

# PUBLIC SPEAKING TRAINING BOOKLET

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CENTER FOR  
CARE AND PAYMENT  
INNOVATION

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## PUBLIC SPEAKING BASICS

# THE ART OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

Truly a tale as old as time, public speaking has been part of human history for a very, very long time. Generally speaking, it is the art of combining storytelling and information sharing to engage a specific audience ([Flintoff, 2021](#)).

There are two common forms of public speaking: Persuasive and educational. As a government representative, you will likely have to engage in each and both at the same time depending on your communications objective.

Public speaking is certainly an art, but one most people can master with practice and a little self-confidence. It also helps to understand some basic principles about public speaking. For instance, public speaking is less about what you say and more about how you say it. Studies show that effective presentations are 38% about your voice, 55% about your non-verbal communications, and just 7% about your content ([SOAP, 2015](#)).

Related to this, remember that your audience expects some level of engagement or participation. Studies suggest that audience engagement can drop by as much as 14% if you do all the talking and they do all the listening ([SalesCrunch, 2020](#)).

## Did You Know?

Public speaking traces its roots all the way back to Ancient Egypt, where early records show they did some training for public speaking. Ancient Greece is where most public speaking rules and training became codified ([Womack, 1990](#)). Aristotle was one of the first to create rules and models for public speaking more than 2,000 years ago ([Heinrichs, 2008](#)). We still use many of these rules today!



## PUBLIC SPEAKING AND YOU

Public speaking is an integral part of your job as a representative of the federal government. And by now, you should have a good sense that *how you say something* is just as important as *what you say*. This section will provide you with a few key considerations about public speaking engagements. It will also give you tips on how you can prepare yourself for these opportunities and ensure success.

### AS YOU PREPARE FOR YOUR PUBLIC SPEAKING OPPORTUNITY...

- ▶ Understand your audience.
- ▶ Ask about the setup of your public speaking opportunity and prepare accordingly.
- ▶ Practice, practice, practice!
- ▶ Arrive early to get a sense of the space where you will be speaking.
- ▶ Consider strategic storytelling.
- ▶ Look for opportunities to get audience participation.

### AS YOU ENGAGE IN YOUR PUBLIC SPEAKING OPPORTUNITY...

- ▶ Talk in soundbites.
- ▶ Make sure to make eye contact with your audience.
- ▶ Do not read your talking points out loud and do not read the information on a slide (if you are doing a presentation).
- ▶ Slowdown and speak clearly. Make sure to add inflections in your voice as you speak.
- ▶ Avoid using filler words like, "Uhm, uh, you know, etc."
- ▶ Do not react if you make a mistake! The audience does not know what you are going to say next!
- ▶ Do not incorporate humor unless you are confident with what you will say.
- ▶ Avoid straying too far from your talking points.

# DEVELOPING A SINGLE OVERRIDING COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVE

Developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a single overriding communications objective (SOCO) is the most important message you are trying to communicate to a targeted audience. SOCOs can help focus public speaking activities and ensure that everything ties back to the most important message you want the audience to know.

Basic SOCO development consists of understanding your communications aim, understanding your audience, and developing a concise key message that you can deliver to that audience. Everything you say should reinforce your SOCO.

Your **communications aim** is defined as the behavior you want your audience to adopt, a piece of information you want your audience to know, or an important concept your audience needs to understand. Your **target audience** is who you are targeting with your SOCO. It is important you consider your audience, as what you say may change depending on who you are talking to. Your **key message** is your SOCO and is what you will say to your audience. Often, SOCOs sound like calls to action with details that reinforce why a behavior should be adopted.

## IN PRACTICE

Imagine you work at the CDC and new data suggests people who are elderly or have an immunodeficiency are more susceptible to contracting a serious or potentially life-threatening strain of coronavirus. But there is strong data that wearing a face mask and getting a vaccine can help reduce the risk of serious illness and death. What is your SOCO?

**First, what is our communications aim?** We want people who are elderly or have an immunodeficiency to wear a face mask and get vaccinated.

**Second, who is our target audience?** Elderly people and people with immunodeficiencies. This population might value more time with family or have an acute sense of self-preservation.

**Finally, what is our key message/SOCO?** "Data shows that you can reduce the risk of serious illness and death from coronavirus if you get a vaccine and wear a face mask, which keeps you healthy for your family and loved ones."

# SOCOs In Pop Culture

Have you seen the movie *Contagion*? This 2011 film is about a global pandemic (it is surprisingly accurate and scary).

A key scene in the film between CDC doctors Erin Mears (Kate Winslet) and Ellis Cheever (Laurence Fishburne) talks about SOCO development. Even Kate Winslet practices her SOCO on the silver screen!



## SOCO PRACTICE EXAMPLES



### Scenario 1:

You work for a regional environmental agency and have just learned that the coal ash ponds at the local power plant are leaking into the river many locals use for drinking water, recreation, and to water their crops. Until testing shows the river water is no longer toxic, people need to avoid the river and use bottled water.

**Communications Aim:**

**Target Audience:**

**Key Message/SOCO:**



### Scenario 2:

You work at Quaker Oats and have just been informed that a production line error has now turned the cereal in Captain Crunch bright blue. While the taste of the cereal is the same, the blue dye can stain someone's tongue and teeth blue. Fortunately, the dye is not toxic.

**Communications Aim:**

**Target Audience:**

**Key Message/SOCO:**

## TECHNIQUES TO PIVOTING

Often, we are not given a straight path to our SOCOs during speaking engagements. You will find that you need to use pivots to state your SOCO. This is not just a useful technique; it is your responsibility to ensure that you state your SOCO as often as possible.

## PHRASES YOU CAN USE TO PIVOT BACK TO YOUR SOCO

- ▶ "Before I answer that I'd like to point out..."
- ▶ "I'd also like to add..."
- ▶ "Which is why it's important to remember..."
- ▶ "One more thing..."
- ▶ "I want to share with you..."
- ▶ "To bring it full circle..."
- ▶ "The main takeaway is that..."
- ▶ "Which is why we should consider..."
- ▶ "Let me begin by saying..."
- ▶ "The bottom line is..."

# DESIGNING AND DEVELOPING YOUR IMPACT STORY

## STORYTELLING IS AS FUNDAMENTALLY HUMAN AS YOU CAN GET

As long as humans have existed, storytelling has been a part of our history. From the earliest cave drawings to rich oral traditions to the era of the Internet, we constantly look to stories for entertainment, to learn new things, and to connect with others ([Mendoza, 2015](#)). As a result, leveraging storytelling in our public speaking opportunities is not only a good idea, but it also taps into something that we innately seek out every day. Consider this, people are 22 times more likely to remember a fact if it is paired with a story ([Bruner, 1987](#)). Keep this in mind the next time you are preparing for a presentation!

### YOUR WHY

Describe what motivates you, drives your passion, and ultimately, is at the heart of your story.



### YOUR INNOVATION

Describe your initiative (e.g., this initiative tackles the problem/challenge of \_\_\_\_\_ to achieve \_\_\_\_\_ results).



### YOUR UNIQUE STORY PROPOSITION (USP)

Describe your initiative and the value and impact it provides – e.g., for Veterans (improved care and service); for Employees (improve service delivery and performance); and for the Community/Public (good stewards).



### YOUR 3 KEY MESSAGES

Describe the three most important points you want your audience to remember and repeat. Think about:

**3Ds** – What we're doing, what you can do, and how we can do it together

**KDG** – What the audience should KNOW, what they can DO, and where they can GO for more information



### YOUR VISUALS

Describe the photos, videos, and tangible materials that will help the audience better understand (and visualize) your initiative (e.g., how it works, and the value and benefits created).



### YOUR WHAT'S NEXT!

Describe your next steps. What do you want to accomplish in next 3 to 6 months? What are your long-term goals?



### YOUR CREATIVE SPARK!

Describe what specific techniques you will use. Consider asking a question, creating urgency, making a startling statement, and more!



### YOUR CALL TO ACTION

Describe how the audience can be involved, support your efforts, and implement your initiative at their facility or office.



# CCPI KEY MESSAGES AND TALKING POINTS

## KEY MESSAGES/SOCOS BY AUDIENCE TYPE

- ▶ **Veterans:** Veterans help shape CCPI pilot programs that aim to improve the access to and quality of care they receive, enhance timeliness of care and service delivery, and identify potential efficiencies that enable VA to provide them the best care possible.
- ▶ **VHA Health Ecosystem:** The VHA Health Ecosystem provides important insights to CCPI through collaborations that support developing innovative and turn-key health care pilots which could be implemented across the VA health care system.
- ▶ **VSOs and VEOs:** VSOs and VEOs can help communicate and elevate key details about CCPI and its pilot programs, ensuring solutions are helping Veterans now and in the future.
- ▶ **PAGs:** By engaging with CCPI, PAGs can help amplify CCPI pilot programs at the national level, which can increase patient intake for health care providers and increase access to critical health care services for Veterans.
- ▶ **Policymakers and Key Stakeholders:** Section 152 of the 2018 MISSION Act established CCPI and gave VA a unique waiver authority to support the implementation of innovative pilot programs that could help Veterans and the American people. This helps accelerate VA's transition to high-value care which will create efficiencies, promote equity, reduce costs, and achieve the best health outcomes for all Veterans.

## CCPI TALKING POINTS

- ▶ CCPI plays a critical role in ensuring VA maximizes quality of care while balancing costs – known as high-value health care – and delivers needed services to Veterans.
- ▶ CCPI works with collaborators across government and the health care industry to develop and test innovative approaches to Veteran care across a wide range of service areas.
- ▶ Section 152 of the 2018 MISSION Act created CCPI and gave VA a unique waiver authority to support the implementation of innovative pilot programs that help Veterans.



# INTERVIEW TIPS AND TRICKS + RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

There are several things you should do to ensure you look capable, speak clearly, and stay on message while engaging in public speaking opportunities. Below is a list of tips and tricks to keep in mind as you conduct a media interview. But remember, many of these tips and tricks will serve you well regardless of whether you are talking on camera or talking at a networking event.

## TIPS AND TRICKS

- ▶ Speak in soundbites.
- ▶ Do not start speaking right away. Think about your answer first.
- ▶ Do not try to fill any awkward silences.
- ▶ Maintain eye contact.
- ▶ Speak slower and with more energy than you think you need.
- ▶ Dress appropriately (and comfortably) for your speaking engagement.
- ▶ Avoid wearing big or very shiny jewelry.
- ▶ Avoid wearing white for on-camera speaking opportunities.
- ▶ Sit up right (avoid slouching) by sitting on the edge of your seat.
- ▶ Engage in "active listening."
- ▶ Avoid using jargon.
- ▶ Assume everything you say is on the record and being recorded.

## RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Remember that you have a several rights and responsibilities that can afford you a certain level of control and can help you ensure you are taking the right speaking opportunities.

### AS AN INTERVIEWEE, YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO...

- ▶ Ask about the nature and purpose of a media interview or speaking opportunity.
- ▶ Ask for details about the types of questions you will be asked or the topics you will be asked to speak about.
- ▶ Decline speaking opportunities if you feel they are not appropriate for you.
- ▶ Decline to answer specific questions or speak about specific topics.
- ▶ Ask to redo certain soundbites or start over if you feel like you made a mistake or want to try again.
- ▶ Ask how your interview or speaking engagement will be used.
- ▶ Ask to see the interview questions ahead of time (although this request is often denied).
- ▶ Ask to stop or pause an interview.
- ▶ Ask if you will be recorded and decide whether that is permissible.



### AS AN INTERVIEWEE, YOU HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO...

- ▶ Provide accurate information and correct any inaccuracies.
- ▶ Speak clearly and concisely to ensure you are understood.
- ▶ Represent the government as best as possible in the way you act, dress, and speak.
- ▶ Maintain your composure and remain professional.
- ▶ Stay in control of the interview as much as possible.
- ▶ Share your SOCO.
- ▶ Collect contact information from the interviewer or organizer to conduct follow-up.
- ▶ Follow-up to ensure the way you and the agency you represent are presented fairly and accurately.
- ▶ Correct any mistakes that may appear in media pieces about you or the agency you represent.
- ▶ Collect information about when and how the information you provided through your speaking opportunity will be used.
- ▶ Follow protocol to ensure all relevant stakeholders at your agency are aware of and can support you with your speaking opportunity.



# VHA PUBLIC SPEAKING PROTOCOL

As government representatives, it is important that you follow the right policies and procedures at your agency. This ensures that your agency can provide you with the proper support and that you avoid breaking protocol, which could lead to more serious issues or consequences.

Personnel from VA's Center for Care and Payment Innovation should adhere to the following protocol for public speaking engagements, including media interviews.

- 1 Any queries that may yield negative coverage or are controversial in nature must **immediately** be forwarded to the appropriate regional Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (OPIA) staff and VISN public affairs (VISN PA) contacts.
- 2 Regardless of subject or nature, any request from a national media outlet requires OPIA and VISN PA review and support.
- 3 Facility-level PA specialists can respond directly to local media queries that are not negative in nature and have a local reach.
- 4 VA employees are required to obtain appropriate authority before speaking in an official capacity for the agency or organization activity in which they participate.
- 5 VA employees may not use official titles, VA stationery, or duty time to engage in activities involving the communication of comment or opinions directed to media without expressed consent from the highest official or designees of the facility/ program office where they are assigned.
- 6 Contact Rachael Burden ([Rachael.burden@va.gov](mailto:Rachael.burden@va.gov)), Acting Director for Media Relations for VHA Executive Communications, with any questions regarding protocol or speaking opportunities.

*Guidance from June 13, 2019, Memorandum "Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Media Interview and Query Policy"*



## Excercise 2

### CAN YOU TALK FOR TWO MINUTES WITHOUT SAYING "UH" OR "UHM?"

Working as a group, each person will take a turn at talking for two minutes about a topic of their choosing. The catch is that they must talk for two complete minutes without using any filler words, such as "uh," "uhm," "like," or "you know." If the person uses any of these words, you can interrupt them, and they need to stop talking and wait for their next turn to try again.

**The first person to get to two minutes, wins!**





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