



healing JUSTICE  
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# COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

TOOLS FOR CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ABOUT MALE SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE

The Healing Justice Alliance is committed to educating key stakeholders and the broader community on the adverse effects of trauma and finding ways to promote healing and safety in our communities. By working with young men of color who are survivors of violence to manage trauma, changing the community conditions that produce trauma, and communicating strategically about the importance of this approach, we are not only improving lives but also changing the public conversation about violence and trauma in our nation. At the core of this work is the understanding that trauma is preventable and that we, as a society, can and must support our young men of color who are impacted by it.

Because no one organization can change the narrative around trauma on its own, we are committed to working together to help each demonstration site hone its own core communications practices. With this approach in mind, this toolkit was compiled to help organizations of all different sizes and strategic aims identify and achieve their communications goals.

## HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is designed to be flexible, and contains hands-on worksheets that can be completed by members of your organization. If you have limited time or resources, you can focus your energies on key priority areas. If you want to write an effective letter to the editor, for example, you can use tool 11, "writing letters to the editor." If you have an upcoming call scheduled with a reporter, you can review tool 9, "responding when a reporter calls."

This toolkit is divided into two parts: *General strategic communications tools* and *Tools for working with the news media*. The general strategic communications tools are relevant whether your target audience includes the news media or not. For example, tool 3, "Message development guidelines," provides a basic formula for developing strategic messages. These guidelines will be useful whether you are delivering an "elevator pitch" to a policymaker, writing a grant report, or speaking to a reporter. The second section, *Tools for working with the news media*, are focused on the particular opportunities and challenges of engaging with news media. This will be a priority for organizations that either want to expand their media presence, or that want to become better equipped at handling inquiries from journalists.

Many organizations will want to start with tool 3, "Message development guidelines." While this tool will be useful in the widest variety of circumstances, we strongly recommend starting with tool 1, "Layers of strategy." When communicating strategically, message is never first. This tool will help to clearly define what goals we are trying to achieve, who our target audience is, and who is going to be communicating with the target audience. The "Layers of strategy" tool, and tool 2, "GOTMME" will help you establish these key parameters on which you can base your messages.

## **PART 1: GENERAL STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS**

### **Layers of strategy** ..... 6

This document helps ensure your message and media strategies are closely aligned to your goals.

### **GOTMME: A six-step tool for communication planning** ..... 13

The GOTMME tool provides a structured set of questions that align with your Layers of strategy.

### **Developing powerful messages** ..... 17

This tool describes the three components of an effective message and provides a sample message.

### **Strategic communications evaluation tool** ..... 22

Evaluation helps you determine whether your efforts are leading to the outcomes you want.

This tool provides guidance on how to evaluate your strategic communications.

## **PART 2: TOOLS FOR WORKING WITH THE NEWS MEDIA**

### **News monitoring** ..... 24

Because the news has a significant influence on the way decision-makers and the public think about trauma and community violence, understanding the media narrative around violence is an important starting point for strategic communications. This tool explains how organizations of varying sizes can monitor coverage of violence.

### **Changing the discourse about violence: Shaping stories across sectors** ..... 27

This tool will help you develop ideas for generating news stories that connect violence prevention with stories from a variety of news sectors.

### **Elements of newsworthiness** ..... 30

Gaining coverage requires getting a reporter's attention in a highly competitive news environment.

This worksheet offers suggestions for making your issue of interest to the media.

### **Working with journalists** ..... 38

Tips and strategies to help you establish and maintain relationships with media professionals.

### **Responding when a reporter calls** ..... 43

This worksheet includes simple questions that can help you quickly assess a reporter's needs when they call about a specific story.

### **Pitching your story** ..... 44

An effective story pitch can increase the likelihood that reporters will follow up on your story idea.

We include tips for developing and delivering an effective pitch.

### **Writing effective letters to the editor about violence prevention** ..... 48

This resource includes tips to help you craft compelling letters and increase your chances of getting them published.

## The Healing Justice Alliance

The [Healing Justice Alliance](#) is a partnership between Youth ALIVE!, Cure Violence, the National Network of Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs (NNHVIP) and Berkeley Media Studies Group (a project of the Public Health Institute). HJA has over 60 years of combined experience training private and public sector agency leadership and staff – part of a comprehensive, multi-system effort aimed at responding to crime victims and addressing violence as a public health issue.

Based in Oakland, California, Youth ALIVE! works to help those who have experienced violence heal themselves and their community. Their overarching mission is to prevent violence and create young leaders through violence prevention, intervention, and healing.

Cure Violence stops the spread of violence by using the methods and strategies associated with disease control – detecting and interrupting conflicts, identifying and treating the highest risk individuals, and changing social norms. Cure Violence is guided by a clear understanding that violence is a health issue.

With over 30 member programs across the U.S. and beyond, the National Network of Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs (NNHVIP) seeks to connect and support hospital-based, community-linked violence intervention and prevention programs and promote trauma-informed care for communities impacted by violence. Its vision is that all patients and families impacted by violence will receive equitable trauma-informed care through their hospital and within their community.

Berkeley Media Studies Group (BMSG) helps community groups and public health professionals practice media advocacy and the strategic use of mass media to advance policies that improve health. Ultimately, BMSG aims to help reshape how the news and other media present health and social issues.

## The Supporting Male Survivors of Violence initiative

In 2015, the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) awarded the Healing Justice Alliance (HJA) a grant to provide training and technical assistance (TTA) to [FY 2015 Supporting Male Survivors of Violence](#) grantees. A collaboration between OVC and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the grant initiative aims to help improve responses to male survivors of violence and their families.

In 2013, OVC released its "Vision 21: Transforming Victim Services" Final Report. OVC identified key priorities for providing services to victims of crime.

### These priorities include:

- **The need to make services accessible for all victims in all communities.**
- **Development of expansive, flexible, and innovative service models.**
- **A holistic approach to addressing historical institutional, geographic, and cultural barriers.**

OVC recognizes that in order for crime victims to recover physically, emotionally and financially, there needs to be a significant shift in the way in which services are provided. This is especially true for services for young men of color. Twelve demonstration projects across the country – from Baltimore, Maryland to Santa Cruz, California – were selected to create and implement culturally relevant and trauma-informed programs and interventions to engage male survivors of violence, specifically, young men of color (YMOC) and their families impacted by trauma and violence.

### The overarching goals of the initiative include:

1. **Creating a multi-disciplinary network of partners to provide coordinated services and support for male survivors of violence and their families.**
2. **Conducting outreach and training to educate stakeholders on the adverse effects of trauma and violence; and, developing methods to overcome barriers that prevent male survivors of violence and their families from accessing services and support.**

PART 1

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**GENERAL STRATEGIC  
COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS**

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## LAYERS OF STRATEGY

When talking about violence prevention with journalists, policymakers and other key stakeholders, advocates often feel compelled to share everything they know about the issue. Tempting as this may be, it's important to remember that advocates can't be comprehensive and strategic at the same time. Instead of saying everything they can about a particular issue, advocates seeking systemic change should keep their focus on an immediate, clearly-defined problem and a specific, achievable solution.

**Strategic** communications means letting your overall goals drive your messaging, not the other way around. Berkeley Media Studies Group recommends a **Layers of strategy** approach to help guide advocates through the process of setting goals, developing messages, and deciding whether to use the media – including social media – to elevate those messages. This tool describes these four layers.

First, developing an **Overall Strategy** helps advocates prioritize a specific problem along with a specific solution to the defined problem. Next, **Media Strategy** helps determine whether to use the media to advance goals, and if so, how to engage the media. Then, **Message Strategy** helps with the development of messages that state the problem, solution, and corresponding values. Finally, **Access Strategy** helps determine how and when to use the media to advance your cause. Below is a description of the key questions for each strategy layer, along with an example of how your organization might answer them.

**OVERALL STRATEGY:** PROBLEM | SOLUTION | TARGET | ALLIES | ACTION

**MEDIA STRATEGY:** COMMUNICATION METHOD | MEDIA ENGAGEMENT | MEDIA OUTLET(S) | MEDIA TACTICS

**MESSAGE STRATEGY:** REFLECT VALUES | DEVELOP CORE MESSAGE | ASSESS | MESSENGERS | MATERIALS

**ACCESS STRATEGY:** TIMING | ACCESS | NEWSWORTHINESS | PITCH | CAPTURE, ASSESS, & REUSE

### Overall Strategy

- Define the problem you want to address.
- Clarify the policy solution for which you will advocate.
- Identify the target with the power to make the change.
- Enlist the allies who can help make your case.
- Identify what you will do to influence the target.

**In the following fictitious example, the Youth Violence Prevention Center (YVPC) developed an overall strategy after first defining a specific problem to address.**

**PROBLEM:** YVPC is a hospital-based violence intervention program that provides culturally relevant services to young male survivors of violence in the city of Addison. As a small organization based at one of three major hospitals in Addison, YVPC was concerned that patients at the city's other two hospitals often did not receive trauma-informed care after they experienced violent injury. Conversations with administrators from those hospitals suggested that they were reluctant to adopt a violence intervention program for fear that such a program might drive up costs and negatively impact their public reputation. YVPC staff defined its core problem as a lack of trauma-informed services for male survivors of color throughout the city.

**SOLUTION:** A specific, measurable objective: By December 2019, all survivors of violence in Addison will receive culturally appropriate, trauma-informed care, no matter which hospital initially treats them.

**TARGET:** Board of trustee members of the two hospitals that did not provide consistent trauma-informed care for survivors of violence. The board is responsible for making budgetary and programmatic decisions.

**ALLIES:** YVPC staff knew that the hospital board trustees, many of whom were doctors, would likely listen to their fellow physicians.

**ACTION:** After clarifying their overall strategy, YVPC decided to enlist the support of physicians who could make a direct appeal to hospital trustees about the need for comprehensive trauma-informed services in Addison.

## Media Strategy

- Identify the best way to communicate with your target.
- Decide whether or not engaging the media will advance your overall strategy.
- Find the media outlets that will reach your target(s).
- Compile the media tactics you will employ.

**COMMUNICATION METHOD:** YVPC secured an initial meeting with the boards of trustees for the two targeted hospitals, and were able to enlist the help of several local physicians to help them make their case.

**MEDIA ENGAGEMENT:** Despite a cordial meeting between YVPC and the hospital trustee board members, the board was reluctant to make any firm commitments. YVPC was eventually told by board members their respective hospital budgets did not currently allow them to join the other hospital in providing comprehensive care. YVPC made the decision to reach out to the local media.

**MEDIA OUTLET(S):** YVPC identified the local daily newspaper, two local radio stations and a local independent TV station as the primary media outlets that could both reach their targets and create public pressure on the trustees to agree to YVPC's demands. Staff identified and followed reporters on Twitter who were covering violence and related issues at the various media.

**MEDIA TACTICS:** YVPC drafted a sign-on letter that was endorsed by the physicians who had earlier lent their support. The physicians also agreed to gather signatures from other doctors in the area to create a "Break the Chain of Violence -- Chain Letter" campaign. The letter called on the trustees to establish a protocol for all gunshot and stabbing victims to receive care from either a social worker or peer health educator while in the hospital by the December 2019 due date. YVPC staff decided to hold a press conference to introduce the chain letter campaign and gain public support.

## Message Strategy

- Frame the issue to reflect your values and support the policy goals.
- Create a message that describes the problem, the solution, and why it matters.
- Assess and improve the effectiveness of your message.
- Decide who will convey your message, and prepare them to deliver it.
- Gather the materials you will need to make your case.

**REFLECT VALUES:** YVPC staff emphasized the values of caring, inclusion, and community interconnectedness to connect with outside audiences. Their message helps frame their cause as not just serving victims of trauma, but also supporting families and loved ones – ultimately, serving entire communities impacted by violence. YVPC hoped to demonstrate to their target audience that rather than damaging a hospital's reputation, the violence prevention program enhances it.

**DEVELOP CORE MESSAGE:** By having already identified a specific problem, a solution, and corresponding values, YVPC staff had all three components for an effective message.

**ASSESS:** To help test the effectiveness of their messages, YVPC invited a few allies, including local business owners and faith leaders, to a brown bag lunch to get their feedback. A few even volunteered to join the media advocacy effort as community spokespeople.

**MESSENGERS:** Local physicians, survivors of violence, and the local business and faith leaders who volunteered to speak on YVPC's behalf were all briefed about the core message including problem, solution, and values, and encouraged to relay the core message through their own experience and point of view.

**MATERIALS:** YVPC staff gathered local data that supported their proposal, compiled the chain letter campaign into a bound book complete with photographs and other compelling visuals, and produced a brochure with information about their program.

### **Access Strategy**

- Determine when media attention could affect the policy process.
- Figure out how you will gain access to the media.
- Prepare newsworthy story elements to offer reporters.
- Pitch the story.
- Capture, assess, and reuse the news coverage.

**TIMING:** A YVPC staff member learned that October 2nd was International Day of Nonviolence, and knew this could be an opportunity for attracting media attention.

**ACCESS:** A press release and media advisory was drafted to announce the Break the Chain of Violence campaign on International Day of Nonviolence. Tweets were also sent to key reporters with information about the event.

**NEWSWORTHINESS:** YVPC staff determined there were a number of newsworthiness elements that would gain the interest of the news and social media: controversy – the concern over damaging the hospitals' reputations; injustice – it wasn't fair that trauma-informed services were not being provided to everyone in Addison; broad and local appeal; holiday link – International Day of Nonviolence; and personal angle – spokespeople with compelling personal stories to tell about the impact of violence.

**PITCH:** With newsworthy story elements in hand along with their core message, YVPC staff reached out to individual members of the media and social media along with a completed press release and media advisory.

**CAPTURE, ASSESS AND REUSE:** After advocates were successful in getting their news conference event in the local media and their campaign covered by social media, YVPC used the attention to get three letters to the editor published in local newspapers that supported their call for support services for trauma survivors. Two of YVPC's physician spokespeople also co-authored an op-ed explaining the value of the program to the whole community. YVPC sent examples of the local coverage to the board members, and reused the examples in a subsequent meeting with the trustees.

*By having already identified a specific problem, a solution, and corresponding values, YVPC staff had all three components for an effective message.*



# WORKSHEET: LAYERS OF STRATEGY

**Instructions:** We recommend planning your media advocacy efforts by answering key questions related to the four Layers of strategy: overall strategy, media strategy, message strategy and media access strategy. Answering the questions for each layer will help give you a clearer sense of your larger goals before you start developing your messages. As your advocacy campaign changes course, you can revisit each layer of strategy.

## OVERALL STRATEGY

**What is the problem?**

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**What is the solution?**

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**Who has the power to make that change?**

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**What is the target's position on your policy goal?**

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**What allies must be mobilized to apply the necessary pressure?**

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**Who opposes the policy and what will they say or do?**

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**What advocacy actions will you take to reach or influence your target?**

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## **MEDIA STRATEGY**

What is the best way to reach your target(s) at each stage of the campaign?

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If it is through the media, which outlets would reach your target audience?

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When would media attention make a difference in the policymaking process?

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Who will be involved in developing your media advocacy strategies?

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What communications protocol do you have in place?

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How will you build your organizational communications capacity?

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How will you evaluate your media efforts and decide when to change course?

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How will you capture news clippings and/or videos, and track coverage?

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Who will you send the news clips to (journalists, allies, targets, financial contributors) and what will you say?

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How will you follow up with your target(s) after media coverage?

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## MESSAGE STRATEGY

If your issue is currently in the news, how is it framed?

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Who is portrayed as responsible for the problem?

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Who is portrayed as responsible for the solution?

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What is left out of current coverage?

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Who or what types of people are quoted often?

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Who could make the case for the policy solution?

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What values support your perspective and policy solution?

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What is the most important message that would help convince your target to act?

*Make sure to answer the questions: What is the problem? What is the policy solution? Why does it matter?*

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What will you need to make your case (data, visuals, social math, policy research)?

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What will your opposition say? How will you respond to those arguments?

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## **MEDIA ACCESS STRATEGY**

**What aspects of your story are interesting, unusual, or otherwise newsworthy?**

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**When might be a good time of year to attract attention to this story?**

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**What can you do to get your story in the media?**

- \_ Create news (release a report, hold an event)
- \_ Piggyback on a breaking story
- \_ Use editorial strategies (op-eds, editorial board visits, letters to the editor)
- \_ Purchase paid ads

**What story elements (social math, visuals, media bites, authentic voices) can support your frame and package the story for journalists?**

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**What will you say when you call to pitch the story to reporters?**

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**How will you develop and nurture ongoing relationships with reporters? What authentic voices, information, perspectives or contacts can you offer them?**

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# GOTMME: A SIX-STEP TOOL FOR COMMUNICATION PLANNING

## Approach to communications strategy

The Healing Justice Alliance is committed to helping programs educate key stakeholders and the broader community on the adverse effects of trauma and promote healing and safety in our communities. Achieving this goal requires that we carefully identify target audiences, determine what we want them to do, and strategize how best to communicate with them. This worksheet, a hands-on companion to Berkeley Media Studies Group's [Layers of strategy](#) document, is designed to help you develop communications strategies to support your goals.

## What is GOTMME?

GOTMME stands for Goals, Objectives, Target, Message, Messenger and Evaluation. It is a 6-step strategic communications planning process. GOTMME is rooted in the key media advocacy concept that message is never first. In other words, before we can know what to include in our messages, we first need to clearly specify our goals, target audiences, and credible spokespeople to reach our target audiences.

- **Goals** are broad, overarching statements about what your organization hopes to achieve.
- **Objectives** are the specific, measurable actions that you will take to achieve your goals. Objectives describe who will do what by when. Objectives might include training community leaders to become effective spokespeople for violence prevention initiatives; holding meetings with policymakers or other key stakeholders; writing strategically timed [writing effective letters to the editor](#) or op-eds; drafting organization-wide talking points; holding events to build support for community-wide violence prevention initiatives; or creating posters. The important thing is to develop objectives that are strategically aligned with your goals.
- **Targets** are specific audiences who have the power to create the changes needed to prevent violence. Strategic communicators go beyond raising public awareness to focus on the primary targets — the key individuals and groups who have the power to institute necessary policies and norm changes. For example, primary targets might be city or county officials with the power to allocate additional resources for victims' services. Secondary targets are individuals and groups who can influence the primary targets. These might be leaders in HJA organizations, young people and others who have survived trauma and violence, faith leaders, physicians, public health officials, or other community members who can have an impact on the primary targets. The general public is usually not a target audience even though they may be exposed to the messages.
- **Messages** are the core statements your group wants to deliver to each target. Effective messages should answer three questions: What is the problem? What is the solution? Why does it matter? The three parts of the message don't have to be equal: Spend more time on the solution than the problem, and weave in values, such as fairness, interconnection, or prevention. People connect to your message when you effectively explain why your issue matters, and not just list facts or statistics.

*The Healing Justice Alliance is committed to helping programs educate key stakeholders and the broader community on the adverse effects of trauma and promote healing and safety in our communities.*

- **Messengers** can matter as much as the message itself, so be strategic when you select your spokespeople. Consider: Who will the targets respond to? Who might be a surprising and compelling messenger? Effective messengers might include family members who have been affected by violence, faith leaders, emergency room physicians, or local business leaders. Research shows that these important stakeholders' voices are largely absent from news coverage, so they can help fill an important void in the broader narrative about how violence affects our communities and who cares about remedying it. Because speaking to primary targets or members of the media (as a means of engaging secondary targets who can in turn reach primary targets) can be a challenge even for seasoned experts, practice is important. Messengers should be equipped with facts but also be able to express shared values. Many people can become powerful messengers. What's important is that they speak passionately to the change they want to see in the community.
- **Evaluation** is important because, ultimately, you will want to know if your communications efforts are having the desired effects. How you design the evaluation will depend on how you, your funders, or others will use it and what questions need to be answered. For example, a basic evaluation might describe the media advocacy actions taken, who completed them, what outcomes stemmed from the actions, and any follow-up steps that are needed. Or you may want answers to other questions such as: Did messengers say what they intended? Was our message conveyed accurately in news coverage? Were coalition partners satisfied with our contribution and/or do they have feedback for us?

Stay focused with your evaluation, just as you should stay focused with your overall strategy, objectives, messages and messengers.



*Because speaking to primary targets or members of the media (as a means of engaging secondary targets who can in turn reach primary targets) can be a challenge even for seasoned experts, practice is important.*



## GOTMME PLANNING TOOL

This worksheet is designed to help guide you through the process of developing a communications strategy that is aligned with your overall goals. The six strategic questions on this worksheet are based on BMSG's [Layers of strategy](#) approach. GOTMME stands for Goals, Objectives, Target, Message, Messenger and Evaluation:

<b>GOAL</b>	
<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	
<b>TARGET(S)</b>	
<b>MESSAGE(S)</b>	
<b>MESSENGER(S)</b>	
<b>EVALUATION</b>	

## GOTMME PLANNING TOOL EXAMPLE: URBAN PEACE MOVEMENT

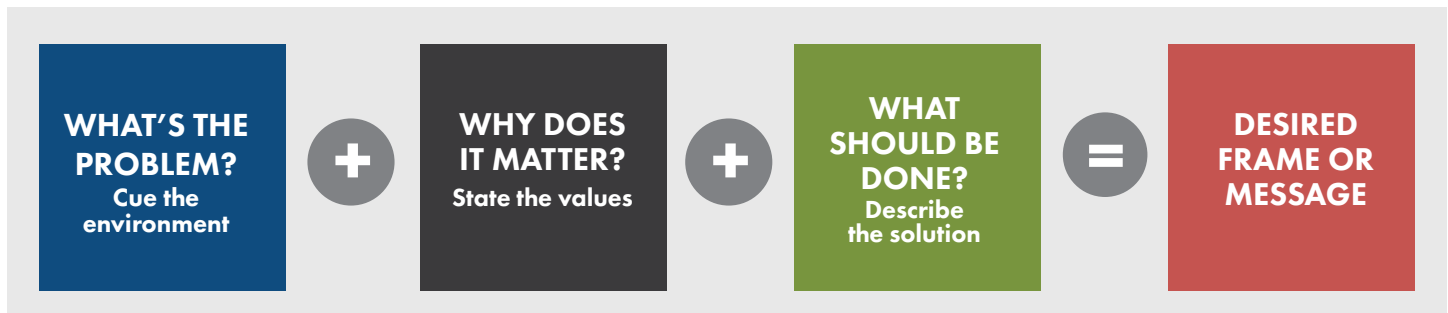
**Background:** Urban Peace Movement is a nonprofit organization based in Oakland, California, dedicated to creating community conditions that prevent violence by investing in young people. To support their goals, Urban Peace Movement and its allies worked to pass California’s Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act, a bill that would create barriers to placing youth in the adult criminal justice system. Advocates did not see this piece of legislation as a panacea, but as an intermediate step toward their broader goal of violence prevention and as an opportunity to advance their overarching “Truth and Re-investment” frame. To Urban Peace Movement and its allies, Truth and Re-investment means shifting resources away from exclusively punitive approaches toward investments in education and community development in low-income communities of color. Through a combination of traditional advocacy and media advocacy, Urban Peace Movement and its partners began working toward passage of the Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act. Their GOTMME strategy, which involves policy advocacy, is below. It is important to note that organizations should carefully consider legal and grant-related restrictions before engaging in policy advocacy.

<b>GOAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To pass the Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act of 2016.</li><li>• To foster youth development, youth voice, and youth participation in setting policies related to criminal justice reform and community investment.</li></ul>
<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To develop and disseminate messages to advance the “Truth and Re-investment” frame.</li><li>• To collect 1,000 signatures in support of the Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act.</li><li>• With coalition partners, to get three op-eds published in local newspapers between April and May 2015.</li><li>• With coalition partners, to get at least five letters to the editor published in local newspapers in response to news stories about community violence and related issues.</li><li>• To train five spokespeople from partnering organizations who can reliably be called on to respond to interviewer requests.</li><li>• With community partners, to hold at least two press conferences, rallies, or other public events that raise public awareness about the Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act, and that promote our Truth and Re-investment frame</li><li>• To ensure that at least one of the events above makes it onto local TV news.</li></ul>
<b>TARGET</b>	<p><b>Primary target:</b> Communities of color, new voters, allies.</p> <p><b>Secondary Target:</b> All California voters.</p>
<b>MESSAGE</b>	<p><b>Problem:</b> Overwhelming research has demonstrated that youth in the adult system return to prison at higher rates than those in the juvenile system, and they experience lifelong consequences related to having felonies on their record such as barriers to finding employment, housing and other basic necessities.</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> The Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act puts the decision-making about which youth should be sent to the adult system back in the hands of judges, instead of prosecutors. It begins to reverse the damage that was done when Proposition 21 (a California ballot measure passed in 2000 that opened the door to placing juveniles in the adult criminal justice system) was passed.</p> <p><b>Why it matters:</b> Children have no place in the adult criminal justice system. When you try kids as adults, they are denied education and rehabilitative services while at the same time are exposed to extreme sentences and harsher conditions.</p>
<b>MESENTERS</b>	Formerly incarcerated youth; community leaders; local educators
<b>EVALUATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Did we successfully collect 1,000 signatures?</li><li>• Did we successfully publish three op-eds?</li><li>• Did we get at least five letters to the editor published?</li><li>• Did we train five spokespeople from our organization?</li><li>• Did these spokespeople report greater confidence in speaking to the media?</li><li>• Did we hold at least two press conferences, rallies, or other public events?</li><li>• Were these events covered on local TV news? How many outlets covered the event?</li><li>• Monitor the news for our overall frame: Did we observe other reporters reinforcing our frame of “justice re-investment”?</li></ul>

## DEVELOPING POWERFUL MESSAGES

Delivering effective messages that support violence prevention takes more than just having a good set of talking points. The same message can have a different impact depending on who delivers it and who hears it. While we have to mean the same thing when we talk about violence and trauma, we don't all have to say the exact same thing. Often, the most effective messages are derived from personal experience or expertise.

In this tool, we introduce three basic components of an effective message: a statement of the problem, a description of why the issue matters, and a solution. Messages do not necessarily need to follow that order, but they should include each component. We will describe each of these components, and then give an example of how they can be put together to create strong messages. The last page is a message development worksheet you can use to personalize your own messages.



### Stating the problem: How can we frame violence as a public health issue?

Framing violence from a public health perspective is challenging because it runs contrary to the way violence is often understood by the public and presented in the media. News stories often depict violence as a random, inevitable occurrence. People of color are infrequently represented as survivors of violence. And the environmental contributors to violence, such as a lack of counseling services for young people who have experienced violence, are seldom brought into view. The challenges are formidable, but the good news is that research suggests audiences' understanding of how to address violence can be significantly influenced by how the issue is framed.

When deciding how to frame your message, consider the starting point for the conversation, especially for your key target audiences. What are the ideas your target is likely to hold, and how will this influence the way they make sense of your message? (You can use the [Layers of strategy](#) and [GOTMME](#) tools in this toolkit to identify your key target audiences.)

In the U.S., personal responsibility is a strongly held default frame: most people think that individuals are masters of their own destiny. The trouble with this default frame is that if individuals are solely responsible for their own success, then they are also to blame when things don't work out for them. To reframe violence from a public health perspective, we need to bring the structural and environmental context into view so that personal responsibility isn't the only consideration. People need to see the whole picture so that, for example, when we ask for institutional changes in how young people are treated, the policy proposal makes sense.

Our task, then, is to tell stories that bring the broader context and the root causes of violence into the frame. When a story focuses entirely on an individual, it can reinforce the idea that violence must be solved by individual effort alone. We call individually focused stories "portraits" because while the person is in clear view, the frame captures little of their surroundings. In contrast to portrait stories, "landscape" stories bring the broader environment into view. Because there's often more to say than time allows, it's important to be strategic about which aspects of the landscape to illustrate.

If the solution you are proposing is hospital-based, for example, then focus on the key role that hospitals must play in ending violence. The more vividly you describe how safe environments and our institutions can help prevent violence, the more clearly our audiences will understand the importance of investing in needed solutions.

Another strategy for reframing violence is telling the stories of young men of color who are survivors of violence. This is critical because until their stories become part of the broader narrative around who violence impacts, it is unlikely that resources will be allocated to ensure they get the services they need. At Healing Justice Alliance, we frequently see how the default frame of individual responsibility intersects with structural, institutional or interpersonal racism to create barriers for young men of color. For example, many in HJA have noted that when a young man of color shows up in the hospital with a gunshot wound, he is often assumed to be gang-affiliated. Telling the stories of young men of color who are not only survivors of violence, but also helping others to heal from violence, can help audiences see young men of color as partners in violence prevention and bring awareness to their need for meaningful connections, strong support, and culturally appropriate services.

Finally, we can underscore the fact that violence is preventable by explaining that trauma is one of its key causes — and one we know how to address. HJA sites have demonstrated that violence can be decreased drastically by using trauma-informed approaches in our hospitals, schools and in other places in our community. When we highlight the connection between violence and trauma, and show the powerful impacts of investing in prevention, we help the public understand the need to treat violence like any other preventable health problem.

## Values

Values resonate with audiences more deeply than facts or statistics, so state the core values that support your work early on in your message. There are many values connected to violence prevention. Be open to thinking about values that resonate most strongly with your work, or that you think will resonate with your target. Here are three that are particularly relevant to HJA: fairness, interconnection and prevention.

- **Fairness:** There is enormous injustice with not only who is affected by violence, but also with the quality of care people receive when they are victims of violence. You can describe, for example, the inherent unfairness in the fact that violence is the leading cause of death for young African Americans. Link to the environment by describing how underinvestment in communities of color has led to conditions of trauma where violence can take hold. You can also describe unfairness in the overall poor quality of treatment people of color often receive when they survive violence.
- **Interconnection:** The value of interconnection evokes the idea that all people in a community are fundamentally united—what is good for one member of your community is good for all. The value reminds people that we all are part of a community and what we do can touch people we may never even meet. You can evoke this value, for example, to help people understand that a program they may not benefit from directly is still in their best interest. A powerful example of a statement invoking the value of interconnection is a frequently cited quotation from Martin Luther King Jr.: “In a real sense, all life is interrelated. All people are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.” (Martin Luther King Jr, Feb 1963).
- **Prevention:** Prevention is a core value for many in violence prevention who recognize that intervening early to address trauma can save lives in the long run. Prevention also saves money and is simply the smart thing to do.

Select values that ring true to you, and are consistent with the way you frame the problem and describe your solution.

## Solution

Violence prevention requires a complex array of strategies—more than can be conveyed in a brief statement or interview. Time and space constraints require being strategic about elevating one core part of the solution – the part that you think your target audience has the power to change. A good rule of thumb for your solution statement is to ask yourself whether it answers the following question: **who** needs to do **what** by **when**? The answer to those questions will come from your overall strategy ([see tool #1](#)).

For example, suppose you are calling on your hospital board of trustees to increase funding for trauma services to male survivors of violence. In this case, you may want to end your message by saying, "...to ensure all patients in our city get the care they deserve, the Trustees of Roosevelt Hospital must allocate funding for trauma services for all victims of violence, especially our young men of color who are most affected by it. We have the funds to make sure we can do something about this problem right away. At their board meeting next Tuesday, we are counting on the Trustees to make the right decision."

Whatever solution you seek, make sure to name the person or group responsible for implementing the change, the specific change you want them to make, and by when. The more specific you can be with your solution, the better.

## Bringing Equity and Racial Justice to the Fore

The default frame of individual responsibility means we have to do more than name disparities to cue a racial justice perspective. For example, if we only say there are different rates of exposure to violence based on race, audiences may default to the view that the group experiencing violence is on their own to solve it. To make the case for investing in violence prevention, we must include context—historical, environmental, political—to help people understand the origin of disparities. We can communicate, for example, about long-standing policies of neighborhood disinvestment, underfunded schools, and other unjust policies that made it possible for violence to take hold. This helps audiences understand why we need structural solutions that address these long-standing injustices.

When communicating about equity and racial justice, the messenger can often matter as much as the message itself. Think about who gets to develop these messages: if it's just one or two high-level people in your organization or coalition, chances are there are opportunities to be more inclusive. Many people can become powerful messengers, including young people who have survived violence, teachers, social workers, local business owners, faith leaders and others. What's important is that they can speak with conviction and convey the specific demand.

## Sample Messages

The following message provides an example of how a problem statement, solution statement, and values statement invoking fairness can come together in a cohesive message:

*"Many of our young men of color have had to deal with challenges no young person should have to face. After decades of disinvestment, many of our African American and Latino youth are living in communities without the resources and services needed to prevent violence. In fact, violence is the number one cause of death among young African Americans here in the city they call home. It's not fair that on top of this, those who enter our hospital system often do not get the care they need. When the city council votes on the upcoming violence prevention ordinance, it's imperative that they approve funding for trauma outreach workers. Once this ordinance is approved, we will be able to reduce trauma in the lives of our young men of color and make our whole community strong and healthy for years to come."*

Below is a similar statement, this time invoking the value of interconnection. Note how the basic structure of the message can stay the same, even as you strategically change the solution and values you highlight.

*"Many of our young men of color have had to deal with challenges no young person should have to face. It's unacceptable that violence is the number one cause of death among young African Americans here in the city they call home. After decades of disinvestment, The [insert the name of your city or county] school board has an opportunity today to address this crisis by creating a trauma-informed school system where all students who have survived violence get the support they need. Here in [insert the name of your city], we understand that when all our young people are supported — especially those who have experienced harms — our entire community is strengthened. We are one community, and today we call on the school board to ensure that our schools and classrooms are safe, supportive places for all our young people."*

Use the worksheet below to develop your own message with these three components.

## Summary

While stories about real people are deeply moving and inspiring, telling one person's story alone may not be enough to help audiences understand the importance of a public health approach to violence prevention. To expand audiences' understanding, we have to broaden the stories we tell. Painting a more complete picture by telling landscape stories can help people see that neighborhoods, schools, and hospitals all have a role to play in ending community violence. Once these connections are made, it will make more sense to our audiences why we need to support trauma-informed solutions. Remember that strong messages include three components: a statement of the problem, a statement of your values, and a description of the solution.



*While stories about real people are deeply moving and inspiring, telling one person's story alone may not be enough to help audiences understand the importance of a public health approach to violence prevention.*





## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS EVALUATION TOOL

Evaluation is important because, ultimately, you will want to know if your communications efforts are having the intended impact. One way to use this tool is at the end of a strategic communications campaign to determine what worked, and what can be improved. There may be certain activities that consume significant time and resources that you will not want to repeat. There may be other successes where you will want to invest greater energy and resources in the future.

Another way to use this evaluation tool is as an informal checklist to make sure your organization is equipped to respond to media requests and to proactively reach key stakeholders. You do not need to answer each question every time — use the questions that best suit your needs.

### Developing Strategy

- Have we identified key goals and objectives?
- Have we identified specific communications strategies that will help us meet our goals?
- Have we figured out how we will know if we were successful?
- Have we decided what role, if any, the media will play in helping us reach our goals?
- Which of our communications activities have proven most successful? Which have been less helpful?

### Equipping spokespeople

- How many spokespeople did we train this year?
- Of the spokespeople that we trained, how many had the opportunity to deliver their message in a real world situation?
- Were our spokespeople adequately prepared to speak to their target audiences?
- Did spokespeople report feeling confident after delivering their messages?
- Did our spokespeople report saying what they intended, or did they find themselves going “off message”?
- In subsequent efforts, who else might we want to include as a spokesperson?

### Developing talking points or core messages for your organization

- Did we develop talking points for our goals and objectives?
- Are staff members familiar with our talking points?
- Do staff members feel comfortable and confident talking with community stakeholders, journalists and other audiences? Can they adapt talking points to different situations?
- Which of our talking points do we feel most comfortable with? Which of our talking points need revision?

### Engaging with the media

- How many journalists have we identified that cover violence or related issues? Do we have their contact information?
- How many journalists have we invited to an event, to visit our program or to meet the young people we serve?
- How many stories did we pitch? How many pitches became stories?
- How many letters to the editor did we submit this year? Were any published?
- How many op-eds did we submit this year? Were any published?
- Does everyone on our staff know what to do when a reporter calls?
- How can we better equip staff members to respond to media requests? Do we need more staff members trained to handle media requests, or do we want to centralize this with just a few staff members?

PART 2

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**TOOLS FOR WORKING  
WITH THE NEWS MEDIA**

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## NEWS MONITORING

We encourage programs to monitor the news because of its far-reaching influence on public perceptions of trauma and community violence. In the absence of direct, personal experience with violence, much of what the public knows about the subject comes from the news media. The news has a particularly strong influence on decision-makers, who often respond to what they see in the news and sometimes even consider it a barometer of public opinion. Therefore, understanding how trauma and community violence are portrayed in the news offers important insight into how the public and policymakers may think about the causes of and solutions to community violence.

By monitoring the news, advocates seek to answer two fundamental questions: *"If the public's information about violence came only from the media, what would they know? What wouldn't they know?"* Answering these two questions helps identify gaps in news coverage and points the way toward strategies to shape news coverage in a positive direction.

### Reasons to Monitor the News

HJA partners have noted that victim-blaming and an overemphasis on individual responsibility are core challenges with media portrayals of community violence. As one of our colleagues stated, young men of color who survive violence are at times asked, "What did you do to get yourself shot?" rather than, "What happened to you?"

This first question — which implies violence survivors are responsible for harms done to them — reflects distorted patterns of news coverage of violence. Typically, the news underrepresents people of color as victims of crime and depicts crime as a series of isolated events disconnected from broader social forces. In fact, research shows that news stories about individual crimes appear at roughly [10 times the rate](#) as stories about the broader issues of community violence or community safety.

News coverage that disproportionately features individual crimes reinforces a long-standing cultural bias that we call the default frame of "rugged individualism." This frame falsely attributes social and health problems exclusively to individual flaws as if everything can be solved with just more personal responsibility. Personal responsibility is important, of course, and it's important to help individuals find alternatives to violence. But when news stories frame violence as simply a matter of personal responsibility, the root causes of community violence and policy solutions to it are likely to remain hidden from view. News monitoring allows us to identify these and other patterns in news coverage which will make it easier to confront and correct it. As a society, we can't solve the problem of violence if we can't see it in its entirety. In the near term and at the local level, news monitoring can help programs identify reporters who need more background information on the root causes of violence and how trauma-informed practices can help—and monitoring can also help identify reporters who are doing a good job covering the issue.

### Tools for news monitoring

Systematically monitoring the news is a powerful way to identify opportunities to insert your frame into news coverage and to evaluate progress toward changing the discourse. You don't have to do a formal research study, but you do need a way to easily find the news coverage that has an impact on how key audiences see your issue. User-friendly tools are available that can help with news monitoring:

- [Feedly](#) is a news aggregator application that combines news from different sources and stores them in one place.
- [Google Alerts](#) allows users to identify topic areas they wish to track and receive daily emails, with links to relevant stories.
- [Hootsuite](#) allows users to sort and organize Twitter and Facebook feeds by issue area, making them easier to find without endless scrolling.

To see an example of news monitoring, you can sign up for [In the News](#), BMSG's daily news monitoring service.

## Key news monitoring questions

If we want to build support for the changes we seek, we need to make sure that not only the work of HJA groups is featured in the news, but also that issues of violence and trauma are framed in ways that broaden the conversation. The following are examples of the kinds of questions to consider when monitoring the news:

- **Where and when was the piece published? Who wrote the piece?** Collecting basic information allows you to identify which periodicals or stations are paying attention to the issues of violence and trauma. Knowing who wrote the article or produced the segment allows you to track and build relationships with the journalists that are covering violence ([see tool 6, “Working with journalists,”](#) for more about this).
- **Who speaks?** Journalists are constantly looking for reliable spokespeople to provide quotes and sound bites that bring their stories to life. BMSG’s research on California news coverage of violence found that law enforcement officials are currently [more likely to be quoted](#) in news stories about violence than other key stakeholders. Review news stories to see whether other key voices — such as survivors of violence, social workers, educators, physicians, business leaders and parents — are featured as well. Once you learn whose voices are missing, you’ll be better able to figure out how to fill the gap. You can start with a simple email to a reporter to invite them to a meeting and have them learn about your work.
- **How are survivors portrayed?** In light of the biases described above, it’s important to ask whether survivors of violence are portrayed in a humanized way. Are they implicitly portrayed as being at fault for the violence they survived? Are they portrayed as helpless victims, or change agents actively supporting others who have experienced violence?
- **Does the story address root causes of violence?** Because of the overrepresentation of crime stories in the news, it is worthwhile to examine the extent to which stories highlight the systemic causes of violence such as underinvestment in low-income communities of color, easy access to weapons, toxic masculinity or other social injustices.
- **Does the story provide an equity or racial justice lens?** Contemporary and historical race-based injustices are often among the most important root causes of violence, yet it is uncommon for these factors to be discussed in the news. Journalists who write compellingly about racial justice can be key allies in highlighting the work of HJA groups and elevating themes of healing and justice.
- **What solutions, if any, are discussed?** Traditionally, news highlights problems more than solutions. Stories that bring solutions to the fore, however, play an important role in helping the public and policymakers understand that violence is a solvable problem in our communities.

In an ideal world, news monitoring is done on an ongoing basis. But if that’s not feasible, you can also do news monitoring as a short-term exercise or in response to an immediate need. For example, if your organization aims to equip young people to speak with the media, a news monitoring exercise might be included as part of their training. Using one of the news aggregating tools above, you can pick out 5 or 10 print or T.V. stories, and then work as a team to analyze them, using the table below as a guide. In addition to providing a sampling of the recent news coverage, this exercise is a great way to help young people learn to critically analyze news stories about violence.

If you are planning to hold a news conference or some other media event, you also might consider doing news monitoring in the weeks leading up to the event so that you have a clear sense of what current coverage has focused on and how you can “piggyback” on it.

There is no one “right way” to monitor the news; what’s important is to go about it in a way that is realistic for your organization and as systematic as possible. You can use the table on the worksheet below, or a modified version of it, to help you organize any news monitoring process.





## CHANGING THE DISCOURSE ABOUT VIOLENCE: SHAPING STORIES ACROSS SECTORS

Ensuring that our communities are safe, trauma-informed, and free of violence is a multi-sector effort. Health care, schools, businesses, public health, youth-serving organizations and other groups all have an important role to play. Yet even though violence directly impacts — and is impacted by — virtually all sectors of society, it is most likely to show up in just one section of the news: crime stories.

BMSG research found that news stories about crime outweigh stories about community violence by a 10:1 ratio. This means that when policymakers or the public read or watch a news story about violence, they are much more likely to learn about an individual person harming someone else than they are to learn about a community-wide problem that can be solved with a public health approach. What's at stake here is that if the problem is framed solely in terms of "bad people," punishment may be the only solution that comes to mind.

To help policymakers and the public understand the root causes of violence and what can be done about them, it is important to seize every opportunity to begin to tell more complete stories about violence and violence prevention across news sectors. Here are a few examples of how the public health approach to violence prevention could appear in stories outside the criminal justice realm:

- An education story about socio-emotional learning could discuss the potential impact of these programs on violence prevention.
- A story about a newly approved hospital expansion could include what that hospital will be doing (or should be doing!) to provide trauma-informed, culturally appropriate care to young men of color who have experienced violent injury.
- A business story could talk about local businesses willing to "ban the box" and hire people regardless of whether they have prior convictions.

What connections to violence prevention would you like to see in news coverage in your local area? To get started, here's a quick exercise you can do with a team of colleagues:

*"Every time there's a story about \_\_\_\_\_, it should mention \_\_\_\_\_."*

Although answers will vary from one site to the next, here are a few possible HJA-style responses that may help spark some ideas of your own:

*"Every time there's a story about health care services it should mention trauma-informed care in hospitals."*

*"Every time there's a story about a shooting it should mention the work of violence interrupters."*

*"Every time there's a story about high school dropout rates it should mention how trauma-informed programs in school improve graduation rates."*

This exercise doesn't need to take long. In fact, you could do it in just a few minutes at a staff meeting. The answers can help you focus your strategic communications goals and identify the information you will want to share with reporters.

If you're looking to take a slightly deeper dive, the worksheet below provides another way to approach the same issue. Each row lists a different news beat, and the columns ask questions that prompt you to consider whose voices are heard in the news, what stories are told, and how those stories connect back to each sector. As always, let your overall strategy guide your answers. What are the changes you want to see in the community, and how would news coverage need to change to garner public support for those changes?

## WORKSHEET: SHAPING STORIES ACROSS SECTORS

*Instructions:* The questions below ask you to consider how you can connect community safety to news stories in sectors that are not traditionally associated with community violence and safety. The following page contains an example.

What sector does your story idea connect with?	How does community violence affect stakeholders in this sector – doctors, students, employers, etc.?	What does violence prevention look like within this sector, and how are stakeholders working to address it?	How does the sector’s work to prevent community violence contribute to building safe communities?
<b>EDUCATION</b>			
<b>BUSINESS</b> (finance, business development, private sector, etc.)			
<b>HEALTHCARE</b>			
<b>OTHER</b>			

# WORKSHEET EXAMPLE: SHAPING STORIES ACROSS SECTORS

What sector does your story idea connect with?	How does community violence affect stakeholders in this sector – doctors, students, employers, etc.?	What does violence prevention look like within this sector, and how are stakeholders working to address it?	How does the sector’s work to prevent community violence contribute to building safe communities?
<b>EDUCATION</b>	A story about how classmates use social media to inspire hope and resilience	A story about how socio-emotional learning in schools could address the impact of these programs on students’ short and long-term coping skills and resilience – and the reduction of community violence in communities that invest in children’s emotional wellbeing.	A data-driven success story that shows lower suspension and expulsion rates in schools that implement trauma-informed practices. The story mentions how restorative school practices help promote community safety.
<b>BUSINESS (finance, business development, private sector, etc.)</b>	A story about how community outreach workers have succeeded in helping youth formerly involved with gangs get jobs with local businesses.	A story about how local businesses that are willing to “ban the box” and hire formerly incarcerated people create safer communities for all.	A story about how a local credit union that offers low-interest loans to low-income people explains how credit helps created a thriving, safe community.
<b>HEALTHCARE</b>	A story describes the unmet mental health needs of patients who have survived violence, and the toll this takes on survivors, their family members and the hospital staff who provide them with treatment.	A feature story on a trauma surgeon who has taken the initiative to create a peer support program for gunshot victims in the hospital.	A story about how increasing access to mental health services for survivors of violence reduces trauma, thereby decreasing the chances of re-victimization.

## ELEMENTS OF NEWSWORTHINESS

Unfortunately, community violence happens every day – but fortunately, so do efforts to make our communities safer. When a story about community violence or trauma is covered in the news, we can ask, why did that particular story appear in the news on that particular day? While many factors influence why reporters and editors select some stories and not others, there are patterns. The elements of newsworthiness help advocates make sense of what these patterns are and give us ideas for how to make our stories compelling for reporters. Reporters commonly refer to the catalyst for a story as a "news hook." The table below provides 11 elements of newsworthiness that you can use to help find the news hook for your story. Sometimes, your news hook will "piggyback" on a story that's already been in the news. Other times, you will be pitching a new story. When you pitch your story to reporters, emphasizing what makes your story newsworthy ([see tool 9 "Pitching your story"](#)) can increase the chances of getting your story reported.

ELEMENT OF NEWSWORTHINESS	KEY QUESTIONS	EXAMPLE
<b>CONTROVERSY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What drama or controversy do you want to highlight?</li> <li>• What is at stake? For whom?</li> <li>• Should a business, institution, or government agency be doing something differently?</li> <li>• Are rules or regulations being violated?</li> <li>• Who is benefiting from this problem not being solved?</li> <li>• Who is losing out? How?</li> </ul>	<p>A controversial ballot initiative would reduce the size of the prison population and reduce recidivism in your state – but some argue it would make communities less safe by releasing low-level offenders into the community. The debate that this initiative inspired was the catalyst for a great deal of thoughtful coverage about the challenges, risks, and rewards of building and maintaining safe communities across the state.</p>
<b>IRONY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is surprising about this story?</li> <li>• Is there a contradiction to point out between how things should work and how they are really happening?</li> <li>• Is there hypocrisy to reveal?</li> </ul>	<p>In an effort to drum up business and increase awareness of its services, a local hospital initiated a major billboard campaign throughout the city. Yet despite the fact that people of color are in the majority among hospital staff and the surrounding community, providers depicted in the ads were almost entirely white. The ads sparked controversy, and several local media commentators noted the ads were emblematic of deeper power imbalances within the city. Violence prevention and trauma-informed care advocates used the irony of these ads to write a letter to the editor calling for culturally appropriate services at the hospital for people of color.</p>

ELEMENT OF NEWSWORTHINESS	KEY QUESTIONS	EXAMPLE
<b>INJUSTICE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is inequitable or unfair in the story you are pitching?</li> <li>• About the decision of an institution, business, or government agency? About the treatment of a community or vulnerable group?</li> <li>• Is this injustice serious enough for the media to adopt an ongoing watchdog role?</li> </ul>	<p>Advocates denounce inflammatory coverage of a proposed statewide policy that would eliminate unfair barriers to hiring formerly incarcerated people.</p>
<b>ANNIVERSARY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can your story be connected to the anniversary of a local, national, or historical milestone – like an incident of violence, or the beginning of a safety initiative?</li> <li>• Was legislation passed or regulation approved that has made communities safer – or should have?</li> <li>• Does the anniversary offer the opportunity to ask what happened then and where we are now?</li> <li>• What progress has been, or should have been made?</li> </ul>	<p>On the two year anniversary of a high profile school shooting, politicians and gun control advocates called for stricter and more comprehensive background checks for people purchasing guns online and at gun shows.</p>
<b>BROAD POPULATION INTEREST</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does this story affect a lot of people, or does it relate to groups of special concern, like children, young men of color, or educators?</li> <li>• Can you think of a way that the story affects a lot of people even if it is related to a specific group?</li> <li>• How can your story emphasize the aspects of community violence prevention that are important, interesting, or appealing to the broadest number of viewers or readers possible?</li> </ul>	<p>Advocates making the case for trauma-informed care describe their city's pride in the quality of care at their world-class trauma center. They explain that, in order to live up to its reputation and make all people in their city proud, the hospital must not just treat physical trauma, but psychological trauma as well.</p>

ELEMENT OF NEWSWORTHINESS	KEY QUESTIONS	EXAMPLE
<b>EVENT/STORY WITH LOCAL INTEREST</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there an event related to community safety (like a talk, fair, ribbon cutting ceremony, etc.) that readers or viewers should know about? If not, can you create an event?</li> <li>• How can your story about the event emphasize solutions and collective action?</li> <li>• What about your story is important or meaningful to the local audience that reads a specific outlet or watches a specific channel?</li> <li>• Note of caution: Planning events takes a lot of work. If you are doing an event exclusively for media attention, you may want to make sure ahead of time that your event will get covered.</li> </ul>	<p>Through a broad-based community effort, residents in your city have joined forces to implement a 4-day moratorium on violence.</p>
<b>SEASONAL/ HOLIDAY LINK</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can your story, issue, or policy be connected to a holiday or seasonal event?</li> </ul>	<p>As the holidays approach, writers invoke peace and the spirit of the season in articles that point to childhood trauma as a root cause of community violence. They call for policies that would build resilience in young people – and ultimately, would lead to safer communities.</p>
<b>BREAKTHROUGH/ MILESTONE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the story describe breaking news relating to community violence?</li> <li>• Does the story mark an important medical, political, or historical first?</li> <li>• Can you make the case that, given a particular event, decision or action, things will never be the same with respect to community violence, or to safety in your community?</li> </ul>	<p>A housing project in your area is the site of an innovative violence interruption program. The precedent-setting program has led to a significant milestone: 365 days without a single homicide.</p>

ELEMENT OF NEWSWORTHINESS	KEY QUESTIONS	EXAMPLE
<b>PERSONAL ANGLE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a person who can serve as a representative example of the broader problem of community violence – for example, a person with direct experience who can provide an authentic voice?</li> <li>• Is that person prepared to talk to a reporter about community violence in a way that emphasizes the necessary policy solutions, and illustrates that prevention is possible?</li> </ul>	<p>A local mother who lost a child to violence comes forward to tell her personal story of loss, and advocates for greater funding for violence-prevention initiatives. People who have lost loved ones to violence are powerful and effective authentic voices for systemic changes that would prevent other families from experiencing their loss.</p>
<b>NEW DATA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the story describe novel data or statistics that are important for understanding community violence and what to do about it?</li> <li>• Is there a way to report on the data in a way that emphasizes its implications for policy solutions and preventing future incidents?</li> <li>• Are there national data that can be disaggregated and made local?</li> </ul>	<p>Your medical center just completed a 3-year study showing that the odds of re-victimization among young men in your trauma-informed program are much lower than among those who did not have access to trauma-informed care. The release of local data is an important hook for reporters that can help you disseminate important findings to a much wider audience.</p>
<b>CELEBRITY OR POP CULTURE APPEAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do any celebrities support your issue and policy goal?</li> <li>• Would they be willing to lend a hand to your efforts?</li> <li>• Is there a local celebrity or community leader with public standing whose affiliation with your site would bring good attention?</li> <li>• If you can form a partnership with a celebrity or public figure, will the relationship be worthwhile – and predictable? (A word of caution: We can't control what celebrities do, nor the media attention they attract. Would it be devastating for the organization if, in the future, the celebrity were involved in a controversy antithetical to your organization's values?)</li> </ul>	<p>A well known musician will be performing at a summer festival dedicated to promoting alternatives to violence. In partnership with your organization, she becomes an outspoken advocate for violence prevention initiatives.</p>



## Examples of HJA in the News

### Example 1

The Seattle Medium, Seattle’s largest African American newspaper, [ran a feature story](#) on the work of Dr. John Rich and Dr. Ted Corbin, who co-direct Philadelphia’s “Healing Hurt People.” The article describes the commitment of Rich and Corbin to ensure that young men of color in Philadelphia have the opportunity to heal when they experience trauma. “We see young people (8 to 30 years old) who have more potential, intelligence and strength than we had...” Rich said. “But they have the same kind of disruption in their lives — post-traumatic stress disorder — as soldiers returning from war-torn countries. Most of the time, the healthcare system treats [victims] as if they caused the injuries themselves and don’t provide them care. We realized...how critical it was to address those issues.”

**What makes it newsworthy?** The personal angle is what makes this story newsworthy. The Seattle Medium has a history of featuring the work of African Americans leading change in a variety of fields. In this story, they chose to feature the work of doctors Corbin and Rich.

### Example 2

On April 13, 2017, [National Public Radio ran a story](#) featuring new data collected by the Vera Center on Youth Justice. Because the Vera Institute’s work built on earlier research conducted by “Make it Happen,” a Brooklyn-based HJA site, the story included an interview with Make it Happen’s Kenton Kirby. Kirby, a licensed social worker, used the interview as an opportunity to highlight the need for more culturally appropriate victims’ services: “So you have this disconnect of what does the help or support look like when [traditional health services] have been oppressive to communities of color. We approach the work we do with young men from that lens, understanding that it’s really important for us to build trust.”

**What makes it newsworthy?** Newly released data on an understudied issue was the news hook for this story. Because the Vera Institute’s study focused on the most effective ways to reach young men of color who survived violence, it made sense that the story would include quotes from Kirby, an expert on the issue.

### Example 3

In an [op-ed published in the Huffington Post](#), Brian Pacheco of Safe Horizons piggy-backed on news stories about the sexual assault of the son of a former NBA star to highlight the need for culturally appropriate trauma-informed services. Zeke Thomas, the son of NBA legend Isaiah Thomas, is a gay African American man who publicly shared his story as a survivor of sexual assault. In his op-ed, Pacheco highlighted the fact that many young men of color experience various forms of assault yet do not get the care they need. Pacheco further described the need for taking an intersectional approach to trauma-informed care that accounts for the unique needs of LGBTQ+ young people who often fall through the cracks of traditional victims’ services.

**What makes it newsworthy?** Brian Pacheco used the strategy of piggy-backing on breaking news about a celebrity to make his story newsworthy and to grab readers’ attention.

*“But they have the same kind of disruption in their lives — post-traumatic stress disorder — as soldiers returning from war-torn countries. Most of the time, the healthcare system treats [victims] as if they caused the injuries themselves and don’t provide them care. We realized...how critical it was to address those issues.”*

*- Dr. John Rich*

## WORKSHEET: IDENTIFYING NEWS HOOKS FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

*Instructions:* Based on the description of each element of newsworthiness, try to think of a possible news hook for as many of the elements as possible. Consider what has been in the news lately in your area. Are there opportunities to piggyback on existing news? Are there opportunities to generate new leads for reporters?

ELEMENT OF NEWSWORTHINESS	KEY QUESTIONS	YOUR EXAMPLE
<b>CONTROVERSY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What drama or controversy do you want to highlight?</li> <li>• What is at stake? For whom?</li> <li>• Should a business, institution, or government agency be doing something differently?</li> <li>• Are rules or regulations being violated?</li> <li>• Who is benefiting from this problem not being solved?</li> <li>• Who is losing out? How?</li> </ul>	
<b>IRONY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is surprising about this story?</li> <li>• Is there a contradiction to point out between how things should work and how they are really happening?</li> <li>• Is there hypocrisy to reveal?</li> </ul>	
<b>INJUSTICE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is inequitable or unfair in the story you are pitching?</li> <li>• About the decision of an institution, business, or government agency? About the treatment of a community or vulnerable group?</li> <li>• Is this injustice serious enough for the media to adopt an ongoing watchdog role?</li> </ul>	
<b>ANNIVERSARY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can your story be connected to the anniversary of a local, national, or historical milestone – like an incident of violence, or the beginning of a safety initiative?</li> <li>• Was legislation passed or regulation approved that has made communities safer – or should have?</li> <li>• Does the anniversary offer the opportunity to ask what happened then and where we are now?</li> <li>• What progress has been, or should have been made?</li> </ul>	

ELEMENT OF NEWSWORTHINESS	KEY QUESTIONS	YOUR EXAMPLE
<b>BROAD POPULATION INTEREST</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does this story affect a lot of people, or does it relate to groups of special concern, like children, young men of color, or educators?</li> <li>• Can you think of a way that the story affects a lot of people even if it is related to a specific group?</li> <li>• How can your story emphasize the aspects of community violence prevention that are important, interesting, or appealing to the broadest number of viewers or readers possible?</li> </ul>	
<b>EVENT/STORY WITH LOCAL INTEREST</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there an event related to community safety (like a talk, fair, ribbon cutting ceremony, etc.) that readers or viewers should know about? If not, can you create an event?</li> <li>• How can your story about the event emphasize solutions and collective action?</li> <li>• What about your story is important or meaningful to the local audience that reads a specific outlet or watches a specific channel?</li> <li>• Note of caution: Planning events takes a lot of work. If you are doing an event exclusively for media attention, you may want to make sure ahead of time that your event will get covered.</li> </ul>	
<b>SEASONAL/ HOLIDAY LINK</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What about your story, issue, or policy goal can be connected to a holiday or seasonal event?</li> </ul>	
<b>BREAKTHROUGH/ MILESTONE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the story describe breaking news relating to community violence?</li> <li>• Does the story mark an important medical, political, or historical first?</li> <li>• Can you make the case that, given a particular event, decision or action, things will never be the same with respect to community violence, or to safety in your community?</li> </ul>	

ELEMENT OF NEWSWORTHINESS	KEY QUESTIONS	YOUR EXAMPLE
<b>PERSONAL ANGLE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a person who can serve as a representative example of the broader problem of community violence – for example, a person with direct experience who can provide an authentic voice?</li> <li>• Is that person prepared to talk to a reporter about community violence in a way that emphasizes the necessary policy solutions, and illustrates that prevention is possible?</li> </ul>	
<b>NEW DATA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the story describe novel data or statistics that are important for understanding community violence and what to do about it?</li> <li>• Is there a way to report on the data in a way that emphasizes its implications for policy solutions and preventing future incidents?</li> <li>• Are there national data that can be disaggregated and made local?</li> </ul>	
<b>CELEBRITY OR POP CULTURE APPEAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do any celebrities support your issue and policy goal?</li> <li>• Would they be willing to lend a hand to your efforts?</li> <li>• Is there a local celebrity or community leader with public standing whose affiliation with your site would bring good attention?</li> <li>• If you can form a partnership with a celebrity or public figure, will the relationship be worthwhile – and predictable? (A word of caution: We can't control what celebrities do, nor the media attention they attract. Would it be devastating for the organization if, in the future, the celebrity were involved in a controversy antithetical to your organization's values?)</li> </ul>	

## WORKING WITH JOURNALISTS

Journalists covering violence will be more likely to incorporate public health perspectives into their reporting and include advocates as sources in their stories if they have developed a relationship with you and clearly understand the work you do. It's important to build relationships with reporters, producers, bloggers and other media professionals so they come to view you as a valued source of information. Once you become a trusted contact, reporters can turn to you for a statement, data or other information when they have a story to tell about violence and trauma prevention in the community. You can also connect journalists with sources who have firsthand experience with the issue of community safety and violence and are prepared not only to tell their personal stories, but also to highlight solutions.

But with so many media outlets available today, which ones should you reach out to? And with so much information competing for media professionals' attention, how can you break through the noise and cement meaningful relationships?

Here are some tips and strategies to help you establish and maintain relationships with media professionals and become a reliable source in today's saturated media landscape:

### Identify reporters to connect with, and monitor their work regularly

- Which outlets reach your target audience (as determined by your overall strategy) or are otherwise important for your work? Be creative. Think daily (breaking news) as well as long-term (in-depth, like magazines). Does your target respond to national news, or local, mainstream outlets? What about outlets that target specific racial or ethnic groups?
- Identify a few local media professionals with whom it's important for you to be on a first-name basis. Watch, read and listen to the media channels that employ those reporters. Read (or watch) their coverage of issues related to community safety (including economic development, education, childhood trauma, etc.). Start with one or two and then build from there.

### Build contacts with the media by watching for articles about your issue

- Starting with the reporters you have identified as crucial, build a media list and harvest bylines from your news monitoring for a contact database. Whatever program you use to build your database, make sure it's easy to use and can be regularly updated. It might be as simple as creating a folder in your contacts list on your phone called "media" and storing reporters' information there. It might be the same database you use for news monitoring. [See Tool #4 "News Monitoring."](#)
- Send an email to every media professional you add to the database, introducing yourself, letting them know the issues for which you can serve as a resource, and explaining why you would be a good contact. For example, you can talk about helping the journalist present a different perspective on community violence and offer to provide access to valuable story elements like key sources in the community, data, or visuals. Initially, you don't have to be pitching a story. Get to know reporters before you need them. Most of them are eager to have contacts and real connections the community. Invite them for coffee and get to know each other. Send them a note letting them know what you think about a story they've done and how you can be of service when the topic comes up again.
- Connect with key reporters on social media. Journalists increasingly use Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms to discover stories, find sources, connect with the public and get feedback on specific topics they are researching for a piece. Take advantage of the accessible nature of these networks to cultivate relationships. Following reporters on Twitter is an especially good way to start building a relationship, since it lets you see what they are interested in and communicate directly with them in real time.

## Contact reporters — especially when they do a good job — to build relationships with them

- Positive reinforcement is a good way to establish rapport. Although journalists get a lot of exposure, they don't always get a lot of feedback, especially positive feedback. Be sure to contact reporters to let them know when they've done stories that were fair and accurate, even if the stories weren't perfect. Building relationships with reporters creates opportunities to educate them when there is a need to do so, for example, by volunteering to help them fill gaps in their reporting on communities affected by violence. Providing reporters with fact sheets about the drops in re-injury that stem from trauma-informed programs, for example, can be a good way to prove your willingness to help the reporter, not just criticize.
- Offering a new story angle can be helpful and appreciated. Think about the kinds of stories you want to see, and how to pitch them. Could you help a reporter tell a story about, for example, the hidden heroes working to sustain a recent drop in crime, or unique approaches to addressing the root causes of violence?
- Another way to help reporters is to connect them with compelling spokespeople, such as survivors of violence, community residents and leaders, researchers, people working to prevent violence, and youth. Prepare and train these sources to speak confidently with the media and create opportunities for them to practice.
- One of the best ways for reporters to develop a deeper understanding of your work is to invite them to a site visit. Groups have had success inviting reporters to attend open house events, visit their offices, or go on a guided tour of the community. Think of your relationship with journalists as a long-term investment. The more the journalist is educated about the issue of violence prevention, the more interested and effective they will be in covering this issue. Be sure to tour the "solution" and not just the problem.

When reporters are in a time crunch and can only make a few calls to fill gaps in a story, you want to be the one they call!

## Provide journalists with the resources and story elements they need to tell compelling stories

- Provide journalists with resources to help them tell a complete story, such as fact sheets with relevant data and statistics; compelling visuals; and short, powerful quotations. This information makes it easier for journalists to do their job, and you increase the chances that the final news story will reflect your desired frame. You can't control how the reporter will develop their story, but information you provide can influence the form the story takes.
- Remember that reporters tell stories more than they describe issues. Good stories have a scene, a plot, action and characters. A story about a family struggling with the loss of a loved one to violence, for example, holds more interest than a story about a conference, a new grant cycle, or the components of your program. Practice tying individual stories to the broader social changes that are needed to prevent violence in the community at large.
- In preparing for a meeting with journalists, it can be helpful to prepare story elements, which are the pieces reporters put together to tell a good story. These include visuals, media bites, "authentic voices" and social math.
  - o **Visuals** are particularly important in today's visually-oriented media landscape. To determine what visuals to include, envision your story through the eyes of a camera. What images will demonstrate what your work is all about? Compelling visuals are related to the work you do, whether that is a street outreach worker engaging with young men in his or her community, a counselor meeting with a patient at their bedside, or a trauma-informed restorative justice circle in a school.
  - o **Media Bites** are short, memorable statements that help audiences understand your frame. Reporters face serious time and space constraints. A television segment on your work may be as short as 30 seconds. Therefore, a media bite should be simple enough to be copied down verbatim by a reporter, easy to repeat, and short enough to make it unedited into a short clip in the nightly news.

- o **Authentic Voices** are spokespeople who can provide an insightful perspective on violence based on their personal or professional experience. Research has shown that the perspectives of survivors of violence, community leaders, faith leaders, healthcare professionals, and teachers are underrepresented in news stories, as are the voices of people of color. Because speaking to the media is challenging, make sure that authentic voices have an opportunity to practice developing and delivering their message.
- o **Social Math** helps make large numbers more comprehensible to audiences. To calculate [social math](#), restate large numbers in terms of time or place, personalize numbers, or make comparisons that bring a picture to mind. For example, to drive home the significance of the 34,000 gun deaths that occur in the United States each year, you could say that every day, there are 96 people killed with a gun. Consider how can you use social math to describe the number of people reached by your program, the number of people in your community who die needlessly each year from violence, the racial disparities in violent injury in your area, or another important statistic crucial to your work.

### **Build client safety into the relationship from the beginning**

- HJA organizations have noted that when engaging with reporters, it is important to clearly establish boundaries to protect client safety from the beginning. While violence survivors can be excellent spokespeople for violence prevention (and talking to reporters can be a positive experience for young people), safety is first and foremost. For clients who have recently experienced a traumatic event, safety means that their media experience should be positive and not re-traumatizing. Clients should be informed that they can stop an interview at any time if they are no longer comfortable. Educate journalists about the basics of trauma so that they can ask questions that humanize survivors and do not re-traumatize them. The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma’s [Ethical Reporting on Traumatized People](#) webpage is a helpful resource to share with journalists.
- Individuals who are far along in the recovery process, or who are past survivors that are now working to support others through trauma may be more appropriate spokespeople than a more recent survivor.
- While it is important for clients to feel free to tell their story in their own voice, practice and preparation can be helpful. Many HJA organizations provide clients with talking points and practice with them prior to their interview. Reading and discussing recent news stories about violence can similarly be an effective way of helping clients engage with the current narrative and understand gaps they can help fill. Taking the time to prepare in these ways can reduce the anxiety of the interview, ensure message consistency, and help clients understand the important role they play in changing the media narrative.

*Social Math helps make large numbers more comprehensible to audiences. To calculate social math, restate large numbers in terms of time or place, personalize numbers, or make comparisons that bring a picture to mind.*



# WORKSHEET: WORKING WITH JOURNALISTS

*Instructions:* Respond to the questions below to help you identify news outlets and reporters to work with, and to prepare the materials you will need.

1. Our overall goal is to (refer to Tool 1 "[Layers of strategy](#)" or Tool 2 "[GOTMME](#)):

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2. The target (person or institution) who can enact the change we want is:

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3. The media outlets that could reach this target are:

a. Newspapers: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Radio Stations and Programs: \_\_\_\_\_

c. TV Stations and Programs: \_\_\_\_\_

d. Online Outlets: \_\_\_\_\_

4. The journalists we are planning to build relationships with are:

Journalist Name	Outlet	Recent articles/ segments	Twitter Handle	Email Address	Phone

5. The key information and story elements we will have prepared for journalists include:

STORY ELEMENT	HOW WE WILL USE THIS STORY ELEMENT
WHAT ARE OUR KEY VISUALS?	
WHO ARE OUR AUTHENTIC VOICES?	
WHAT MEDIA BITES CAN WE USE?	
WHAT KEY DATA OR STATISTICS ARE IMPORTANT FOR OUR AUDIENCE TO KNOW?	
HOW CAN WE CALCULATE SOCIAL MATH FOR THE DATA AND STATISTICS ABOVE?	

6. What steps will we take to ensure the safety of our clients if they engage with the media?

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## RESPONDING WHEN A REPORTER CALLS

If you understand a journalist's needs, you will get better coverage of your issue, and the reporter will view you as a reliable and valuable source. Whether you have an established relationship with a reporter or are responding to a journalist you haven't met, four simple questions can help you figure out what their needs are when they call you about a specific story:

### What's your story about?

When you ask a reporter this question, you are finding out a lot about the story's angle. Most likely, you will want to reframe or add a new perspective to the reporter's starting point. Hearing the answer to the question, even though it may be very short, will help you figure out how to get from the reporter's initial story idea to something that, hopefully, includes your overall strategy.

### Can you tell me who else you've spoken to?

It's important to know who a reporter has talked to – and what they may already know about the issue. For instance, you'll want to know if they've spoken with people whose perspective on community violence prevention opposes yours. Be prepared for some reporters to be unwilling or unprepared to reveal their sources, and don't be afraid to suggest other contacts who can help them flesh out their reporting.

### What do you need?

Will you be able to provide good visuals, compelling data, or connections to sources whose perspectives are often left out of the news about community safety (like trauma professionals, community residents, trauma survivors or education professionals)? Whatever you provide, make sure to offer current or updated information. When information gets stale or outdated, it loses its news value, so providing the most current data and alerting reporters to changes in your issue increases the likelihood that reporters will be able to use it and that they will call you back.

### What are your deadlines?

If journalists are to add new sources to their mix, those sources have to be ready and willing to talk and share resources – and to do it within a tight deadline. That means you need to respond promptly to reporters. It can be inconvenient, but important. When you drop everything to get a reporter what they need to tell a more complete and accurate story, they will remember. A quick and helpful response is a good long-term investment.

Remember that there is no obligation to respond to reporters' questions the moment they call. Many HJA organizations have found it effective to take down basic answers to these questions when a reporter calls, then discuss internally who will be the best person inside the organization to follow up. Do so in a timely fashion—be responsive to deadlines when you can—but do not be rushed.

*When you ask a reporter what their story is about, you are finding out a lot about the story's angle. Most likely, you will want to reframe or add a new perspective to the reporter's starting point.*

## PITCHING YOUR STORY

Once you've built relationships with journalists ([See tool #6, "working with journalists"](#)) and decided which of the elements of newsworthiness you will highlight, how will you get your story covered? An important first step is pitching your idea to a reporter. A "pitch" is an invitation to do a story: a short description of your story and a concise argument for why a reporter should cover it.

A good pitch explains why your story is newsworthy and how it connects with a major issue of the day or a topic you know the reporter covers. Pitching stories persuasively increases the likelihood that reporters will be able to convince their editors to let them do the story. Here are some tips for giving an effective pitch to a reporter:

### Preparing your pitch

- **Pitch ideas for specific stories.** As "60 Minutes" producer Don Hewitt once said, reporters don't tell issues, they tell stories, so craft your pitch with this in mind. For instance, the general topic of "trauma-informed care" isn't a story, but when someone is doing something about it, it is. For example, you could pitch stories about a new or changed program to help violence survivors gain jobs and enlist other survivors in the community in prevention, new research that shows the effectiveness of violence interruption, or a novel hospital-based strategy that is successful at stopping the cycle of violence.
- **Remember the 5 W's (who, what, when, where and why).** Pitches can be for original story ideas or they can "piggyback" off of other news stories by applying a new angle to a story already in the news. Either way, a pitch should answer several basic questions:

### What happened (or is going to happen)?

**Example of pitching an original story:** *"Hi. I'm calling you today because young leaders from Alameda County are calling on the Board of Supervisors to increase funding for summer violence prevention and youth outreach programs . . ."*

**Example of piggybacking:** *"Hi. I'm calling you today because, as you may have seen in last week's news, an East Baltimore community was recently labeled one of "America's most dangerous neighborhoods." People in that neighborhood don't buy it – and they are rallying this afternoon to highlight the things about their neighborhood that make them proud."*

### Why is it interesting/important/newsworthy?

Emphasize controversy, significance and timeliness ([see tool #5, "Elements of newsworthiness."](#)) Say why the story is timely now, and if you can, link the story to some other issue in the news.

**Example of pitching an original story, continued:** *"Everyone is thinking about summer, but the end of the school year and the rising temperatures mean there could be more violence in many communities. These young people are asking the Board of Supervisors to dedicate more funding to youth summer programs to build job skills and prevent violence before it happens. You know, we hear every day about 'youth violence,' but this is a unique opportunity to hear from youth themselves who are working to end violence in our community."*

**Example of piggybacking, continued:** *"That 'most dangerous neighborhood' label puts all of us here in East Baltimore in the national spotlight – a negative one. I'm talking about a unique opportunity to highlight work that young people are doing to end violence in our community."*

## Who is the story about?

**Example of pitching an original story, continued:** *“This is a chance to show how motivated teens from Oakland – and their families, friends, teachers and neighbors – are working to end violence in their lifetimes.”*

**Example of piggybacking, continued:** *“The people of East Baltimore are painted with an unfair brush. We are the residents of a resilient and vibrant community whose stories were lost when their homes – and their lives – were described as just part of ‘America’s most dangerous neighborhood.’ What is missing from the story is the fact that this community is home to one of the nation’s most innovative violence intervention programs, and it’s being led by an amazing people born and raised right here in East Baltimore. Come and meet them!”*

## Where and when will it happen?

**Example of pitching an original story, continued:** *“Come see what these young people are doing on Wednesday afternoon at 10 a.m. on the front steps of City Hall.”*

**Example of piggybacking, continued:** *“Incredible work is happening every day here. I can connect you with at least four community members who would be happy to take you through their work on a typical day and share their stories about their community.”*

## Who is impacted?

Broaden the base of the story to the largest possible audience that attends to the media that you are pitching. Can you help the reporter see how the benefits of the program extend beyond the people who get the direct service? If you can show the benefits to the family, the hospital and even the whole community the reporter will know there is a wide audience for the story. The more people potentially affected, the better your story’s prospects.

**Example of pitching an original story:** *“This is a story about everyone impacted by violence – not just the young people you’re going to see on Wednesday. That’s why we want to make sure that you have a chance to cover groundbreaking work that’s changing this city for all its residents.”*

**Example of piggybacking, continued:** *“As Baltimoreans, we deserve to know our neighbors and fellow residents, and to learn and celebrate what makes Baltimore so rich and so worthy of positive attention. That’s why it’s so important for you to meet our violence interrupters—they are making this community a better place for all of us.”*

- **Suggest compelling visuals.** What will the news cameras record for the story? Programs in action? Meetings or other events that bring together community residents? Local art commemorating victims and survivors of community violence? Presentations to policy makers? Whatever visuals you have, make sure you can explain or evoke them. Think of your pitch like a movie – you need to make it come alive for the reporter.

*Broaden the base of the story to the largest possible audience that attends to the media that you are pitching. Can you help the reporter see how the benefits of the program extend beyond the people who get the direct service?*

## Delivering your pitch

- **Consider the size of your media market.** In smaller media markets, you may be able to reach a reporter by phone. In larger media markets it might be best to use email or social media (like a direct message on Twitter) since reporters will get dozens of voice messages throughout the day and may be unable or unwilling to go through all of them in a timely fashion.
- **Be brief.** However you contact a reporter, keep your pitch simple, clear and concise. Just as reporters are often told not to bury their “lede,” or main point of their story, sources should heed the same advice. To better your chances of being heard, make the purpose of your call or email clear quickly. You don’t have to tell them everything about the issue, you just have to invite them to learn more about the newsworthy event you are pitching. They will learn more when they cover the story. Ask if they are on deadline; if they say yes, ask when you should call back.
- **Anticipate multiple scenarios.** On the phone, keep your pitch to a minute or less, and be prepared to give a “quick pitch” right away – the reporter might want to hear a bit before deciding to hear more. Be ready to “pitch” to voice mail – that is, give a brief description of your story or event, and clear contact information. Remember to leave your contact information.
- **Capture attention with descriptive subject lines.** For an email pitch, keep the text of the email short (1-3 paragraphs at most), and describe the pitch in the subject line, like “Story idea: How Crown Heights students plan to end community violence in their lifetimes.”
- **Maintain a sense of urgency.** Convey an energy level that says you understand the immediacy of news reporting. Emphasize newsworthy points – remember that the person you pitch to may need to then pitch to their editor. Why do they need to do the story right now? Why should they cover your story instead of whatever else they were planning to cover?
- **Practice.** Practice out loud with a friend or colleague, but don’t over-prepare – just speak from your heart and explain why this is an important story. Likewise, don’t read your pitch from a script.

## Always follow up

- **Be patient but persistent.** Reporters often work on tight deadlines and may not be able to answer every email. When one attempt at communicating goes unanswered, that does not necessarily mean that the reporter is not interested. Be patient, and try again.
- **Don’t be discouraged if the first reporter you reach isn’t interested.** You may need to pitch your story to more than one reporter at a particular media outlet. That’s why it’s good to monitor the media and get to know several reporters and to build relationships with them before you pitch your ideas. Journalists depend on sources they can trust for good information.
- **Just because a story’s gone live doesn’t mean you’ve missed your chance.** Since news stories published online are often updated throughout the day, breaking news is no longer tied to just one deadline. So, even if you miss the first story posting, it may not be too late to get your perspective included in the updated version of the story.

Pitching stories to a reporter can be intimidating, but it gets easier with practice. Keep in mind, when you pitch a story to a reporter, you’re not asking for a favor – you’re alerting them to a compelling story and helping them do their job better!

*On the phone, keep your pitch to a minute or less, and be prepared to give a 'quick pitch' right away.*

# WORKSHEET: PITCHING YOUR STORY

*Instructions:* Respond each of the questions below to help hone your pitch. Time yourself. Can you respond to all four questions in a 30-second voicemail, or a brief email?

## 1. What happened (or is going to happen)?

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## 2. Why is it interesting/important/newsworthy?

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## 3. Who is the story about?

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## 4. Where and when will it happen?

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## WRITING EFFECTIVE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ABOUT VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Letters to the editor provide a useful and visible forum in which community residents, advocates, and others can express their perspectives on community violence and how to end it. For example, in the aftermath of a violent incident or in response to a story discussing violence trends in your city, you can submit letters to the editor emphasizing the importance of addressing violence from a public health perspective and highlight relevant aspects of your work. Submitting a letter within 24 hours of the initial story will greatly increase the chances of your story getting published.

Most newspapers have online forms on their website for submitting letters to the editor. While these forms are typically easy to use, check them out ahead of time so you know the process and bookmark the webpage so you can find it quickly when it's time to respond.

You can use the letter to the editor worksheet on the following page to help you organize your ideas. Be creative, clear, opinionated, and succinct – keep it under 200 words.



*In the aftermath of a violent incident or in response to a story discussing violence trends in your city, HJA organizations can submit letters to the editor emphasizing the importance of addressing violence from a public health perspective and highlight relevant aspects of your work.*

# WORKSHEET: WRITING EFFECTIVE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ABOUT VIOLENCE PREVENTION

*Instructions:* Use the following template to help structure a letter to the editor. Remember to keep it to under 200 words.

**Dear editor:**

**Re: [PUT THE DATE AND HEADLINE FROM THE ARTICLE YOU ARE RESPONDING TO HERE]**

**Yesterday, you reported that**

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**This is [timely/interesting/ironic] because**

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**As a [parent/nurse/advocate/community member/doctor/voter], my perspective is**

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**What people don't realize is**

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**One thing that could really make a difference is**

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Sincerely,

Signature

[Your name, address, email, and phone number]







**Thank you for reading!**

For more information: [healingjusticealliance.org](http://healingjusticealliance.org) @HJAlliance  
[youthalive.org](http://youthalive.org) | [cureviolence.org](http://cureviolence.org) | [bmsg.org](http://bmsg.org) | [nnhvip.org](http://nnhvip.org)



The recommendations in this toolkit are adapted from *News for a Change* (Sage Publications, 1999) and Berkeley Media Studies Group's work with advocates across the country.

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