrase 'everyone deserves to work in peace and be respected for doing their job well'. This simple shift rooted the message in a daily experience that everyone could relate to: the dignity of work.

Similarly, in Zimbabwe, activists found that messages framed around collective responsibility resonated better. By connecting inclusion to the long-standing tradition of community care such as 'tiri pamwe chete', meaning 'we are in this together', their messaging began to reflect the texture of everyday Zimbabwean life.

In Kenya, another group adapted its community workshops to draw from common parental experiences. They used stories of parents navigating the challenges of raising diverse children to illustrate acceptance and empathy. These narratives resonated more powerfully than technical policy language ever could.



Tip 2. Recognize Practical Realities

It is essential to respect the limits and pressures that define people's lives. For example, urging people to 'speak out' in unsafe environments without offering protection mechanisms can sound naïve or even irresponsible. Likewise, calling for community members to 'embrace diversity' without acknowledging widespread economic struggle can make inclusion feel like a distant luxury.

Good campaigners start by asking: Does my message make sense in the life of the person hearing it? If not, it needs adjusting. This may mean using local examples, translating slogans into community idioms, or connecting advocacy to pressing concerns like access to healthcare, security, or employment.

In Nigeria, one of the organizations found success linking the idea of inclusion to the shared experience of safety. By framing acceptance as a community value that reduces fear and tension for everyone, they made inclusion feel practical and beneficial, not abstract or imposed.



Tip 3. Validate People's Realities

Audiences are more open when they feel seen. Validating lived experiences does not mean agreeing with every belief; it means recognising the journey people have taken. A message that says 'we know many families are doing their best to raise children in difficult circumstances' communicates empathy and respect. It invites collaboration, not correction.

In campaign communication, humility goes a long way. Rather than beginning with instruction, begin with observation: 'We have seen how families come together in times of hardship; that spirit of care is what we hope to strengthen.' This approach affirms people's wisdom and builds trust.



HOW TO APPLY THIS CONSIDERATION PRACTICALLY

- 1 Listen before you write.** Use community consultations, interviews, or informal conversations to understand people's challenges, joys, and fears. Let their language guide your phrasing.
- 2 Test your messages.** Share drafts with small focus groups and ask: 'Does this sound like something you would say?' If it doesn't, simplify or localize it.
- 3 Tell relatable stories.** Replace statistics with examples from ordinary life: a parent protecting a child, a neighbour offering help, a teacher standing up for fairness.
- 4 Show realism.** Avoid idealistic promises; instead, acknowledge limitations and suggest small, achievable steps.

When communications reflect people's lived experiences, advocacy stops sounding like an external lecture and starts feeling like a shared conversation. It reminds communities that change is not imported from outside; it grows from within their own daily lives.

CONSIDERATION #4: VALUES WE HOLD



Values are the compass points of human decision-making. They tell us what is right, what is wrong, and what is worth protecting. Every culture, faith, and community holds a set of values that guide behaviour and shape what feels acceptable or admirable. When our advocacy aligns with these values, our messages are welcomed; when it challenges them without care, resistance follows.

To persuade effectively, we must therefore speak the language of values. We do not invent them; we reveal them. We hold a mirror to what already exists within our communities: love, family, fairness, respect, hard work, and peace. The art lies in showing how inclusion and equality reinforce, rather than threaten, those same values.

1. Surfacing Shared Values

In every conversation during the coaching process, participants could identify values that nearly everyone agreed upon. In Kenya, for example, activists named family unity, hospitality, and community spirit (harambee) as the strongest moral threads binding people together.

In Zimbabwe, values such as respect for elders, resilience, and peace were highlighted as cornerstones of social harmony. In Ghana, activists spoke of hard work, neighbourliness, and the desire to live honourably.

By beginning with shared values, messages create a sense of safety and belonging. They remind people that our advocacy is not foreign; it springs from the same moral soil that nurtures their own lives.

A message framed around shared values might sound like this:

'We all want our communities to be places of peace and fairness, where every family is respected and every person can contribute without fear.'

This kind of statement opens the door before asking anyone to walk through it.

2. Aligning New Ideas with Familiar Values

When introducing ideas that may seem new or sensitive, it helps to connect them to a value that is already accepted. Instead of opposing a deeply held belief, pair it with another belief that is equally cherished.

For example, when discussing gender diversity with faith leaders in Kenya, activists connected the concept of dignity with the Christian value of compassion:

'Even when we don't understand someone fully, compassion asks us to treat them with respect and love.'

This allowed conversations to stay within a moral frame the audience trusted.

In Zimbabwe, an organization reframed its advocacy from 'challenging discrimination' to 'upholding our tradition of caring for one another'. The idea was the same, but the framing made it consistent with the value of ubuntu- the belief that one's humanity is bound to the humanity of others.

3. Avoiding Value Conflicts

Sometimes a message fails because it unintentionally pits one cherished value against another. For instance, if inclusion is framed in a way that seems to undermine faith or family, it creates emotional conflict.

The campaigner's task is not to erase that conflict, but to guide people toward resolution by showing complementarity.

For example, a Kenyan activist once shared that parents were torn between their love for their children and their fear of societal judgment. Instead of asking them to 'choose love over tradition', she invited them to see love as tradition: 'In every culture, a parent's duty is to protect their child. That is our shared value and it includes every child.'

This approach reduces the sense of threat and invites reflection rather than defence.

4. Demonstrating Values in Action

Values gain power when they are seen, not just said. In the Nigerian strategy workshops, participants began using storytelling to illustrate values in action. Short narratives showed neighbours standing up for one another, teachers defending fairness, and young people helping friends in distress. These stories did more than explain; they embodied inclusion.

Practical tools such as radio dramas, community theatre, and social media reels can help audiences see their own values come to life through ordinary people. When listeners recognise themselves in the story, the message no longer feels abstract.



HOW TO APPLY THIS PRACTICALLY

- 1 Start from what is sacred.** Identify the values that hold the greatest meaning for your audience: love, family, harmony, hospitality, or fairness. For example, when speaking to parents, begin with what they already treasure—the wellbeing of their children. For instance:
‘Every parent wants their child to feel safe, loved, and able to dream freely. Ensuring safety and acceptance for all children simply continues that sacred duty of love and protection.’
- 2 Connect, don’t confront.** Frame your issue as a way of strengthening, not breaking, those values. For instance, when discussing fairness, frame your message as strengthening community bonds rather than attacking beliefs: Here is an example:
‘When everyone in our community is treated fairly, our unity becomes stronger. Excluding some weakens the very harmony we say we value.’
- 3 Use local proverbs, sayings, and idioms.** Familiar cultural expressions can anchor new ideas in trusted wisdom. For example, ‘A home that welcomes all visitors never grows poor’ can introduce discussions on acceptance. ‘As we say in many African homes, ‘One finger cannot lift a stone.’ It takes all of us, with our different strengths, to build a peaceful and thriving nation.’
- 4 Tell stories that show values in motion.** Show people doing what is right, not only talking about it. For instance, rather than preaching acceptance, tell stories that reveal it naturally:
‘In one village, a grandmother began inviting young people of all backgrounds to her home for tea. She said, ‘When we eat together, we stop fearing one another.’ Her simple act spoke louder than any speech could.’
- 5 Acknowledge tension honestly.** When values seem to collide, invite dialogue: ‘How can we honour both our faith and our duty to care?’ And when they seem to conflict, open the space for reflection instead of defensiveness:
‘Many people wonder how to stay true to faith while accepting differences. That question itself is part of our journey. How might we live our faith in a way that protects love, care, and compassion for all?’

When our communications are rooted in shared values, we remind people that change does not mean abandoning who they are. It means living more deeply into the best of what they already believe.

CONSIDERATION #4: OUR BELIEFS



Beliefs are the roots from which values and emotions grow. They are the deep-seated understandings that people hold about life, morality, community, and purpose. On the African continent, many beliefs are interwoven with religion, culture, and long-standing social norms. These beliefs shape how people make sense of the world; they determine what feels natural and what feels foreign, what is seen as honourable and what is feared.

Beliefs differ from values. While values express what people hold dear, beliefs are the statements they hold to be true about how the world works or how life should be lived. For instance, 'love' is a value, but a belief built on that value might be 'true love means accepting someone completely' or 'God commands us to love our neighbour as ourselves.' It is these kinds of convictions that shape how people interpret messages and decide whether they align with their moral world.

Beliefs can unite or divide. When communications challenge beliefs too sharply or too early, audiences shut down. But when messages recognise and affirm the positive intentions behind those beliefs, they can become powerful bridges. The task of a campaigner is not to demolish old beliefs, but to find what is life-giving within them and connect that to the desired change.

1. Building on Positive Foundations

In the strategy discussions, one lesson emerged clearly: every culture already holds beliefs that point toward dignity and fairness. The campaigner's task is to locate those beliefs and build from them.

In Zimbabwe, activists began their community dialogues by affirming a shared belief that every human being carries inherent worth. This belief, drawn from both Christian teaching and local traditions of ubuntu, provided moral legitimacy for discussions about inclusion. Once people recognized that equality was not a foreign idea but a natural extension of what they already believed, resistance softened.

Similarly, in Nigeria, messages that appealed to the belief in justice and divine fairness found common ground with faith communities. A message framed as 'God's justice is for everyone' resonated more deeply than appeals based only on human rights language.

2. Respecting the Power of Religious and Cultural Beliefs

Religion and culture hold tremendous influence. This is particularly so on the African continent. They guide family life, moral education, and community norms. Disregarding or mocking them alienates audiences; engaging them with respect opens dialogue.

During the coaching process under the Free to Be Me program, several organizations learned that arguing theology rarely works. What opens doors is humility and shared reflection. For instance, activists in Ghana found that cultural storytelling offered another way to approach belief. They used folktales about fairness, courage, and respect to highlight inclusion as a traditional virtue rather than a modern import. The familiar form of storytelling allowed audiences to see that cultural identity and human rights are not enemies; they are allies when understood deeply.

3. Transforming Limiting Beliefs

Some beliefs restrict possibilities or create fear, often without malicious intent. For example, the belief that ‘accepting difference threatens moral order’ can fuel exclusion. Instead of directly opposing this belief, campaigners can introduce a new perspective that reframes it:

‘Our moral order grows stronger when everyone is treated with respect.’

The ‘how’ here lies in inviting reflection, not demanding conversion. Ask questions such as:

- ‘What kind of community do we become when we care for each other, even when we differ?’
- ‘How does fairness deepen our faith?’

Such questions activate self-awareness and open the heart without causing shame.

4. Balancing Conviction and Openness

Beliefs give people stability. Therefore, they are not meant to be easily shaken. Therefore, campaigns that aim for transformation must balance conviction with gentleness. The campaigner must stand firmly for inclusion while showing genuine respect for others’ sincerity.

A message that says, ‘We know faith guides many of our decisions, and that faith also calls us to love and protect others’ acknowledges belief as a moral compass, not as a barrier. This approach preserves the dignity of both speaker and listener.

In the Zimbabwean and Ghanaian contexts, the combination of conviction and empathy helped activists maintain trust even when disagreement persisted. People may not change overnight, but they will continue listening and that is progress.



HOW TO APPLY THIS PRACTICALLY

- 1 Identify guiding beliefs** that already promote unity, care, and justice. Use them as entry points for your message. For example in Ghana, many communities hold the belief that ‘every child belongs to the village.’ When introducing messages about safety and inclusion, an activist might begin there:

‘If every child belongs to the village, then it is our shared duty to protect every child no matter who they are or whom they love.’

- 2 Avoid attacking beliefs directly.** Instead, highlight where they already support the principle you are advocating for. For example rather than challenging a statement like ‘our culture does not accept such people,’ gently redirect it:

‘Our culture has always valued respect, peace, and togetherness. When we extend that respect to everyone, we are actually keeping our traditions alive, not abandoning them.’

- 3 Use stories of transformation** including testimonies, theatre pieces, or short videos that show people learning, reflecting, and growing. For example, a short video could show a mother who once feared her son’s identity but later found understanding through dialogue at her church. Her testimony.

‘I realized my son’s happiness was also my peace’

This helps audiences see transformation through love and reflection.

- 4 Acknowledge spiritual and cultural authorities respectfully.** Quoting proverbs, scriptures, or teachings that support compassion can validate your message. For example, when addressing faith leaders, quote texts or teachings that highlight compassion:

‘As the Qur’an reminds us, ‘If anyone saves a life, it is as if he has saved all of humanity.’ Our duty, then, is to protect and uplift, not to cast away.’

- 5 Promote reflection rather than argument.** Ask open questions that invite dialogue and help audiences make meaning for themselves. For instance, instead of debating whether inclusion is right or wrong, pose a question that invites introspection:

‘How can we uphold our belief in love and fairness if some of our children feel unsafe or unwelcome?’

Such questions open hearts and invite dialogue rather than defensiveness.

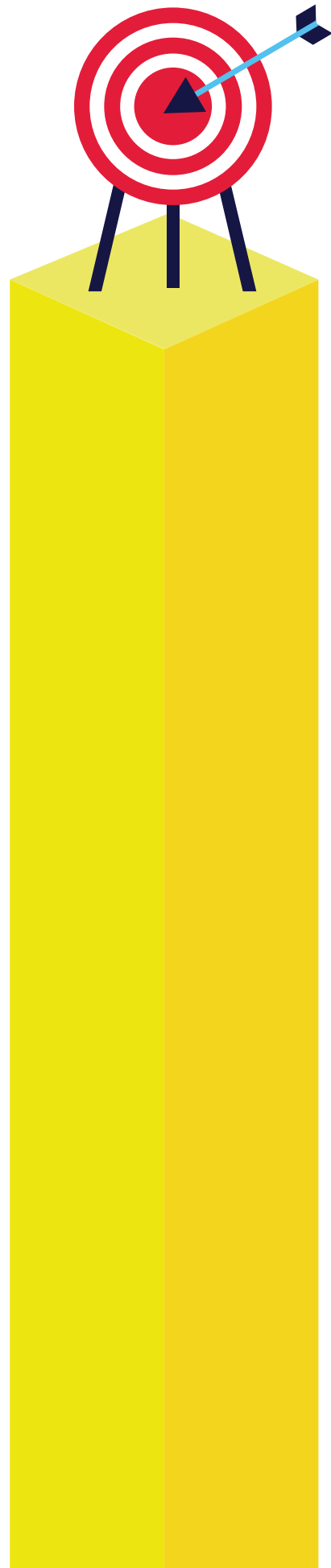
When a campaign honours the beliefs that give people’s lives meaning, it invites them to expand rather than defend their worldview. Change that grows from belief endures longer than change that is imposed upon it.

STEP2: UNDERSTANDING YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

If Step 1 helped us examine what we are saying, Step 2 helps us discover who we are saying it to and how they might receive it. Understanding your target audience is the cornerstone of an effective campaign. Every campaign, no matter how creative or well-funded, will struggle if it does not clearly identify whose hearts and minds it seeks to touch.

In campaigning, we often assume that 'the public' is our audience. But in truth, there are many publics: each with different fears, loyalties, motivations, and levels of influence. This step helps us move from speaking to everyone to speaking strategically, knowing exactly which audience can help us achieve our goals and tailoring our messages to reach them meaningfully.

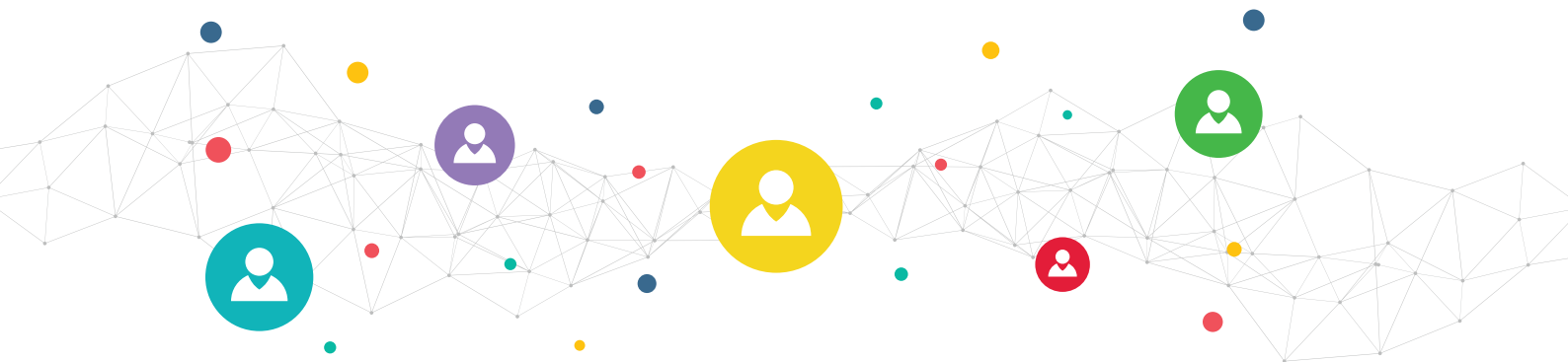
This step encourages you to map your audiences, prioritize them, and then explore their mindsets using the five human considerations discussed earlier: identity, emotions, lived experiences, values, and beliefs. The result is messaging that feels personal, relatable, and persuasive.



IDENTIFYING YOUR AUDIENCES



In order to identify your target audience, you need to begin by casting your net wide. Who are all the people, groups, or institutions that influence your work, whether directly or indirectly? These could include supporters, critics, policymakers, funders, religious or traditional leaders, journalists, or community gatekeepers.

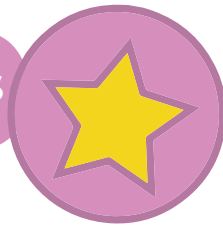


During the coaching process, many organizations discovered that their audiences were more diverse than they had assumed. For example:

- In Kenya, one group realised that its campaign on workplace inclusion needed to target employers and human-resource officers, not just youth advocates.
- In Ghana, activists noticed that local radio hosts were powerful agenda-setters who could either amplify or dilute their messages.
- In Zimbabwe, faith leaders and traditional leaders emerged as influential voices in shaping attitudes around family and morality.

By listing all potential audiences, you create a clearer picture of the ecosystem in which your message must travel.

PRIORITIZING YOUR AUDIENCES



Once your list is broad, begin narrowing it down. Not every audience deserves equal attention at the same time. Some groups have greater power to enable or block your change goals.

You can prioritize using questions such as:

- Who has the most influence over the issue we are addressing?
- Who is most likely to take the action we need?
- Who has access to those who make key decisions?
- Who might oppose us, and how can we engage them constructively?



In practice, you may categorize your audiences as:

- **Primary audiences:** those whose behaviour or decisions you seek to influence directly.
- **Secondary audiences:** those who can persuade or support your primary audience.
- **Tertiary audiences:** those who shape the wider environment, such as the media.

For example, if your campaign goal is to improve access to healthcare for sexual minorities, your primary audience may be local health administrators; your secondary audience could be medical associations or faith-based service providers; and your tertiary audience could include local journalists who frame the public climate.

During the coaching sessions with Nigerian activists, one organization ranked its target groups using a simple three-tier system and realized it had been spending too much energy on social-media followers and too little on health-policy actors who could actually change service delivery. That realization led to a sharper, more focused communication plan.

MAPPING THE MINDSET OF YOUR PRIORITY AUDIENCE



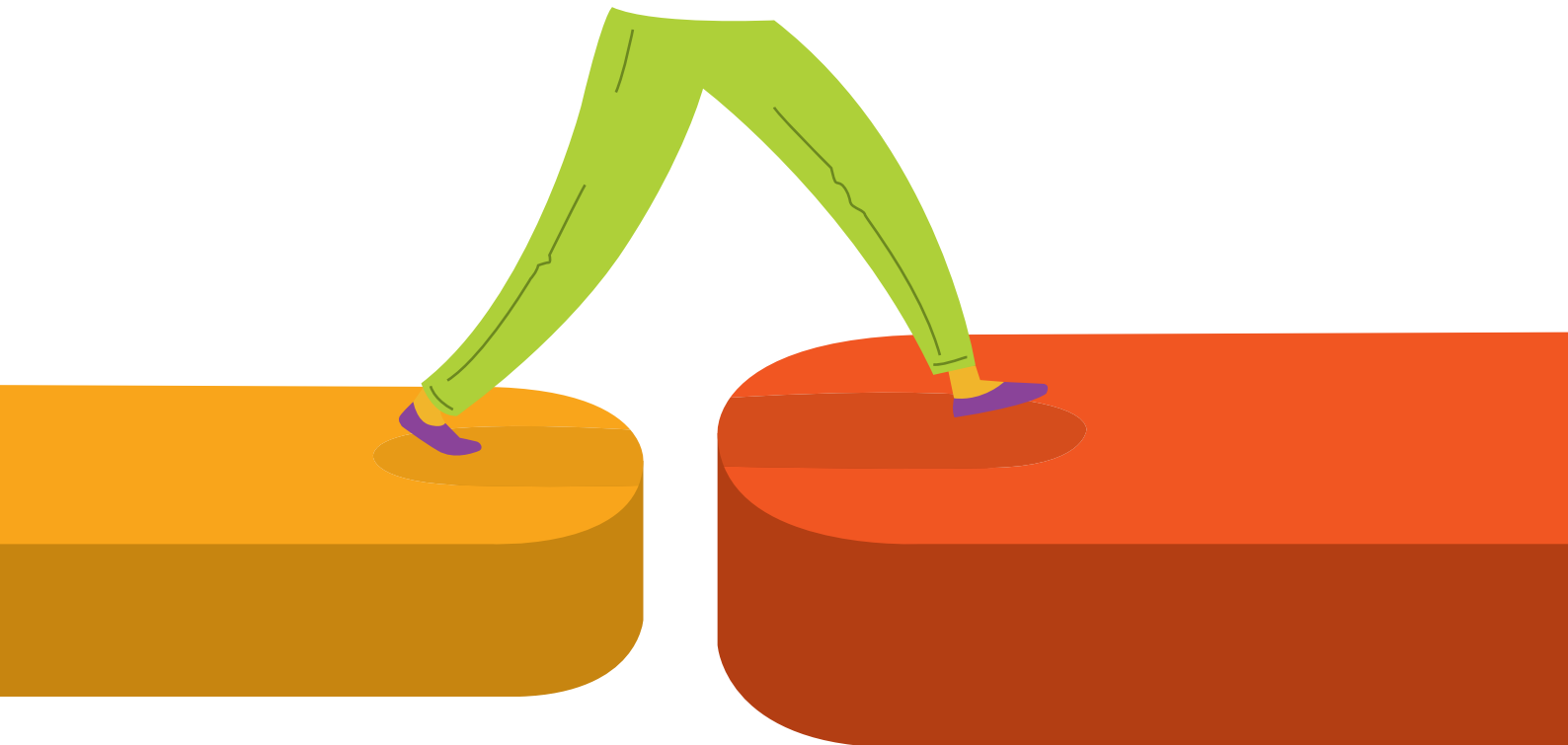
After identifying and prioritizing, it is time to understand your chosen audience more deeply. This is where advocacy becomes truly human-centred.

Ask yourself:

- How do they see themselves (their identity)?
- What feelings might this issue evoke in them (emotions)?
- What realities shape their daily experiences (lived experiences)?
- What principles guide their moral compass (values)?
- What convictions or truths do they hold dear (beliefs)?

In Ghana, activists found that some faith leaders felt defensive when approached with rights-based arguments, but opened up when conversations began with shared compassion. By mapping this emotional and belief-driven dynamic, campaigners learned to lead with empathy rather than correction.

All the items we listed in STEP 1 will be useful in order to complete a thorough mapping.



Moving Beyond Echo Chambers

A common trap for activists is assuming that the people they engage most : peers, allies, or fellow advocates represent the wider public. In reality, most audiences do not live within our networks, share our language, or see the world through the same moral lens. To truly understand the mindsets we aim to influence, we must step outside our comfort zones and listen where it feels uncomfortable.

Here are practical ways to do so:



Listen in unfamiliar spaces. Attend community meetings, faith gatherings, or social forums where people discuss issues in their own words. Take note of tone, metaphors, and priorities. The goal is not to correct, but to understand.



Use research methods that prioritize empathy. Tools such as focus-group discussions, audience diaries, or short surveys can reveal how ordinary people think about issues. Ask open questions such as 'What concerns you most about this topic?' or 'When you hear this word, what comes to mind?'



Work with cultural interpreters. Collaborate with individuals who bridge different social or ideological worlds. For instance, journalists, teachers, or faith leaders. They can help decode nuances that activists might overlook.



Test your assumptions. Before finalizing a message, share it with someone outside your circle and ask them what it means to them. If their interpretation differs from your intent, treat that as useful feedback rather than resistance.



Adopt a posture of curiosity, not certainty. Go into conversations not to win or convert, but to learn. Curiosity invites honesty. People sense when they are being studied versus when they are being respected.



Document insights objectively. When gathering audience insights, separate observation from interpretation. For instance, write 'Participant said they worry about their child being influenced' rather than 'Participant is homophobic'. This discipline keeps data clean from personal bias.

Breaking out of echo chambers demands humility, patience, and a willingness to be surprised. Yet it is precisely in those moments of surprise that insight is born. When activists replace assumption with inquiry, they begin to see their audiences not as obstacles, but as teachers revealing how communication must evolve.



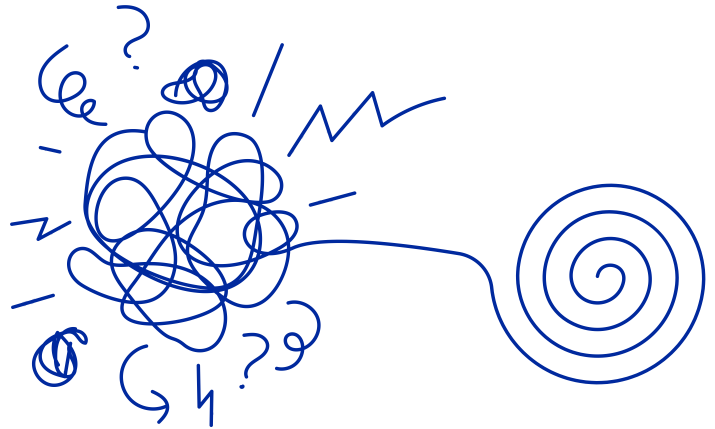
UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT AND RESISTANCE



Audiences often hold conflicting motivations, often resulting in tensions. For instance, someone may value fairness but fear community judgment. Recognizing these internal tensions helps campaigners frame messages that reconcile rather than intensify conflict.

In Zimbabwe, parents who cared deeply for their children also worried about being perceived as 'supporting immorality'. Messages that appealed to their identity as loving caregivers rather than challenging their fears helped reduce resistance. Statements such as 'Every parent wants their child to grow up safe and loved' reframed inclusion as an extension of parental duty.

This empathetic approach respects audiences' emotional journeys. It accepts that change is rarely immediate; it is cultivated through consistent trust-building and affirming people's better instincts.



CHOOSING MESSENGERS WHO ARE TRUSTED



Even the best message will fail if delivered by the wrong messenger. Trust is often rooted in familiarity. People are more likely to believe someone who looks, sounds, and lives like them.

Choosing the right messenger requires understanding not only who your audience trusts, but why they trust them whether because of authority, expertise, moral guidance, or shared experience.

When activists in Nigeria sought to engage local communities, they trained faith-based health volunteers to deliver messages on dignity and safety. These volunteers were not seen as outsiders; they were neighbours and fellow believers. Similarly, in Ghana, radio hosts who had built reputations for fairness became strong messengers for inclusion because they already enjoyed public credibility.





HOW TO APPLY THIS PRACTICALLY

- 1 Map your ecosystem:** List all audiences who influence your issue.
- 2 Rank them by impact:** Identify those whose decisions most affect your goals.
- 3 Develop audience profiles:** Describe each audience's values, fears, influencers, and motivations.
- 4 Tailor your message:** Align language and tone with your audience's worldview.
- 5 Select credible messengers:** Use peers, faith leaders, or professionals who already command trust.
- 6 Test and adapt:** Pilot messages with small groups and refine them based on feedback.

When we understand our audiences deeply, our messages become less about convincing and more about connecting. Advocacy then moves beyond information-sharing to empathy-building; and that is where genuine transformation begins.

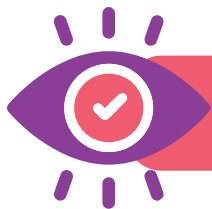
STEP 3:

DESIGNING MESSAGES THAT TOUCH HEARTS AND MINDS

Having analyzed our current communications and understood our target audiences, we now turn to the heart of the matter, that is, how to craft messages that truly connect.

Messages that touch both hearts and minds move people from awareness to empathy, from agreement to action. They are not merely statements of fact; they are invitations to care, reflect, and participate. Effective messaging builds emotional resonance while grounding that emotion in values, truth, and possibility.

This step focuses on how to design such messages intentionally, using a process that blends insight, creativity, and discipline.



BEGIN WITH CLARITY OF PURPOSE

Every message should start with a clear 'why'. Ask yourself: What do we want the audience to **feel, think, and do after engaging with our message?**

- Do we want them to see something differently?
- To care more deeply?
- To take a particular action?

For example, a Kenyan activist collective working on school inclusion identified their purpose not as 'raising awareness' but as 'helping parents see diversity as part of good parenting'. That clarity reshaped everything including tone, visuals, even the choice of messenger.

A clear purpose keeps communication focused. It prevents activists from creating content that is busy, loud, or clever but ineffective.

ANCHOR YOUR MESSAGE IN SHARED HUMANITY

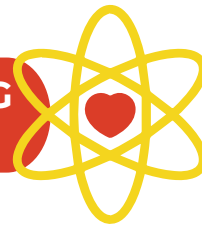


Every audience, no matter how different their worldview, understands human emotions such as love, pride, fear, and hope. Messages that appeal to this shared humanity have the potential to cross ideological divides.

In Zimbabwe, campaign teams found that rephrasing messages around care rather than conflict shifted tone dramatically. A slogan like ‘Stop discrimination now!’ was replaced with ‘Let’s build communities where everyone belongs’. The new phrasing invited participation instead of confrontation.

In Zimbabwe, a youth group used storytelling videos to show families supporting one another through everyday struggles. For instance a daughter helping her father after illness, a neighbour offering food to a friend. The underlying message of acceptance came through naturally: inclusion is not foreign; it is the extension of the care we already practise.

FRAMING THE MESSAGE USING FOUR CORE ELEMENTS



A message that touches hearts and minds often balances four key elements: **connection, problem, solution, and vision.**

A. Connection Message: Start Where People Are

This is where the campaigner builds trust and familiarity. Use local references, relatable stories, or shared experiences to open the conversation. For example:

‘Every parent knows the joy of watching their child thrive.’

Connection language signals: I see you; I understand your world.

B. Problem or Need message: Name the Issue Gently and Clearly

Once connection is established, describe the challenge in a way that audiences can see themselves as part of the solution, not the problem. Avoid blame; focus on shared concern. For instance:

‘But sometimes, some children are treated unfairly simply because they are different and that hurts all of us.’

This phrasing invites reflection without accusation.

C. Solution Message: Offer a Positive and Practical Response

People need to know there is something they can do. Provide a clear step forward, however small. Example:

'When we teach our children kindness, we build a society where every child feels safe and can learn freely.'

Solutions make audiences feel capable and included.

D. Vision Message: Paint the Bigger Picture

End by showing what success looks like- a world or community that feels better, safer, and more united. Example:

'Together, we can build a Kenya where every child's potential shines, where differences are celebrated, not feared.'

This simple four-part frame transforms abstract advocacy into relatable messaging.



Emotion drives engagement, but manipulation backfires. Authentic emotion arises from empathy and truth.

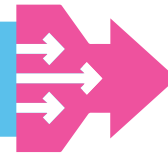
In Nigeria, an organisation used community radio to tell short stories about friendship across differences. Each story ended quietly, no slogans, no outrage, just humanity. Listeners reported feeling moved rather than preached at.

To achieve this balance:

- Let real voices and experiences speak, not polished scripts.
- Avoid guilt or fear; use hope and care.
- Keep the tone conversational, not confrontational.

If emotion is a fire, authenticity is the oxygen that keeps it burning cleanly.

SIMPLIFY WITHOUT OVERSIMPLIFYING



Complex issues lose power when buried under jargon. Clear language invites understanding without diluting truth.

During the coaching process, one group replaced the term 'SOGIESC' with simple, respectful phrases such as 'diverse identities' and 'different ways of being'. The audience grasped the concept immediately, and the conversation stayed grounded in empathy rather than confusion.

A good test of clarity is this: if your audience cannot repeat your message in their own words after hearing it once, it needs simplification.

USE STORYTELLING AS YOUR MOST POWERFUL TOOL



Facts tell, stories move. Humans remember feelings more than data. A good story follows a simple arc:

- A relatable character (the connector)
- A challenge (the problem)
- A journey or response (the solution)
- A transformation (the vision)

During the coaching process, activists in Kenya collected short testimonies of young people who had overcome rejection with family support. When turned into digital mini-stories, these became powerful tools for reshaping public perceptions.

Stories should always aim to be relatable to the audience. To quote an African writer:

"I tell my story so that others see their own story in it".

When people see themselves in a story, they begin to connect and open to the possibility of empathy.

TEST AND REFINE YOUR MESSAGES



When you have completed the steps above, you will most likely have created a very subtle and smart messaging strategy. But will it actually work in real life? As the saying goes, “the proof is in the pudding”. So, how do we get to cook that “pudding”? The answer is: Test and Refine!

- **Pilot first:** Share drafts with small, diverse groups before launching publicly.
- **Observe reactions:** Do people nod, frown, disengage, or light up? If you disseminate on targeted social media profiles, what reactions do your messages elicit?
- **Adjust tone:** If resistance appears, consider whether the message challenged too much too soon or lacked emotional warmth.
- **Keep records:** Document what works and what doesn’t. Over time, this becomes your organisation’s messaging knowledge base.

In Zimbabwe, activists created a message-testing group that met to review posters, slogans, and social media content. The iterative process improved quality and kept communication relevant to the public mood.



HOW TO APPLY THIS PRACTICALLY

- 1 Define purpose: Know what you want your audience to think, feel, and do.
- 2 Frame carefully: Build connection, clarify the problem, offer a solution, and end with a hopeful vision.
- 3 Keep it human: Use emotion authentically, avoid jargon, and speak in everyday language.
- 4 Show, don’t tell: Use relatable stories and familiar imagery.
- 5 Test, listen, and adapt: Treat feedback as data, not criticism.

When messages touch hearts and minds, they become more than communication; they become movement fuel. Each word becomes an act of bridge-building, a gentle turning of attention from fear to understanding, from silence to solidarity.

ENSURING YOUR MESSAGE RESONATES AND DELIVERS IMPACT



To make sure your communication strategy as a whole is persuasive and truly effective, pause and test it against a few critical questions. These will help you go beyond content creation and examine how your narrative is actually perceived, remembered, and acted upon.

1. Do all your messages work together as one complete story?

Check for cohesion and consistency. Is there a unifying thread that connects every statement, post, and conversation? A strong narrative feels like a single voice, even when told by many people and through different messages.

2. Can you imagine the message persuading those who are uncertain or conflicted about your work?

Powerful messages don't just inform; they build trust and shift perspectives. Ask yourself whether your narrative can reach beyond your allies to engage those who hesitate, misunderstand, or disagree. Does it offer reasons to reconsider, to empathize, or to act?

3. Is your message plain-spoken and easy to understand?

Clarity is kindness. Avoid jargon, abstract terms, or technical language that alienates non-specialists. A message that is simple, human, and direct invites everyone in. Remember, complexity often hides connection; simplicity creates it.

4. Can different people deliver your message naturally and consistently?

The strength of a message lies in its adaptability. Could partners, colleagues, faith leaders, or community advocates all use it comfortably in their own voices? If not, it may need simplification or rephrasing. The best messages are those that many can carry authentically without distortion.

5. Can your message inspire new forms of expression?

A powerful message should spark creativity. Ask whether it could grow into a story, poem, short film, radio spot, or social media post. When a message can take new life across formats, it shows that it carries emotional and imaginative depth — the kind of depth that sticks in hearts and minds.





CLOSING REFLECTION FOR THE TOOLKIT

As you work through these steps, remember that campaign communication is both art and discipline. It requires humility to listen, courage to speak, and wisdom to know when to pause.

Every message you craft carries the power to build connection, restore dignity, and open hearts. Keep returning to these worksheets whenever you feel stuck — they are not just exercises but mirrors reflecting how well we are walking the talk of empathy, inclusion, and collective care.

WORKSHEETS AND EXERCISES

STEP 1: ANALYZING YOUR COMMUNICATIONS WORKSHEET

Purpose of this worksheet

To help organizations take stock of their current communication practices, identify what works, what does not, and where adjustments are needed to make messages more resonant.

Exercise 1: Taking Stock of Current Messaging

Instructions:

Gather a few recent examples of your organization's communication materials (e.g. social media posts, radio scripts, posters, statements, or speeches). With your team, discuss the following questions:

Reflection Prompt	Notes / Examples
What are the main issues or themes we communicate about?	
Who are we currently talking to, and how do we know these are our audiences?	
What reactions or feedback have we received from these audiences (positive, negative, or indifferent)?	
Which messages or materials have worked well, and why?	
Which have not landed as expected, and what might explain that?	

Exercise 2: Analysing with the Five Considerations

Instructions:

For one key message, evaluate how well it addresses the five human considerations.

Consideration	How Our Message Addresses This	What Could Be Improved
Identity (does it connect with how people see themselves?)		
Emotions (does it evoke empathy, pride, hope?)		
Lived Experiences (does it sound real to the listener's life?)		
Shared Values (does it reflect what people already hold dear?)		
Beliefs (does it respect their worldview and moral frame?)		

Exercise 3: The Mirror Test

Instructions:

Ask a colleague or trusted outsider to read one of your messages aloud. As they do, listen carefully.

- Does it sound like your audience speaking?
- Does it reflect warmth, curiosity, and respect?
- Does it sound defensive, technical, or preachy?

Note down what you hear differently when your own message is reflected back to you.

STEP 2: UNDERSTANDING YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE WORKSHEET

Purpose of this worksheet

To identify, prioritize, and understand your audiences so that you can design messages that meet them where they are emotionally, socially, and culturally.

Exercise 1: Mapping the Audience Landscape

Instructions:

List all groups, individuals, or institutions connected to your issue. Then, rank them by their influence and interest in your advocacy goal.

Audience Group	Audience Group Influence (High/Med/Low)	Interest (High/Med/Low)	Why They Matter	Type (Primary/Secondary/Tertiary)

After ranking, discuss:

Who must be convinced first for the rest to follow?

Who could become unexpected allies?

Who might resist, and why?

Exercise 2: Audience Profile Builder

Choose one priority audience and fill out this profile. Be as specific as possible.

Question	Your Notes
Who are they (demographics, role, community, faith, occupation)?	
How do they describe themselves?	
What emotions does this issue trigger for them?	
What values and beliefs shape their worldview?	
What sources of information do they trust?	
Who influences their opinions (faith leader, local radio, friend, social media)?	
What might persuade them to act differently?	

Exercise 3: Escaping the Echo Chamber

Instructions:

To ensure objectivity, plan one deliberate action this month to step outside your familiar circles.

Action Step	When & How	What You Learned
Attend a public forum, church service, or local gathering unrelated to your cause.		
Invite someone with different views for a conversation over tea or lunch.		
Read, watch, or listen to a media outlet that represents a different perspective.		

Reflect afterwards: What surprised me? What assumptions were challenged? How might this influence our next message?

Exercise 4: Conflict Mapping

Instructions:

Identify internal conflicts your audience may face (e.g. a parent who values love but fears social judgement). Fill in the table below.

Audience Group	Positive Motivation	Conflicting Fear	How We Can Bridge the Two

STEP 3: DESIGNING MESSAGES THAT TOUCH HEARTS AND MINDS WORKSHEET

Purpose of this worksheet

To guide activists in creating messages that resonate emotionally, connect with shared values, and inspire practical action.

Exercise 1: The Message Canvas

Use this table to craft one strong, complete message that follows the four-part frame (Connection, Problem, Solution, Vision).

Element	Example / Draft Message	Notes
Connection: Start with something relatable.		
Problem: Name the issue gently and clearly.		
Solution: Offer a hopeful, actionable response.		
Vision: Paint the bigger picture of success.		

After writing, read it aloud. Does it flow naturally? Does it invite participation?

Exercise 2: Emotion and Tone Check

Use this quick diagnostic to test emotional alignment.

Question	Reflection
What emotion do we want to evoke? empathy, hope, pride, or reflection?	
Are we overusing anger, fear, or guilt?	
Does the tone feel inclusive and human, or moralising and distant?	
Does the message sound authentic to the audience's world?	

Exercise 3: Storyline Builder

Design a simple, human story that communicates your message.

Step	Notes
Character: Who is at the centre of the story?	
Challenge: What barrier or struggle do they face?	
Turning Point: What choice or moment changes things?	
Resolution: How does life look or feel after the change?	
Core Message: What does this story teach or invite others to do?	

Encourage participants to tell these stories orally first, then document them later.

Exercise 4: Testing and Refining Messages

Instructions:

Form a message-testing circle- a small, diverse group of listeners from different backgrounds.

Task	Who Involved	Feedback / Learning
Share your message aloud or via poster/social media post.		
Ask: 'What does this message mean to you?'		
Note emotional reactions (smiles, nods, frowns, silence).		
What changes could make it clearer or more relatable?		

Revisit your message after each round. Adjust, simplify, and test again.

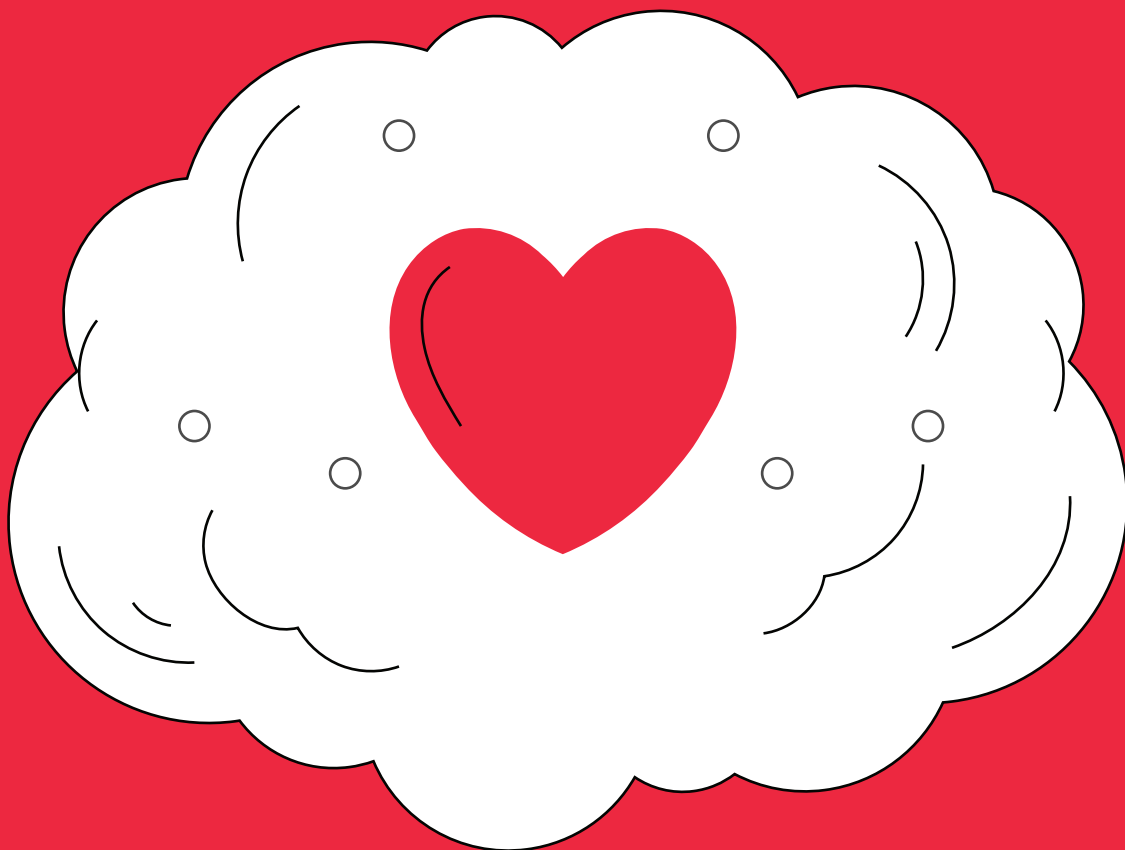
Exercise 5: Reflection — The Heart and Mind Test

After drafting your message, answer honestly:

Question	Reflection
Does it touch the heart (emotion, empathy, belonging)?	
Does it engage the mind (logic, shared benefit, clarity)?	
Is it inclusive of all identities and experiences?	
Does it invite, not impose?	

If you can confidently say 'yes' to each, your message is ready to go.





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