



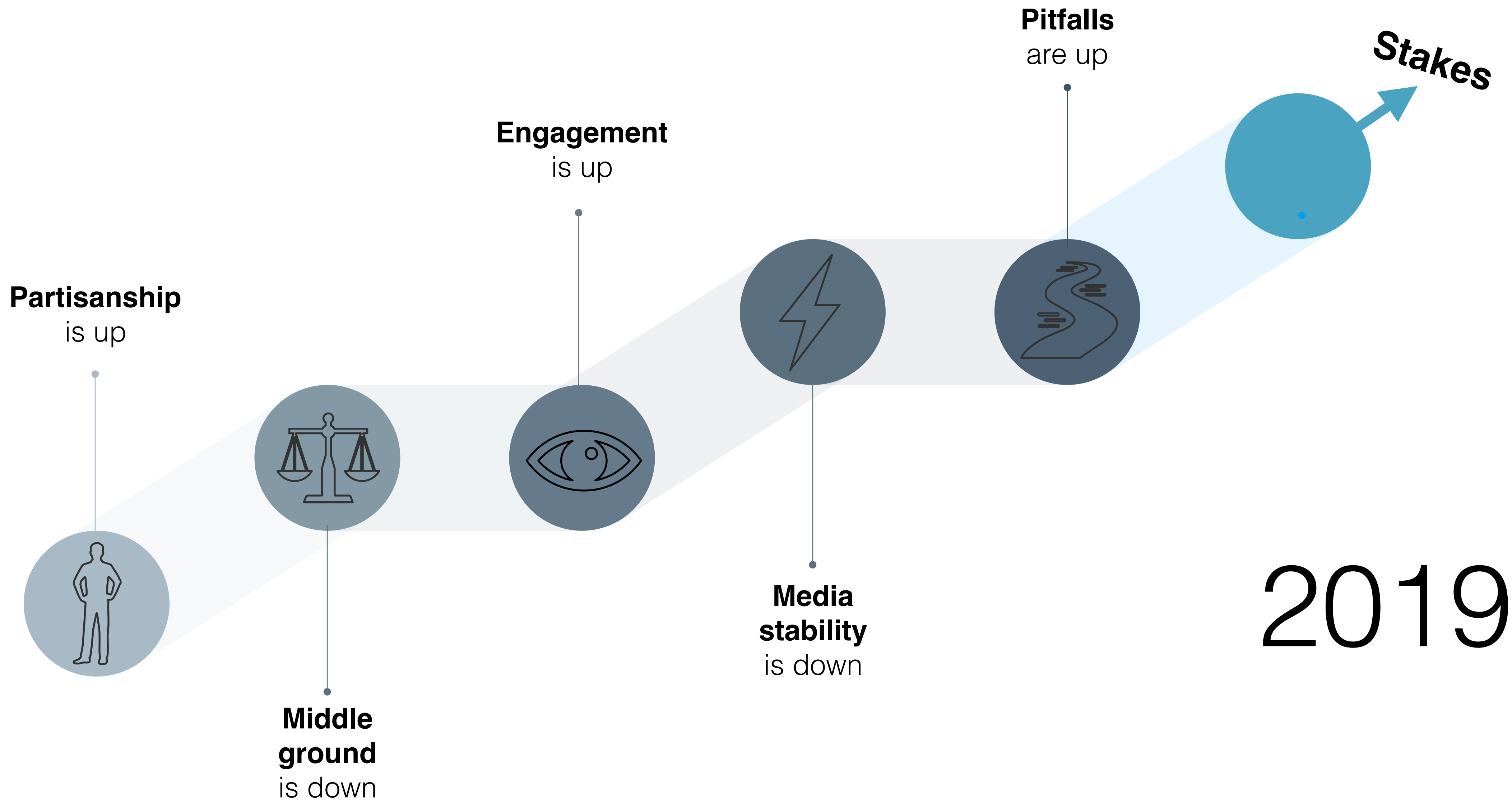
# PR: LEADING THE CONVERSATION

HFA ADVOCACY INSTITUTE | MARCH 2019

# AGENDA

- ▶ Building Your Narrative
- ▶ Overcoming Challenge
- ▶ Speaking With Authority
- ▶ About Group Gordon

# THE LANDSCAPE



But...

Opportunity is abundant.

# BUILDING YOUR NARRATIVE

## Strategy + Messaging



Discovery

Planning

Execution

Measurement

Interviews + documents

Media audits

Landscape analysis

Strategies

Messaging

Tactics

Media relations

Social and content

Events

Targets

Metrics

Ongoing assessment

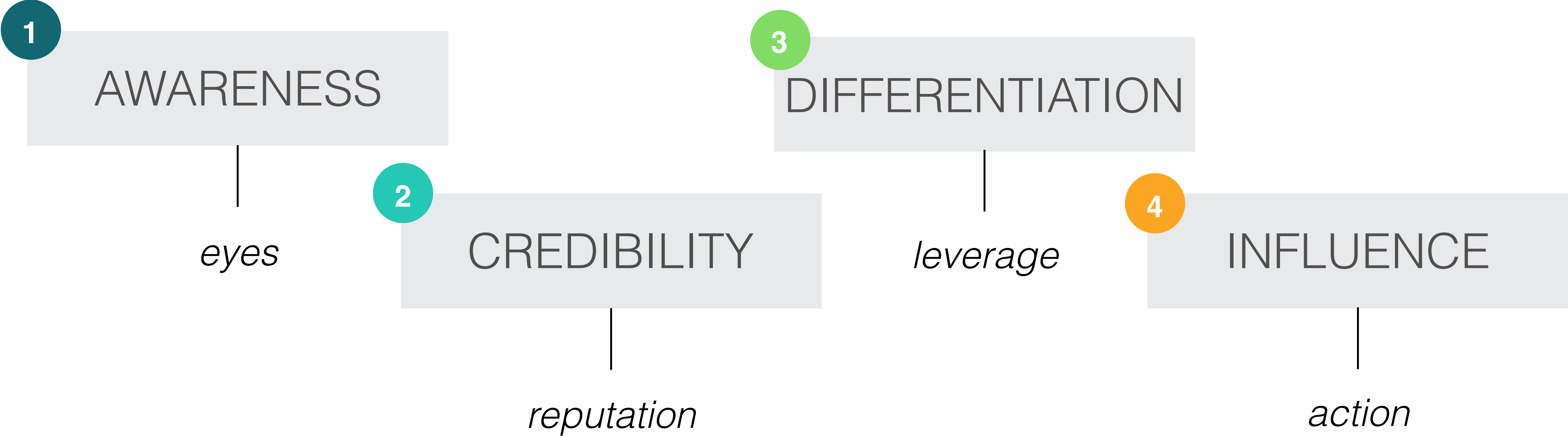


What's your objective?

# What's your objective?

↳ organizational/programmatic **first**... then PR

STRATEGY + MESSAGING



# Who are your audiences?

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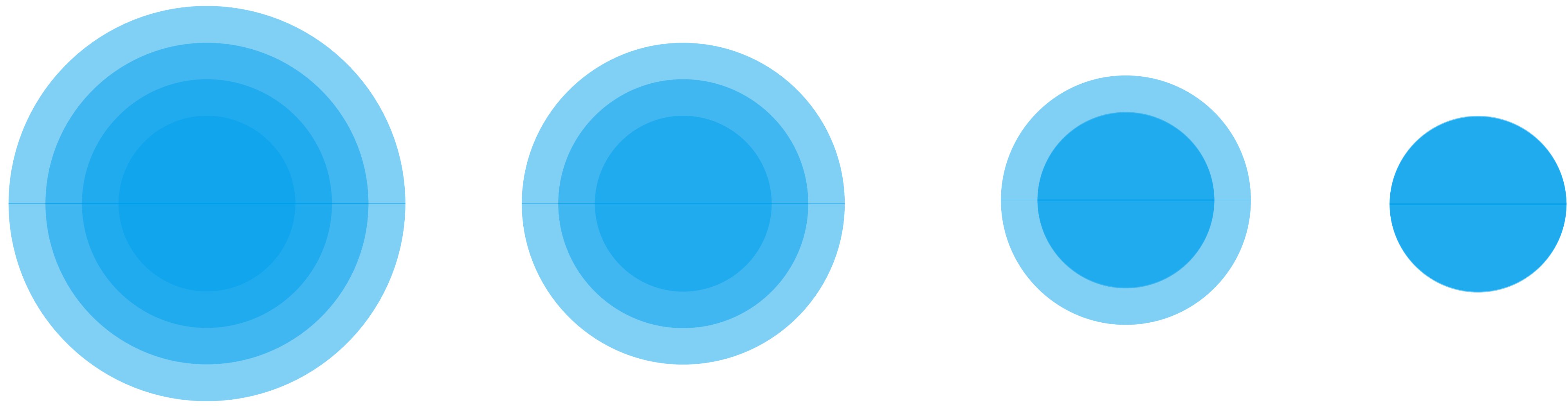


What's your message?

# What's your message?

↳ Start with *why* (not what).





NARRATIVE →

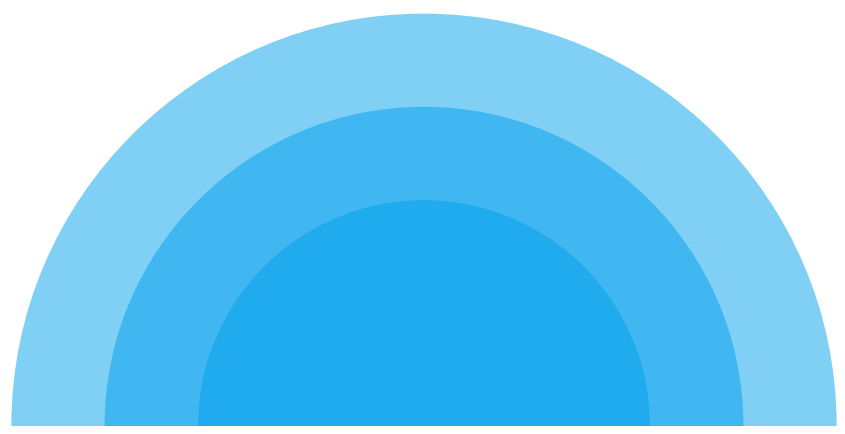




Challenge  
(why / context)



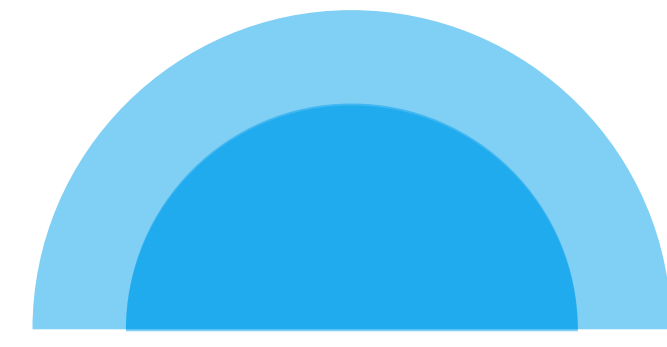
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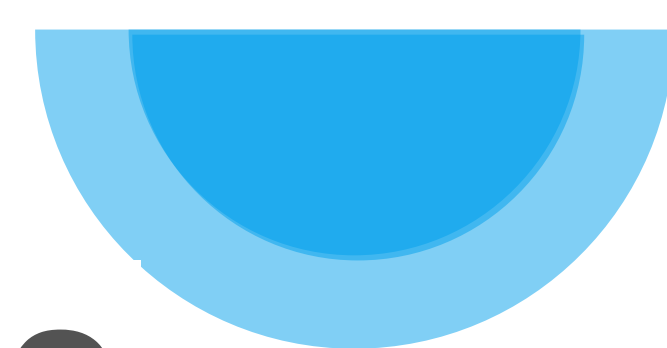
Vision  
(opportunity)



2



Solution  
(your org's role)



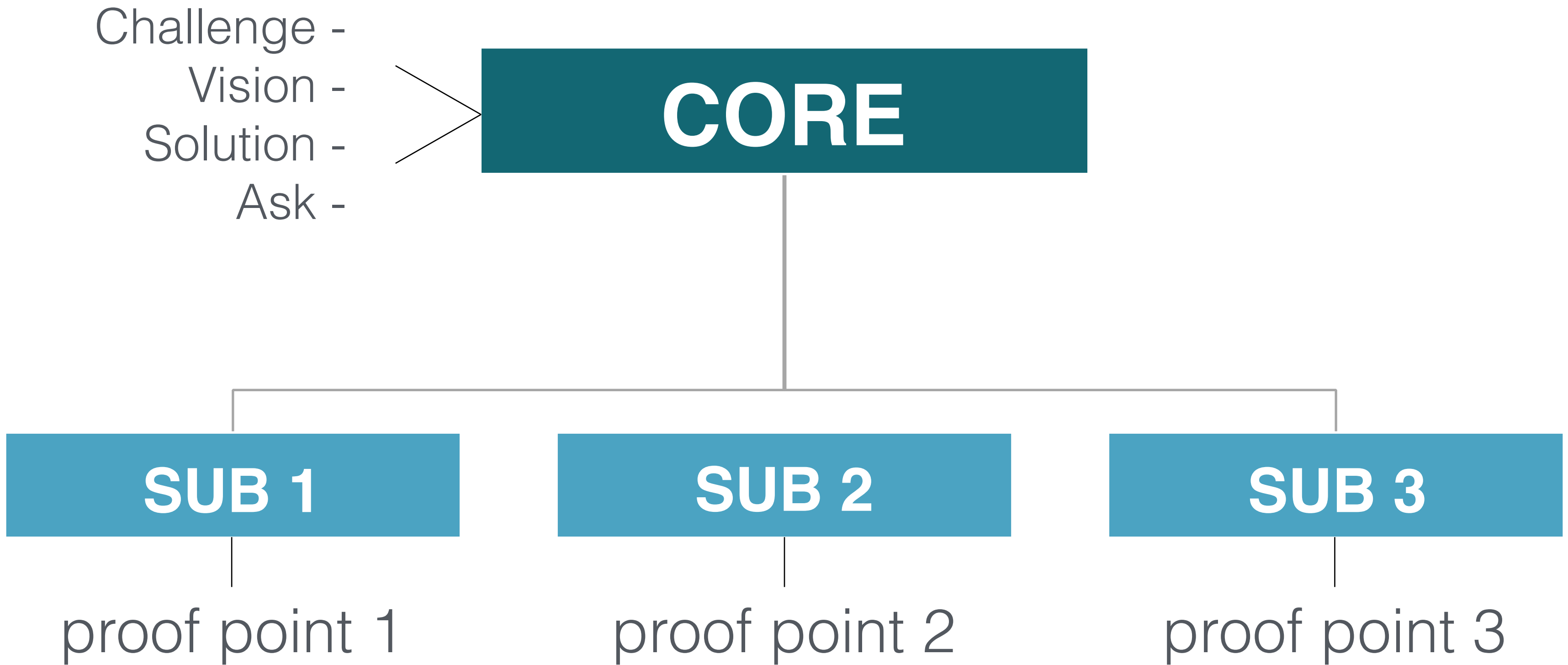
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Ask  
(call to action)



4





- Keep it simple and concise
- Focus on what's unique to your org
- Leave stuff off the table
- Eliminate jargon
- Be bold

Most importantly, humanize.




Nicholas Kristof

- 1 “We intervene not because of stories of desperate circumstances but when we can be cheered up with positive stories of success and transformation.”
- 2 “What matters is saving a high proportion of people, not just a large number of lives.”
- 3 “Storytelling needs to focus on an individual, not a group. ... One death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic.”


# PIECING IT TOGETHER



 **A FRAMING PLAYBOOK FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING ADVOCATES**

In partnership with Enterprise Community Partners

# “You Don’t Have to Live Here”

Why Housing Messages Are Backfiring and 10 Things We Can Do About It



**Tiffany Manuel, PhD**  
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**Nat Kendall-Taylor, PhD**  
Chief Executive Officer  
FrameWorks Institute  
Nkendall-Taylor@FrameWorksInstitute.org

October 2016




Tiffany Manuel

“When we try to raise awareness and offer potential solutions, we often find ourselves largely in a conversation with ourselves.”

“To advance support for policies and programs that need scale, we must do a better job of navigating the three dominant narratives (*individual responsibility, mobility, and racial difference*) that complicate our ability to communicate why solutions matter.”

“Move from an affordability frame to a fairness frame.”

- 
- Build messaging around the values of *Fairness Across Places and Regional Interdependence.***
  - Position community development organizations as solving the puzzle of varying concerns, expertise, and resources.**



## Some “Meh” Messages

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FrameWorks tested several values messages with a nationally representative sample. These four values had little or no positive effect on people’s attitudes or policy preferences about affordable housing.

### ***Economic Participation***

Researchers found no effect from a message about how affordable homes strengthen the economy by allowing people to participate in the economy more fully through work and purchasing.

### ***Opportunity***

Researchers found no effect from a message about how homes are the foundation that allows people to take advantage of opportunities and pursue pathways to success.

### ***Community Bonds***

Researchers found no effect from a message about the importance of social interaction and community bonds, and the ways in which affordable housing helps to create stable, connected communities.



Source: Manuel, Tiffany and Nat Kendall-Taylor. "You Don't Have to Live Here". October 2016.

- ➔ **Recommendation #1:** Tell stories that balance the people, places and systems perspectives.
- ➔ **Recommendation #4:** Bring the connection between housing and other issues into sharper focus.
- ➔ **Recommendation #9:** Avoid leading with or over-relying on the terms “housing” or “affordable housing.”

# How are you delivering the message?

**MEDIA**

- Credibility
- Reach
- Control

**SOCIAL**

- Directness
- Flexibility
- Scaling

**PUBLISHING**

- Control
- Depth
- Reach

**EVENTS**

- Engagement
- Authority
- Cost

# Gaining traction in affordable housing

- ✓ Publicize property events and deal closings.
- ✓ Be a resource for commentary.
- ✓ Write letters to the editor.
- ✓ Partner with an unlikely ally on an op-ed.
- ✓ Release new data.

# OVERCOMING CHALLENGE

## Crisis Communications

What's a PR hazard?



**GLOBAL**

An external circumstance that runs counter to your mission and affects many organizations.



**DIRECT**

An external circumstance that specifically threatens your organization — often related to funding or operations.

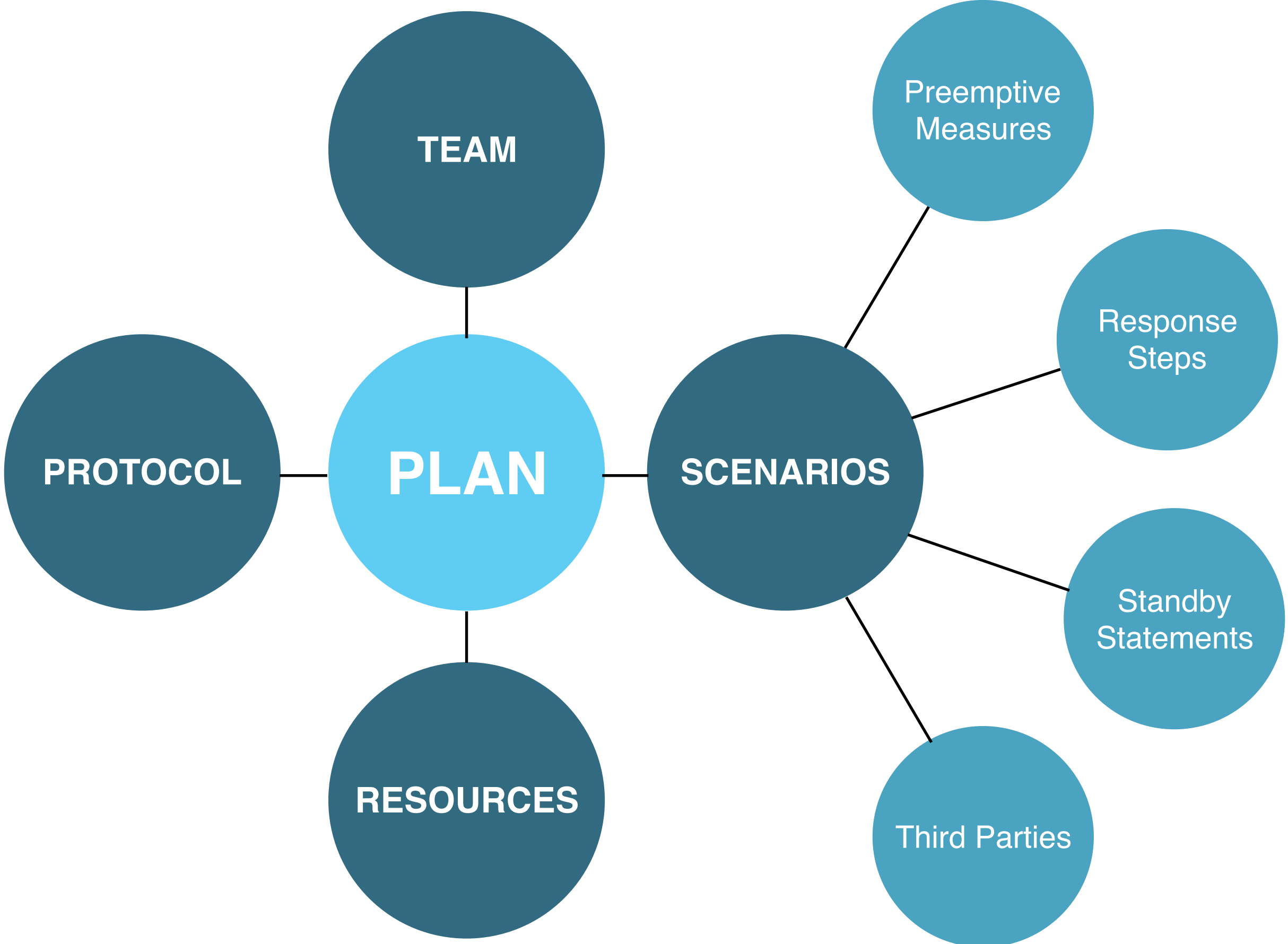


**INTERNAL**

An internal circumstance that has the potential to produce unfavorable public outcomes.



Create a plan.





- ✓ Contain the root problem.
- ✓ Convene your team. Act fast.
- ✓ Be transparent, factual, and non-defensive.
- ✓ Show contrition when warranted.
- ✓ Take the long view.
- ✓ When in doubt, do the right thing.



# Proactive or reactive?

- ▶ Generally, communicate first — on your terms.
- ▶ How likely is the situation to be covered?
- ▶ Can you better tell the story and balance the public record a proactive approach?



# Engage or don't?

- ▶ Most times, some form of engagement — even if off-record — will improve the outcome.
- ▶ How likely is the reporter to write the story regardless?
- ▶ Will your perspective positively influence the outcome?
- ▶ How will your inclusion in or absence from the story impact the perception of your organization?

Every crisis is a challenge  
to do better.

# SPEAKING WITH AUTHORITY

## Media Training

Formulate three concise statements that communicate your message well and use them throughout the entire interview.

**Develop Concise Statements**

**Address Target Audiences**

Ensure your answers address your target audiences, who may not be as knowledgeable on your issues as the reporter. Assume they have less information on your topic.

**SETTING THE AGENDA**

Always stay focused. Reporters sometimes begin interviews with softball questions to gain your trust and then lead into more hard-hitting questions.

**Stay Focused Throughout**

**Familiarize Yourself**

Familiarize yourself with the interviewer (the publication/show as well as the reporter). Understand their background and the interests and concerns of their readers/viewers.



1

**Follow your prepared agenda.** Insert your key messages into each answer. Do not wait for the reporter to bring up your target topics because it may not happen.

2

**Be honest and direct.** A minor misrepresentation can become a major problem and convey the wrong message.

3

**Speak a common language.** Simplify concepts that are difficult to understand and sum up complicated answers in a couple of short sentences. Do not use jargon or overly technical language the audience is unlikely to be familiar with.

4

**Be yourself.** Give your personality a chance to come across. Speak in your normal conversational tone.

5

**Make sure you and the reporter are on the same page.** Do not hesitate to ask the reporter to rephrase or clarify the question.

1

**Neutralize and bridge.** To answer a difficult question, neutralize the negative frame first, then bridge to one of your key points. This will help move the conversation back to your agenda.

Useful  
Phrases

- *“But perhaps an equally important issue here is...”*
- *“It’s too soon to tell, but what we do know is...”*
- *“Well, that’s just part of the story...”*
- *“It’s important to remember...”*
- *“Actually, in my experience...”*

2

**Answer all questions.** In nearly all cases, do not answer a question with “no comment.” There is almost always a better response.

3

**Be aware of your tone.** Tone is key; defensiveness is an immediate red flag for a reporter.

4

**Avoid loaded questions.** Don’t feel obligated to accept the premise of a loaded question. Don’t get pressured into answering hypotheticals. If you’re asked an “a” or “b” question, feel free to reject both options and state a separate position.

**Off the record:**

**WHAT YOU SAY IS NOT FOR PUBLICATION.**

Many journalists consider off-the-record information **fair game** if they can independently source or corroborate the information with a third party. While it won't be sourced to you, **you shouldn't disclose** information that you would never want to see published—even if it's off the record.

**On background:**

**WHAT YOU SAY CAN BE QUOTED OR PARAPHRASED IN A STORY,  
BUT NOT ATTRIBUTED TO YOU BY NAME.**

The reporter might attribute the quote or characterization to “a person familiar with the situation” or “an industry insider.” Since definitions of “on background” vary, you should **always clarify the terms** and the exact attribution before proceeding.

*Your key messages require evidence—proof points—to bring them to life and make them resonate. Pair a proof point with each of your key messages.*

**FOR EXAMPLE:**

**Share someone’s story to humanize your message**

“After 30 years as a public school teacher in our community, Jane Doe found that her retirement income couldn’t keep up with rising rents.”

**Offer data**

“Nationwide, 75 percent of extremely low-income families are forced to spend more than half their income on rent.”

**Make an analogy**

“It’s like trying to fill a leaky bucket—at current funding levels, the affordable housing supply will never meet the demand.”

**Quote third parties, or validators, when they support your position**

“The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit has always had bipartisan support; that’s why Senators Hatch and Cantwell introduced a bill to expand it in 2016.”

**Offer your relevant personal experiences**

“We’ve created thousands of affordable homes in the last decade, and it’s clear that...”

# ABOUT GROUP GORDON

Some firms emphasize strategy; others prioritize execution.  
At Group Gordon, we excel at both.



Dynamic  
Strategists

Best-in-Class  
Writers

Assertive  
Tacticians

We are a full-service firm, offering the suite of communications services for our clients.



Strategy

Media  
Relations

Content

Social

Planning

Reputation management

Campaign development

Thought leadership

Messaging

Features

Trend stories

Media tours

Expert commentary

Op-eds

Media / marketing materials

Visuals

Original research

Video

Speeches / presentations

Website content

Blogs

Community management

Campaigns

Paid social

“Group Gordon has a reputation as one of the industry’s **good guys**, both in terms of the **clients** it represents...and in terms of its own employee **culture**.”

*-Paul Holmes, Chair, The Holmes Report*



Top Five Corporate Agencies in  
North America: 2017-2018



A Best Agency To Work For in  
North America: 2011–2018



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