Media Relations & Messaging

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National Association of Counties (NACo)

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Organize to Communicate

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- Identify organization's spokespeople

- Build network of "talkers"

- Calendar

- Communicate
  - Press kit core materials
    - Bio(s)
    - Brochures/fact sheets
    - Press release
    - Contact info

Organize to Communicate

- Messaging documents
- Press list(s)
  - Media types
  - Programs
  - Beats: Reporters, producers, personalities, bloggers

When the Media Calls…

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- Return calls promptly
- Do not feel obligated to answer questions on the spot
  - Which outlet are you calling from?
  - What is your story about?
  - When is your deadline?
  - What is your contact information?
- Prepare

Prepare

- Read the latest articles by the journalist
- View or listen to the latest TV or radio segments
- Think through possible questions
- Develop concise, accurate answers
- Know the rules – on the record, on background, off the record
- Know your message

The Message

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- Effective messages
  - Distinctive
  - Repeatable
  - Concise
  - Simple but not simplistic
  - Avoid jargon

The Message

- Specific examples

- Analogies

- Colorful words (devastating, chilling effect)

- Clichés

- Contemporary references

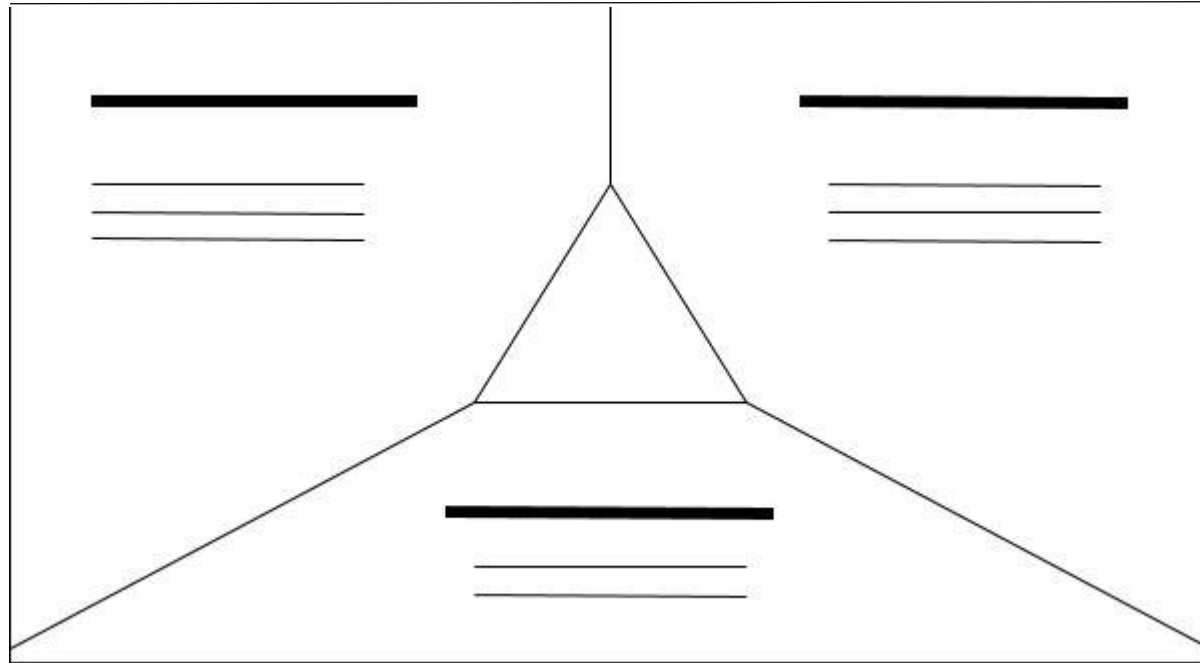- One-liners

- Personal experiences

The Message

- Absolutes
- Meaningful statistics
- The audience
- Second-person perspective

The Message

- Talking points
- Message box or triangle
  - Three-legged stool or four-legged chair

The Message Triangle

- Address the question, then transition to message point(s)
  - That's an interesting question, and to put it in perspective…
  - I'm glad you asked this because it brings me to a point I've been wanting to make…
  - I don't have the precise details, but what I do know is…
  - Let's not lose sight of the fact here, which is…
  - What I think you mean by the question is…
  - A more important point is…
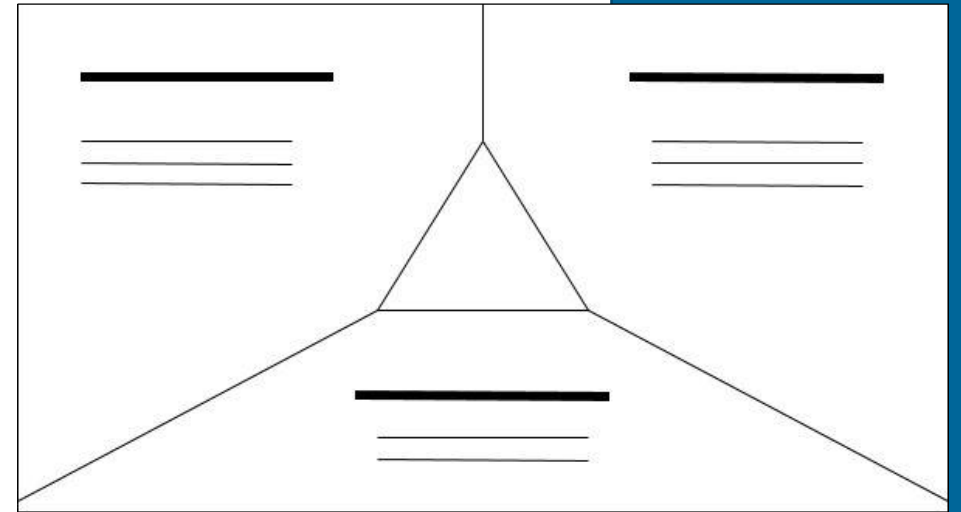
Counties play a key role in our nation's election system

- Counties are central to our **nation's election system** and work with states to **ensure the security and integrity of the process.**
- We run all elections on the ground.
- There are almost **9,000 dedicated local election officials** throughout the country who administer all elections.
- We oversee **100,000 polling places** and more than **700,000 poll workers** every two years.
- This process begins long before and extends after election day.
    - Training
    - Auditing
    - Security
    - Accessibility

All elections are local

Counties face real world threats that can erode the public's trust in elections before, during and after votes are cast

- Counties defend against cyber attacks every day.
- In fact, the state of **Utah reported** it fends off nearly **1 billion cyber attacks each day**. If successful, these hacks could damage websites, communications and vote tabulations.
- We also protect against **traditional security threats** by analyzing polling locations, contracting with local law enforcement and safely storing voting machines.
- After the election, we **secure vote tallies, audit the election** and **safeguard voter information**.

A strong federal-state-local partnership secures and improves our nation's election system

- Ensuring that vote totals are safely and accurately counted is not a single player game.
- A partnership with federal, state and local governments is crucial to combat new, sophisticated risks to election security.
- **Dedicated funding** for local governments **reduces election costs** and makes sure counties have the **resources to protect against attacks.**
    - Resources often get stuck at the state level.
    - **Uncertainty** in the federal or state budgeting processes can hinder local efforts.

No Comment?
No Way!

- That's the $64,000 question. As soon as somebody hands me the envelope with the correct answer, I will open it and let you know."

- "What you want to know, I can't tell you, because I don't know yet. When I do, I'll let you know."

- "The picture isn't clear yet."

- "The issue is undergoing a thorough review at this time, and I wouldn't want to prejudice the review by making a premature comment."

- "As you know, the law imposes very serious obligations on the county, and we need to move carefully to make certain that our actions comply with the law."

- "We need to find out the facts before commenting."

- "Our timetable is however long it takes to do it right, and not a day longer."

(Adapted from Sheehan Associates, Inc.)

Lights, Camera…

- Types of TV interviews
  - Live
  - Live to tape
  - Edited

Lights, Camera…

- Eye contact
- Smile
- Posture
- Animation
- Color
- Clothing
- Always on

Earned Media

- Press releases
- Exclusives
- Op-ed columns
- Letters to the editor
- Editorial board meetings
- Press events
- Press conference calls
- Digital content
- PSAs

NACo Media Relations: A Guide for Counties

- Developed to assist county officials in strengthening communications skills and improve local media coverage
- NACo has other resources available, including media relations workshops, webinars and "take home" news releases to report on NACo activities

National Association of Counties

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