

ALL EYES ON YOU!

How To Be a Spokesperson For Your CAA



A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE
PRESENTED BY
PALMETTO CAP

All Eyes On You: *How To Be a Spokesperson For Your Agency*

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An Introduction

In 2014, an internal communications audit of Palmetto Community Action Partnership revealed that many staff, board members and agency volunteers did not feel comfortable sharing even basic information about what the agency did in public (that included to their own family and friends). The decision was made to make an active effort to empower Palmetto CAP team members to become brand ambassadors and promote the agency to the community.

This empowerment came in the form of a workshop at the agency's staff training day. The workshop received such positive feedback that it was presented at the South Carolina Association of Community Action Partnership's statewide training conference , at the South Eastern Association of Community Action Agencies' annual conference and at the National Partnership's Annual Convention.

This manual expounds on the topics addressed in that workshop (which was loosely based on a presentation designed by Rocketship Education). It is designed to help Community Action professionals and supporters share what their agencies are doing to fight poverty in their communities.

The Goals of This Manual Are To...

- Prepare users to communicate with external audiences.
- Teach users how Community Action fits into the broader anti-poverty movement in their service area and the nation.
- Teach users about common misunderstandings of their CAP and the Community Action movement in general.
- Teach key external messaging points that they can use.

What Exactly Is a Spokesperson?

spokesperson 

noun | spokes·per·son | \-,pər-sən\

Popularity: Bottom 30% of words

Simple Definition of SPOKESPERSON

: a man or woman who speaks for or represents someone or something

Source: Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary

- Your agency's spokesperson communicates your agency's mission and values to your community.
- While spokesperson duties are often held by the agency's Executive Director or Communications Director, communicating the good work your agency does is something all team members can do!

What Is Community Action's Vision?

We pledge to rededicate ourselves “to eliminating poverty in the midst of plenty in this Nation by opening to everyone the opportunity for education and training, the opportunity to work, and the opportunity to live in decency and dignity.”

We hereby recommit to continue the battle to help the poor to overcome hunger, inadequate housing, illiteracy, unemployment, discrimination and the lack of adequate educational, health and social services

We accept the challenge to lead our agency, our community, and our country with renewed dedication, enthusiasm and effort, into a new era in which the dignity and decency of all people will be paramount.

- a. Poverty can be eliminated by creating an environment that encourages opportunity for everyone
- b. Community Action is development of these opportunities.
- c. Serving the best interests of the poor is in the best interest of all people.
- d. Systems and people have the potential for change.
- e. Community Action's success is dependent upon the collective efforts of the entire community and its institutions

What Are Community Action's Values?

- a. The misery of poverty must be addressed and alleviated
- b. Despair can be replaced by opportunity and hope through Community Action intervention
- c. The plight of the poor must be made known
- d. Impoverished individuals, families and communities can be enabled and assisted to attain self-sufficiency and independence
- e. A coordinated response to poverty causes/conditions, facilitated by the CAA, can be an effective approach to moving people out of poverty
- f. The vision and values of Community Action must be modeled internally and projected externally.

What Makes a Good Spokesperson?

- Trustworthiness
- Positivity
- Honesty
- Authenticity
- Kindness
- Knowledge of programs
- Willingness to help

Homework Assignment

Learn basic information about each agency program and how the program can be accessed. You don't have to be an expert, but you should at least be able to help the public get in contact with the appropriate department.

TIP: You may want to keep an agency card or brochure in your purse, wallet or car.

What's Your Agency's Story?

Can you tell a stranger what your agency does and why in 30 seconds or less? Being able to articulate what Community Action does is vital in presenting Community Action as the leading authority on poverty elimination. Community Action is the voice of the poor. Clear and concise communication of what your agency does gets this point across loud and clear.

Homework Assignment

Develop (or refine) a 60-second elevator pitch for your agency and make sure **ALL** your team members can affirm it confidently!

Why Does Your CAP Need to Tell Its Own Story?

- There is a lack of understanding of poverty and anti-poverty initiatives.
- Because of the up-close and personal contact and direct services your agency provides, your CAP is perfectly positioned to be the voice of the poor in a way that other agencies aren't.
- For your CAP to be valued by the community, you must talk about how our CAP adds value to the broader community.
- Your CAP will have its critics. It's important that your CAP defines itself on its own terms.
- Telling your CAP's story can result in collaborative success as more citizens will seek services, more donors contribute, more volunteers serve at your agency, more organizations become partners and more legislators govern based on the reality of poverty instead of preconceived notions.

How Do We Tell Our CAP's Story?

- **Seize the initiative.** Look for opportunities in the community to share what you do.
- **Tell your story first.** Get ahead of any negative press by being the first one to share the positive aspects of your work.
- **Always tell the truth.**
- **Tell your story *your way*.** Go on the offense in sharing what your CAP is doing by focusing attention on the aspects you want highlighted.
- **Get all the facts out about your CAP's successes.** Make sure to frequently report positive outcomes and narratives so that any negative news would be counteracted by positive news they heard first.

Know Who You Want To Reach

Who is your audience?

- Community members
- Board members
- Legislators
- Community organizations
- Current and prospective program participants
- Current and prospective staff
- Media
- Third Party Validators

Remember

Your audience can/will change, but you must always be proactive, targeted and strategic in order to influence your audience, and ultimately influence public awareness.

What's the Word On the Street?

Do you know what program participants think about the service you provide? Have you heard what people who work with other community organizations feel about the work your CAP does? Do you know how your legislators feel about programs that serve economically disadvantaged families?

In formulating your talking points, you must know what people already feel about your agency, the people you serve and the work that you do.

Homework Assignment

The public's perception is their reality until you prove otherwise. Do an assessment (formal, informal or anecdotal) of your agency's reputation among community members and key stakeholders. Is it positive/negative/non-existent? **TIP:** Don't forget to utilize comments left on your CSBG Community Action Plan's surveys!

Know Common Misunderstandings About CAPs

1. Don't Help People.

- Staff members cherry pick program participants.
- Getting help is unnecessarily hard.

2. CAPs Only Provide Short-term Success.

- Program participants are only helped in the short-term.
- Agencies give out handouts, not hand-ups

3. Staff Are Uncaring.

- Staff are sometimes less than compassionate.
- Obstinate.
- Unwilling to help when we can make concessions.

4. Systems, Procedures and Technology Is Inefficient.

- Phone systems and websites are not user-friendly.
- Multiple trips to bring documents.

5. CAPs Have No Accountability – “scandals.”

- Governance/conflict of interest.
- Misspending of taxpayer money.

Know Common Misunderstandings About CAPs (continued...)

6. Government bureaucracy.

- Wasteful.
- Ineffective.
- Biased.
- Government-funded programs breed laziness in the program participants who receive help and in the agencies who rely wholly on this funding to serve program participants.

7. Other...



Once You Know How Your Audience Thinks, You Can Retrain Them

Key Messages

- Your CAP is a leading non-profit Community Action Agency providing **basic needs, emergency services and self-sufficiency programs** for low-wage workers, retirees and their families.
- Your CAP's goal is **to eliminate the barriers** that keep individuals economically insecure.
- Your CAP currently serves over ---- **thousand individuals** in your service area.
- Your CAP is the **highest-performing organization** serving low-income individuals with a variety of services.
- Your CAP **meets people where they are** to get them what they need to be to overcome poverty.

Key Messages (continued...)

- Your CAP is diligently working to improve customer service and service delivery so program participants have a more **transformative interaction**.
- Your CAP has been fighting the War On Poverty in your area for **50 years** (since 1964) or more.
- Your CAP is **constantly evolving** its service delivery and will only become more innovative and efficient in its utilization of technology.
- Community Action is a high-quality, proven successful model that's committed to fighting poverty **around the nation**.
- Your CAP is **committed to meeting the diverse needs** of economically-disadvantaged citizens.
- Your CAP is able to do have such wide-reaching impact because of strategic **partnerships with non-profit organizations, private business, government and the faith-based community**.
- Your CAP works to **break the cycles** of situational and generational poverty.

Which Programs To Highlight

Three Pillars of Economic Independence

➤ **Basic Needs**

- Your CAP helps the citizens of your service area to meet their basic needs. By doing this, we allow them to focus on improving their future.

➤ **Crisis Intervention**

- Your CAP provides a firm landing spot when the bottom is falling out. We intervene in financial crises (with domestic violence assistance, homelessness prevention, the prevention of disconnection, etc.) to help good people out of tough situations when they have nowhere else to turn.

➤ **Financial Empowerment**

- Your CAP provides people with the tools to become financially empowered. Your self-sufficiency programs teach them financial literacy principles they can use for the rest of their lives; employment and educational support that will improve the economic standing of their families; energy conservation that will save them money for years to come and will improve the environment; youth leadership skills that will help break the cycle of generational poverty; and home ownership that will build wealth for generations to come.

Deciding Which Programs To Highlight

Three Pillars of Economic Independence

➤ **Management**

- Your CAP utilizes the nationally-recognized Results Oriented Management and Accountability system to determine program efficacy. This highly-effective model ensures that programs are administered with intention and are mission-driven.

➤ **Community Needs Assessment**

- Your CAP determines how to best serve the needs of the people you serve by actually listening to them. Through the work plan's Community Needs Assessment, quantitative and qualitative data is used to justify which needs the agency's many programs and services will address.

➤ **Tripartite Board**

- Your CAP utilizes a tripartite board of directors to ensure that the agency is being a good steward of the federal funding it receives. The representatives of the poor, government and business sectors serve as a perfect cross-section of society and these individuals are best equipped to inform how programs will operate to best serve the needs of the community.

How You Get the Message Out

- Talking with program participants and community members.
- Commenting on news articles or blog posts.
- Speaking at board meetings and community meetings.
- Writing letters to the editor or op-eds.
- Helping tell the story of your CAP to the press.
(Use the internet to search for local news outlets (tv stations, radio stations, newspapers, magazines to see how they prefer to be contacted. Make sure your contact information is available on your agency website should someone want to make an inquiry.)

Remember

NOBODY KNOWS YOUR JARGON!!! DO NOT use acronyms, initialisms or funding sources to describe services. Speak in terms people understand.

What Story Do You Tell?

The best stories are often the ones not told...
People will care what you have to say!

- What is your CAP doing for people in your area that no one else is?
- What does it feel like to be a member of the CAP community?
- Tell stories that have a happy ending and actually show success.

Consistent Messaging = Desired Perceptions

When speaking to the broader public, it is important to convey what is **first, best, most** or **unique** about your CAP.

Consistent Messaging = Desired Perceptions

First: Community Action has been committed to fighting poverty long before many other organizations who serve our same clientele.

Best: Your CAP is one of the highest performing Community Action Agencies in the state. We also usually help more program participants than other organizations and are able to provide more assistance.

Unique: We have a unique service delivery system that allows for minimal fraud and maximum oversight.

Tips for Communicating with the Media

(or anybody else!)

Preparation: General Rules of Thumb

- Try to anticipate the reporter's questions.
- Tell your story – this is an opportunity for you to frame your position – before critics tell your story for you.
- Create a personal sound bite.
- Write down talking points—then memorize them.
- Practice.

Tips for Communicating with the Media

Basic Do's & Don'ts:

- Ask the reporter as much as you can prior to the interview.
- Know your key message points.
- Turn negatives into positives.
- Stay on message! The public usually only hears your answers and not their questions.

Avoid making the 5 most common mistakes.

Tips for Communicating with the Media

- Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know the answer to a question – instead offer to find the answer and get back to them.
- Don't respond to questions based on unfamiliar facts.
- Don't repeat negatives and don't use negative buzz words.
- Focus on good body language.
 - Smile.
 - Maintain a relaxed demeanor.
- Dress for success
 - Avoid busy patterns, bright pink and white.

Tips for Communicating with the Media

- Public speaking.
 - Speak slowly and enunciate.
 - Avoid “Um’s.”

- Choosing a location
 - Good lighting, either in a well-lit room or outside in the sunshine.
 - Strategically place your logo or sign in the background for additional publicity.
 - Prepare for a ‘Skype’ interview.

- Protect the privacy of your program participants
 - Always get permission and a release

Avoid These 5 Common Mistakes When Speaking To the Public

1. Displaying Anger

- Don't get your emotions get the best of you – it will rarely work in your favor.
- Focus on your demeanor.
- It's always best to relax. And smile!

2. Evasiveness

- Preparation is key! Know your messages.
- Answer the question! Know when you've said enough and stop there.
- Avoid the "siege mentality."
- Don't just make something up—that can lead to follow-up questions
- Be quick on your feet

Avoid These 5 Common Mistakes When Speaking To the Public

3. Displaying a Lack of Empathy/Sensitivity

- Display sensitivity. The public needs to know that you can understand and relate to them.
- Remain consistent throughout. Don't suddenly change your tone after you've been rattled.
- Never complain. The public won't be sympathetic to your plight.

4. Stonewalling and Being Defensive

- Be prepared. Know what you are going to say and exactly how you are going to say it.
- Be aware of current events and incorporate that into your messaging—*sensitively*.
- Never underestimate the power of an apology.
- Stay away from hostile media interviews.

Avoid These 5 Common Mistakes When Speaking To the Public

5. Repeating the Negative

- Don't repeat the negative. This one statement helped define Nixon's presidency.
- Develop messaging that focuses on the positive.
- Remember that in many interviews, viewers hear the answer, not the question.

Choosing Program Participants for Success Stories

Someone whose life has been changed by your agency makes the **BEST** spokesperson!!!

Keep in mind the following:

- Be respectful—not exploitative
- Avoid stereotypes
- Be honest
- Choose an actual success

Homework Assignment

Identify a program participant who can act as your spokesperson!
Choose this person carefully though!

What To Do In a Crisis

Examples of Crisis:

- False or real allegations of mismanagement, fraud or abuse
- Potential employee misconduct
- Disaster or violence
- Accident

Steps to Consider:

- Take immediate action on behalf of the safety and security of staff and students and work with your site supervisor.
- Work with your leadership department to identify next steps for internal and external communications and other support efforts where necessary.
- Consult Crisis Response Team (usually your executive director)

What To Do In a Crisis

- Contact parent(s) or family member of involved persons to obtain: accurate information about the crisis, what information can be shared, appropriate responses to family members and key community stakeholders, etc.
- Notify oversight agencies and associations.
- Be open and available. Recognize that “no comment” is a comment.
- Streamline communication by selecting one spokesperson.

Homework Assignment

Develop a Crisis Communications Plan

A Summary of Homework Assignments

- 1. Learn Your Programs**
- 2. Develop an elevator pitch**
- 3. Assess public perception of your agency**
- 4. Identify a program participant to act as your spokesperson**
- 5. Develop a Crisis Communications Plan**

Contact Info

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