

Message Mapping Development Guide for Communities

**Get the right information. To the right people. At the right time.
So they can make the right decisions.**

Message mapping is a simple method to create effective messages during an emergency. In stressful times people have a hard time understanding information, unless the message is crafted in **very** specific ways. The message mapping process uses proven crisis communication techniques for developing public information of all types.

Why it is so hard to get out effective crisis communication?

- Information about the emergency is limited and in flux.
- Responders are busy responding, and public information is often forgotten in the initial urgency of the response.
- Often multiple agencies, departments and communities are involved in the response and without coordinated message development this can result in conflicting messages.
- Social Media: Without timely official information social media will fill a communication void very rapidly, with myths and rumors.

What is a Message Map?

The format of the Message Map is a grid with three layers of increasingly detailed information, which answers expected questions and concerns of a specific target audience.

Tier 1: Primary Issue		
Key Concern of the Target Audience		
Tier 2: 3 Key Messages that Address the Primary Concern		
Key Message1	Key Message2	Key Message 3
Tier 3: Supporting Facts for Each Key Message		
Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3

What are Some Benefits of Message Mapping?

- Timely messages can improve the response and late release of information may hurt.
- Easier to get general pre-approval of messages from Incident Commander for key talking points.
- Clear, simple, concise messages are better understood in a crisis.
- Allows use of consistent messages across media channels: one message map forms the foundation/basis for media releases, social media interviews, public meetings and fact sheets/FAQs. Messages from experts/communities/agencies are in sync and don't conflict.
- Helps with countering rumors and myths. (Many can be anticipated ahead of time).
- Keep ahead of social media, which may be inaccurate and will fill an information void.
- Helps meet media needs more quickly.

Principles of Effective Messaging

Communicate clearly with compassion.

Develop a limited number of key messages that are:

Brief and concise 3/9/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop 3 messages of 9 word each = 27 words total• Support each of those with 3 supporting facts of 9 words each• It should take only 30 seconds to read any 3 messages out loud
Simple	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid jargon and acronyms
Easily understandable by people in crisis mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use short sentences and simple words: grade level 6
Credible and trusted	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cite 3rd party support in supporting messages• Use personal pronouns “we recommend....we are committed to, we understand”
Memorable	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use photos, charts, anecdotes to support key messages. These can increase recall by 50 %• Stay positive: any negative statement should be balanced with at least 3 positive constructive or solution-oriented messages• Repeat your key points at least once
Timely	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get out in-front of the story or social media will fill the void. People need to know what to do right away
Accurate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use only confirmed facts. Avoid promising or speculation
Consistent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that all spokespersons use the same message maps
Culturally/politically/ operationally sensitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Incident commander and PIO must <u>always</u> approve messages before release• Be aware of and sensitive to cultural differences
Respectful of audience concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be Relevant: Balance what you must communicate with:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ what the audience wants to know○ what the audience might get wrong• Commit to continued communication
Compelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage action with meaningful information that encourages a response

How to Read a Message Map During an Interview

- > Start by using an opening statement to show your concern/empathy with the target audience, if appropriate. The opening statement is used to express empathy. It can be used to acknowledge a tragedy, express commonality, or convey that you wish to answer the question, but cannot.

An opening statement is not always used and is not required to complete a message map. You may not know what the opening statement should be until you hear how a specific question is asked. It is always important to let stakeholders know that you care about them. They need to know that you care, before they will care what you know: “there was a terrible loss of life/property today”; “we are concerned”; “we are all saddened.”

- > Repeat your message at the beginning or end of each statement (Key messages 1 + 2 + 3)
- > Use your supporting messages to back up your key messages with facts, simple and strong data, and support from experts and trusted leaders.
- > Repeat key points so the audience clearly understands your message, but avoid repeating a single point too many times.
- > Once you make a statement, remember your messages and use them to answer questions. Stay with points from your message map. Don't stray.

Acknowledgements

Much of the information about Message Mapping and crisis communication in the guide results from the work of Dr. Vincent Covello. The founder and Director of the Center for Risk Communication in New York City; he is a nationally and internationally recognized researcher and expert in risk and crisis, communication who has worked with the World Health Organization, the US Department of Health and Human Services, the US Environmental Protection Agency, the US Department of Agriculture, the US Department of Defense, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other national and international agencies to develop systems for effective crisis communication. <http://centerforriskcommunication.org/>