Words Matter: Message Training for Livable Communities

October 17, 2011
Panel

- **Ilana Preuss**, Chief of Staff, Smart Growth America, Washington, DC

- **Jim Middaugh**, Communications Director, Metro, Portland, Oregon
Words Matter: Message Training for Livable Communities

Ilana Preuss, Chief of Staff
My Focus

• Tell the Story – the Heart of a Community

• Tested Language to Reach Your Target Audience

• People are focused on the economy – making the case
Tell the story of what makes a place great
Smart growth means building urban, suburban and rural communities with housing and transportation choices near jobs, shops and schools.

These strategies support thriving local economies and protect the environment.
National Priorities for our Elected Officials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Priorities (60%+)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jobs</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The economy</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care costs</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal deficit</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of living</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: Now we would like to ask you some questions about the issues our nation is facing today. How much of a priority do you think each of the following issues should be to our elected officials?
National Priorities

Medium Priorities (49%+)

- Ending the war(s) 57%
- Public safety 51%
- Reducing our dependence on oil 51%
- Addressing poverty 49%
- Clean air and water 49%

“Just Not Priorities”

- Wall Street and banking reform 39%
- Housing market downturn 38%
- Climate change and global warming 30%
- Transportation 21%
- Land development patterns 16%

Q: Now we would like to ask you some questions about the issues our nation is facing today. How much of a priority do you think each of the following issues should be to our elected officials?
Americans want the government to “stop spending money it doesn’t have” and “use the money it has more effectively.”
Most Americans spend more than 50% of their household expenses on housing and transportation costs. That is too much.

Rebuilding our economy and creating new jobs is the most important issue of our generation.
Making great places is key to turning around our economy
Smart growth places are in high demand

People and businesses are moving there
Young professionals
Suburban Office Markets Trail Downtown Rivals

By A.D. PRUITT

Mack-Cali Realty Corp., one of New Jersey's largest commercial landlords, for example, saw its occupancy fall to 89.1% at the end of 2010 from 90.1% a year earlier.

Zappos CEO envisions a new community downtown

Office market thriving in downtown Oklahoma City, observers say

Blue Cross has moved 3,000 workers to downtown Detroit offices
Smart growth strategies cost government less
Per Acre Cost of Roads and Water Lines

- In Town: $45,000
- In Suburb: $125,000
- At the Edge: $140,000
Sacramento, CA

Analysis of multiple planning scenarios in Sacramento revealed that compact development would save the city $7.5 billion in infrastructure costs, 23% of what it currently spends.
Smart growth strategies bring in more money
El Dorado, Arkansas
Reality Check
Having a car is too expensive and too much trouble I want to live where I don’t need one as much.

*Data from a Ford Foundation survey conducted by Harris Interactive 4th quarter, 2010.*
We can do better
1. Tell Your Story – No Jargon!
2. Define Your Terms
3. Base it on the Economy and Local Leadership
Smart Growth America is the only national organization dedicated to researching, advocating for and leading coalitions to bring smart growth practices to more communities nationwide.

www.smartgrowthamerica.org

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The Portland Metropolitan Area

Jim Middaugh
Communications Director
Metro

As a regional government, Metro crosses city limits and county lines to work with communities in creating a vibrant and sustainable region for all.
Presentation Topics

- Know your audience
- Public opinion climate
- Values & beliefs: transportation, other services
- Communicating with the public
- Communicating with elected officials
- Messaging
Know your audience

Different attitudes and behaviors

• General public vs.
• All registered voters vs.
• Likely voters vs.
• Community leaders vs.
• Etc...
Public opinion climate

- Extreme negativity and cynicism
- Low awareness and knowledge
- Anxiety about the economy, other problems
- Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission
- Media changes
- Changing demographics
Low awareness and knowledge

- ABC’s of politics, government, public finance
- Public sector’s contribution
- History and geography
Anxieties about the economy

- Unemployment, underemployment
- Depreciation of home and investments
- Credit card debt
- Gap between super wealthy and everyone else
- Shrinking middle class
- Federal deficit
- Loss of economic competitiveness
Anxiety about other problems

Automobile, Bicycle, Pedestrian Safety
Forest Clearcutting
Federal Deficit
Climate Change
Physician Shortages
Illegal Immigrant
Corporate Bonuses
Pandemics
Campaign Finance
Domestic Violence
Libya
Energy Dependency

Homelessness
Urban Sprawl
Traffic Congestion
Food And Product Safety
Obesity
Future of Social Security and Medicare
High School Drop-out Rates
US-China Relations

Iraq War
Airplane Safety

Earthquakes & Tsunamis
Health Care Access and Cost
Israel-Palestinian Conflict
Police Conduct
Ethics Violations
Talk Show Fear Mongering
Gun Control
Child Health And Safety
Child Trafficking

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Energy Dependency
Mental Illness
Mental Health Related Shootings
Deteriorating Transportation, Water & Sewer Systems
Media changes

- Less newspaper readership
- More “information” sources—Internet
- Faster communications—claims spread quickly
- Less coverage of state & local government
- Superficial coverage
- Focus on the negative and the sensational
- Framing: right vs. left, R vs. D
- Focus on celebrity and entertainment
- Listeners and viewers with shorter attentions
The result?

- Less civic engagement
- Less informed participation in elections
- Control by special interests and polarized ends
- !@$#$%@! Less civility
- No appetite for tax increases
The Good News

• The “idea” of government is not lost
• Support for government’s unique mission, purpose
• Awareness of public interest and common good
• People want a role in public issues & government
• Desire for consensus building & problem-solving
• Stewardship, planning for future – roles for government
There is support for transit

Do you support or oppose these transportation policies...

- Encouraging the development of more public transit: 51% support, 24% oppose, 4% somewhat support, 7% somewhat oppose, 14% strongly support, 10% strongly oppose, 11% don't know

- Requiring more housing in areas that are well served by public transit: 33% support, 35% oppose, 11% somewhat support, 9% somewhat oppose, 10% strongly support, 11% strongly oppose, 9% don't know

- Encouraging more people to get around on bicycles: 39% support, 24% oppose, 11% somewhat support, 9% somewhat oppose, 17% strongly support, 10% strongly oppose, 9% don't know
Neighborhood streets and choices

Should we focus transportation improvements on highways to move people more quickly OR improvements on neighborhood streets, public transit, bicycles, and walking to provide more travel choices.

- Focus improvements on neighborhood streets, public transit, bicycles, and walking to provide more travel choices: 42%, 15%
- Focus transportation on highways: 23%, 12%
- Don't know: 8%
Hesitancy about “compact” neighborhoods, general development descriptions

Do you support or oppose these land use policies...

- Building more compact neighborhoods
  - Support: 16%, 20%, 14%, 21%, 27%
  - Oppose: 8%, 19%, 11%, 20%, 41%

- Having more apartments and condominiums built on the closest busy street near where you live
  - Support: 10%, 14%, 11%, 21%, 43%
  - Oppose: 8%, 19%, 11%, 20%, 41%

- Adding one more housing unit per block in your neighborhood
  - Support: 10%, 14%, 11%, 21%, 43%
  - Oppose: 8%, 19%, 11%, 20%, 41%

Bar chart colors:
- Strongly support
- Somewhat support
- Neither support or oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Don't know
Support for more walkable neighborhoods

Do you support or oppose these land use policies...

- Building more neighborhoods where people can walk, bike, or take public transit to where they need to go
  - Support: 55% Strongly support, 32% Somewhat support, 17% Neither support or oppose, 11% Somewhat oppose, 11% Strongly oppose, 8% Don't know
  - Oppose: 25% Strongly support, 33% Somewhat support, 30% Neither support or oppose, 8% Somewhat oppose, 8% Strongly oppose, 6% Don't know

- Keeping a tight Urban Growth Boundary
  - Support: 40% Strongly support, 30% Somewhat support, 17% Neither support or oppose, 10% Somewhat oppose, 8% Strongly oppose, 8% Don't know
  - Oppose: 30% Strongly support, 32% Somewhat support, 11% Neither support or oppose, 9% Somewhat oppose, 10% Strongly oppose, 8% Don't know

- Requiring more housing in areas that are well served by public transit
  - Support: 33% Strongly support, 35% Somewhat support, 11% Neither support or oppose, 9% Somewhat oppose, 10% Strongly oppose, 8% Don't know
  - Oppose: 17% Strongly support, 11% Somewhat support, 9% Neither support or oppose, 11% Somewhat oppose, 12% Strongly oppose, 8% Don't know

- Requiring more housing near employment centers
  - Support: 26% Strongly support, 32% Somewhat support, 11% Neither support or oppose, 11% Somewhat oppose, 12% Strongly oppose, 6% Don't know
  - Oppose: 32% Strongly support, 17% Somewhat support, 11% Neither support or oppose, 12% Somewhat oppose, 11% Strongly oppose, 8% Don't know
## Important infrastructure projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Urgent</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public plazas with fountains and benches</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community centers</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle lanes</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidewalks and crosswalks</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood parks</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural areas</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green storm water management systems</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidewalks and crosswalks</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storm water drains, pipes, and treatment facilities</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local alternative energy systems</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pipes and systems for delivering drinking water</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewer pipes and treatment facilities for removing wastewater</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roads and bridges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Urgent, High, Medium, Low, Don't know categories are aggregated to show the percentage of respondents.*

*Highlighted projects are considered urgent and high in importance.*
### Most Important Capital Projects for Your Community*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Groups 1 &amp; 2 Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School facility construction and rehabilitation</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fix and improve existing roads</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local and renewable energy sources: solar, wind, geothermal</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking and biking separated from traffic</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transit projects: buses, light rail, and streetcars</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean up and reuse of contaminated urban lots</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redevelopment of vacant lots</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Participants ranked the importance of 29 capital projects—weighted rankings based on three points for most, two points for second most, one point for third most important.*
I’d like for you to build a budget based on how you would like to see taxpayer money spent on six broad service areas. Your budget is $100. After I’m finished reading the list of six service areas, please tell me how many dollars you feel should go to each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service area</th>
<th>Mean $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public safety</td>
<td>$23.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and human services</td>
<td>$22.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business assistance and job creation</td>
<td>$16.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>$14.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood livability</td>
<td>$12.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and culture</td>
<td>$10.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Education was not tested as a service area. The survey only tested services directly provided by City/County budgets.
Communicating with the public

- Link to values, beliefs, concerns, issues
- Keep it basic
- Don’t use “government” or “infrastructure”
- Show public involvement
- Show accountability and transparency
- Show partnerships
- Use effective messengers
- Use multiple communication channels
- Support for Spanish-speakers (know audience)
- Keep at it...consistent, sustained effort
Communicating with electeds

- *Not* the public. Talk more about “jobs/economy”
- Be prepared: What is end game? Why important? How does the public feel?
- Don’t assume high awareness/knowledge
- Educate. Keep basic.
- Be consistent in messaging
Values and Beliefs

What core value and belief is most important?

- Participation in family
- Career and job opportunity
- Being charitable to others
- Independence of self
- Practice of religion and spirituality
- Concern for the environment
- Supporting your community
- Being economical or thrifty
- Seclusion, solitude, or privacy
- Diversity of people
Values and beliefs (general public)

What core value and belief is most important?

• Participation in family
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“The sense of community—meeting your neighbors.

“Really, the only messages you hear are safety issues, bus crashes, and other bad things.”
Messaging: public transit

- Talk about cost benefits—how much are riders saving?
- What financial support is available?
- Talk about the positive side of public transit—Why is public transit a good thing?
Benefits of public transit

- Less pollution
- Save money (parking and auto)
- Better health
- Energy independence
- Aging population needs
- Low income needs
Secondary benefits of transit

- Reduce stress
- Avoid traffic
- See more of the community
- Alcohol related activities
- Helping the environment
- “Greener” lifestyle
Make it easy

Tell people what information is available

• Transit Tracker
• TriMet Trip Planner
• Google Maps
• 238-RIDE
• Smart Phone Apps
• Maps
• Real-Time information at transit stops
Final thoughts

• Always lead with values
• Give voice to your supporters and your critics
• Tell the story, don’t summarize the analysis
• Invest in research, it provides representative and audience-specific comments
• Don’t assume knowledge
Questions?