

# Communication/Marketing

## Challenge: Finding Asset-Building Messages that Resonate

*Is there any one “universal” asset-building message that resonates with all audiences, or do you need different messages for different audiences?*

All participants agreed that no one universal message for asset building resonated with all audiences. Some participants noted that there should be one consistent message, modified slightly depending on the audience. Some messages work with some audiences and not with others. For example, “gaining access to and protecting the middle class” may appeal to legislators, but many people feel a strong opposition to the term “class.”

Another unacceptable term is “wealth gap.” Some people do not identify with the term “wealth.” Participants mentioned that terms such as “common ground” did not seem to resonate with Democrats, but “fairness” did. Republicans seemed to prefer “personal responsibility.” One participant noted that a report on messaging found that leading with “economic productivity,” including “fairness,” and avoiding “poverty” seemed to resonate.

Other messages that work are those that tell stories and offer insight into how assets affect families.

No one universal message resonates with all audiences. Messages should lead with “economic productivity,” include “fairness,” and avoid “poverty.”

“**[Link] the power of the asset to the family as a life-changing stepping stone.** Behavioral changes come about by telling that story. Delaware Treasurer Jack Markel kicks off every speaking engagement by telling those stories.”—Ginny Marino

Here are some messages on which participants seemed to have good feedback:

“One talking point Arkansas uses—**It’s not about getting by, it’s about getting ahead.**”—Matt Price

“**‘Cycle of prosperity’ or cycle of wealth** seems to be resonating (I have no proof it is working across the board as a positive message), but is untested.”—Ben Mangan

Here are some terms that participants felt were red flags:

“**[The term] “class”** itself is a loaded word.”—Genevieve Marino

“I don’t like the “wealth” word. Not being wealthy, I can’t imagine what that would be like.”—Stephanie Upp

Participants suggested frequently using those messages that work:

**“If you’re not bored with the messaging, you’re not saying it enough.”**—Ben Mangan

*What specific messages have worked or not worked in different communities? Are there strategies that work better for reaching grassroots stakeholders such as individuals, families, community organizers, and community-based organizations?*

Participants noted that terms such as “American dream” or “ownership society” do not work as well in some African American communities. Even though these terms are popular with politicians, there is a risk of alienating some people when we use such terms.

Some participants noted that messages for legislators should include research and analysis of how an asset policy, such as CSAs, benefits the entire state.

For the financial sector, messages should be framed to be about potential deposits and investments and the future value of the accounts.

For other antipoverty advocates, the messages need to connect the asset-building agenda to the continuum of moving people from poverty to prosperity.

**“[The] challenge is to find the balance between language that politicians use and the language with which the constituents associate.”**—Jennifer Brooks

“Financial institutions are very interested in Children’s Savings Accounts because those accounts will mean more investments to them....”—Dory Rand

## Challenge: Using Supplemental Information to Support the Asset-Policy Message.

*Does anybody have data on the economic benefit of asset building?*

Some of the research currently available includes mortgages leveraged from IDA programs and the economic benefit of early childhood education. All participants strongly agreed that, to demonstrate asset policies, we need more research and analysis on the benefits to the overall economy.

Participants noted two programs (Pacifica Community Ventures in California and Marriott Hotel's IDA program in Chicago) in which employer-based asset building accounts for workers resulted in higher retention of employees. The American Dream Demonstration shows the positive results of asset-building policies for families with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

"[We] want to see figures that **tell businesses that if they host an asset-building account for workers, they'll be able to keep their workers....** Use it as a job retention policy. Getting employers to do that is difficult. Maybe start with state employees."—René Bryce La-Porte

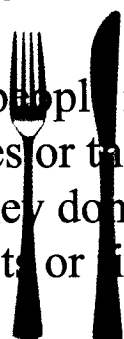
"From the state's perspective, we can't assume transformations in the way lives are lived can also result in savings in areas like juvenile justice, etc."—Doug Hall

*What is the value of stories and how have they helped?*

Some participants noted that people remember stories even if they do not remember the facts or figures. However, some felt that individual success stories sometimes failed to connect to the larger, systemic issues. The flip side of a success story may be a tendency to "blame the victim," who has not succeeded, as though the reason is personal failure, not bad public policy.

"Don't focus on the individual because then people think that everyone should be able to do it, and if someone can't then it's just a personal failure. Asset leaders need to do the same sort of marketing research and train reporters on asset building."—Jennifer Brooks

Some people remember stories for the people even if they don't remember facts or figures.



*What about getting people you are working with to tell stories to the media?*

Most participants agreed that we must have the people tell their success stories since reporters always want to talk to a "real person." **But prep all speakers on how to speak with reporters.**

## Challenge: Using Effective and Efficient Communication Vehicles

*How do you communicate your message in the best way? Op-ed pages, radio, working with reporters, newsletters, or the Internet? What's working? What's not?*

Participants reported positive results with public radio. In California a public radio station came to an asset-policy briefing, began a series of programs on the continuum of moving from poverty to prosperity, and included asset building in the continuum. Later Public Radio International noticed a demand, and the California stories were broadcast nationally. In Illinois, Chicago public radio WBEZ's *Chicago Matters* show covered "Money Matters" and shared stories about asset building, access to mainstream financial services, and IDA programs.

As a result of grassroots research in Illinois, IABG found that many constituents responded more to radio than to brochures.

**"One thing that resonated was strengthening community. [The] preferred communication was meetings and verbal communication. Brochures had limited value."**—Gina Guillemette

*What about op-eds or other newspaper articles?*

Op-eds were popular with some of the participants for a number of reasons. Op-eds fuel the conversation, especially among legislators.

In some markets, reporters are always looking for additional news to cover, provided that the messages are quick and concise. Participants mentioned that maintaining an acquaintance with reporters was helpful. Reporters read their e-mail, so to put them on your newsletter distribution list is to give them stories to run.

**"With some reporters, they'll call back if you've talked to them in the past and they need something. Get on their radar."**—Dory Rand

**“It is surprising how much reporters read their e-mail. Having a connection helps....** If you are writing on something that is poignant and information they don’t have already, getting in is not that difficult.”—René Bryce La-Porte

“Once you have one success, reporters feel like you’re less risky.”—Ben Mangan

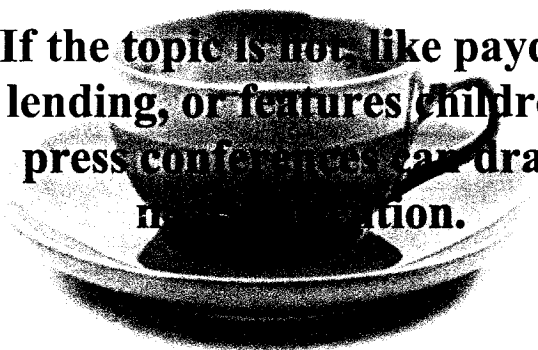
*What about press conferences?*

Participants noted that press conferences required a lot of time but were not always effective. If the topic is hot, such as payday lending, or features children, such as the student-run high school bank branch, press conferences can draw media attention.

“Press conferences are not effective in California. It’s hard to get the press to come, even when the very popular mayor is involved.”—Ben Mangan

“We succeeded with coverage of the CFED Scorecard with legislative leaders; it was a slow news time. Getting them out there is the thing. Once they’re out, they’ve got to cover it. Press releases also won’t do it; they can ignore them.”—Michael Rowett

**If the topic is not like payday lending, or features children, press conferences can draw media attention.**



*What works for events with legislators?*

Two participants noted that we must frame the event and educate legislators. Find a way to balance the legislator’s message with the key theme of the event.

**“With busy schedules, [legislators] might welcome having some tips on what to cover in their comments.** You have to know whom you’re inviting to your event.... They’ll say what they think is right sometimes, whether it is right or not....”—Michael Rowett

*Are there other types of channels to get messages out?*

## ■ Idea from Delaware!

Working with the advertising section of the newspaper in Delaware has been very effective for the Delaware coalition. Advertising and marketing executives at the newspaper wanted to charge nonprofit entities for advertising space. The nonprofit entities suggested that the paper should look at covering issues such as personal finance instead of corporate news stories in its Business Monday section. Personal finance articles got the attention and advertising from financial institutions. Changing the focus of this section to personal finance also allowed the nonprofit entities to get their concerns such as CSAs and IDA programs covered in articles.

*Do you feel positive about the effectiveness of the website for the coalition as a communication vehicle?*

All participants agreed that having a website is useful as a communication vehicle, provided that it is updated regularly. The website is a great repository of research, publications, and event information and allows the interested to read more, become a supporter, and sign up for events. Keeping the site current does require time and attention.

Some participants use RSS (Real Simple Syndication) feeds as a way to stay current on what's going on around the nation on asset policy. RSS is a syndication format that allows consumers and journalists to have news constantly fed to specific websites instead of searching for it.

Harry Pestine advised all to have a link on their sites to Profitwise, the community affairs publication from the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.

Linking to other state coalitions' websites can build the network of coalitions as well.

## State and national asset policy websites:

[www.community-wealth.org](http://www.community-wealth.org) - Wealth building strategies for America's communities.

[www.assetbuilding.org](http://www.assetbuilding.org) - The New America Foundation

[www.nga.org](http://www.nga.org) - National Governors' Association

[www.arassetpolicy.org](http://www.arassetpolicy.org) - Arkansas Assets Coalition

[www.povertylaw.org/advocacy/community-investment](http://www.povertylaw.org/advocacy/community-investment) - Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law

[www.assetpolicy-ca.org](http://www.assetpolicy-ca.org) - Asset Policy Initiative of California

[www.illinoisassetbuilding.org](http://www.illinoisassetbuilding.org) - Illinois Asset Building Group

[www.CFED.org](http://www.CFED.org) - Corporation for Enterprise Development

[www.chicagofed.org](http://www.chicagofed.org) - Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago

[www.frbsf.org](http://www.frbsf.org) - Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco

[www.ywca.org/site/pp.asp?c=djISI6PIKpG&b=284783](http://www.ywca.org/site/pp.asp?c=djISI6PIKpG&b=284783) - YWCA Delaware

[www.moneysbestfriend.com/](http://www.moneysbestfriend.com/) - Pennsylvania Office of Financial Education

[www.hacbed.org](http://www.hacbed.org) - Hawaii Alliance for Community-Based Economic Development

[www.ctkidslink.org](http://www.ctkidslink.org) - Connecticut Voices for Children