Changing the discourse about violence:

A strategic communication toolkit from Berkeley Media Studies Group

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

To end violence, we need to invest in the communities most affected by violence and the solutions that we know are effective. Doing that requires changing the way policymakers and the public think, talk, and write about violence.

Berkeley Media Studies Group (BMSG) developed this toolkit to help practitioners, advocates, residents, and others frame violence from a community perspective and harness the power of the media to achieve change. This toolkit is designed to allow organizations involved in all aspects of violence prevention — regardless of experience and organizational capacity — to strengthen their strategic communication.

How to use this toolkit

There is no one right way to use this toolkit. It is designed to be flexible with hands-on worksheets you can use with 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 a letter to the editor, for example, you can use Tool 10, "Writing Effective Letters to the Editor." If you have an upcoming call scheduled with a reporter, you can review Tool 8, "Responding When a Reporter Calls."

This toolkit contains both general strategic communication tools (pages 8-41) and tools for working with the news media (pages 42-88). The general strategic communication tools are relevant whether your target audience includes the news media or not. For example, Tool 2, "Developing Powerful Messages," 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. Tools 4-10, which are geared toward working with the news media, are focused on the particular opportunities and challenges of engaging with reporters. Use these tools to expand your media presence and to become better at handling inquiries from journalists.

While many organizations will want to start with Tool 2, "Developing Powerful Messages," we strongly recommend starting with Tool 1, "Layers of Strategy." That is because message is never first. Developing messages comes after you clearly define your goals, identify your target audience, and determine who is going to communicate with the target audience. The "Layers of Strategy" tool will help you establish these key parameters on which you can base your messages.

Whether you use all the tools in this toolkit or just a few, we hope you will find the information useful in reaching your goals and sharing your stories.

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Layers of strategy

When talking about violence prevention with journalists, policymakers, and other key stakeholders, it may feel tempting to share everything you know about the issue. However, it's important to remember that you can't be comprehensive and strategic at the same time. Instead, when seeking systemic change, you should keep your focus on an immediate, clearly defined problem and a specific, achievable solution.

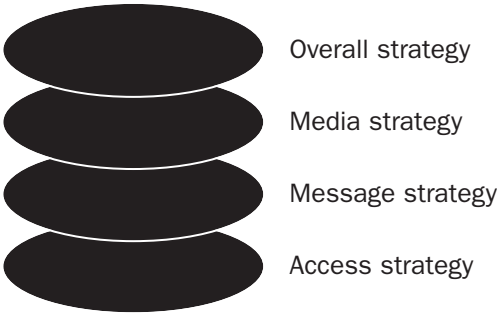
In strategic communication, your overall goals drive your message, not the other way around. Berkeley Media Studies Group recommends using the four Layers of Strategy to set goals, develop messages, and decide whether to use the media — including social media — to elevate those messages. This tool describes these four layers.

First, develop an **overall strategy** to prioritize a specific problem along with a specific solution to the defined problem.

Next, create a **media strategy** to determine whether to use the media to advance goals and, if so, how to engage the media.

Then, use your **message strategy** to develop messages that state the problem, solution, and corresponding values.

Finally, craft an **access strategy** to determine how and when to use the media to advance your cause.



Getting started

Below is an overview of each component of the Layers of Strategy.

Overall strategy

Define the problem you want to address.

Only through clearly defining the problem, can advocates craft and make the case for effective solutions. Any given locale or organization will have many avenues for preventing violence. Which one will you be focusing on in the near term?

Clarify the policy solution for which you will advocate.

The more specific you can get, the better. Violence has many root causes and intermediate causes, but to be strategic, you will need to prioritize which potential solutions you want to pursue based on the needs of your community in this moment.

Identify the target with the power to make the change.

Strategic communicators go beyond raising public awareness to focus on the primary targets — the key individuals and groups who have the power to implement the specific changes you seek. For example, primary targets might be city or county officials with the power to allocate additional resources for violence prevention. The general public is not usually a target audience, even though they may be exposed to the messages and, depending on the strategy, might be enlisted to support it.

Enlist the allies who can help make your case.

These might be organization leaders, young people or others who have survived trauma and violence, faith leaders, physicians, public health officials, or other community members who can influence the primary targets.

Identify what you will do to influence the target.

You need to let the target know your position, what you want them to do, and that you and your allies care deeply about the policy solution. You might meet with them and make your case — and in some instances, that might be enough. In other instances, you'll need to demonstrate broad community support to put the pressure on. That's where a media strategy can help.

Media strategy

Identify the best way to communicate with your target.

This could be through one-on-one meetings or phone calls, strategically placed op-eds, social media, letter-writing, petitions, or even paid advertising.

Decide whether engaging the media will advance your overall strategy.

If a direct letter, phone call, or meeting is your starting point, and your target expresses a clear commitment to making changes you're seeking, media outreach may not be needed.

Find the media outlets that will reach your target(s).

If media outreach is a key part of your strategy, find out what outlets your target reads or listens to and make them your focus. If you plan to reach out through social media, learn which platforms your target engages in, such as Twitter or Instagram.

Compile the media tactics you will use.

Once you know what media outlets you will focus on, decide how you will make your make your issue newsworthy to reporters, editors, and producers. Determine if you will purchase ads and/or meet with editorial boards, submit op-eds, write letters to the editor, or use social media. See Tool 6 to learn more about the elements of newsworthiness.

Message strategy

Frame the issue to reflect your values and support your policy goals.

Facts and statistics are important but rarely enough to make the case for policy change. Stating shared values, such as interconnectedness, fairness, or prevention, can help people connect on a more personal, emotional level.

Create a message that describes the problem, the solution, and why it matters.

Messages are the core statements your group wants to deliver to each target. The three parts of the message — problem, why it matters, and solution — don't have to appear in that order or be described in equal amounts. For example, if your targets are already knowledgeable about the problem, it may be beneficial to spend more time discussing what can be done about it. See Tool 2 for more information on how to create an effective message.

Assess and improve the effectiveness of your message.

Get feedback from your allies to determine if your message is persuasive or needs to be refined. If your budget allows, you may be able to hire a message-testing firm.

Decide who will convey your message, and prepare them to deliver it.

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. 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 can speak passionately to the change they want to see in the community.

Gather the materials you will need to make your case.

These may include fact sheets, talking points, media advisories, or news releases, etc.

Access strategy

Determine when media attention could affect the policy process.

Timing matters. Put important dates, such as local elections or key votes, in your calendar ahead of time and plan accordingly.

Figure out how you will gain access to the media.

Building relationships with journalists in advance can help your chances of getting your message amplified. Other tactics include releasing reports and staging events with attention-grabbing visuals.

Prepare newsworthy story elements to offer reporters.

Story elements include timely news hooks, authentic voices who can speak with firsthand experience about your issue, compelling imagery, and social math* — a way to break down complex data to make them easier to understand. See Tool 6 to learn more about newsworthiness and story elements that can strengthen your message.

Pitch the story.

Even though your target may be one person or perhaps a few members of a city council, the news story will have to make sense to the general audience of the media outlet; be sure to make your story feel tangible and relatable to journalists and their audiences. Journalists are usually busy, so pitches should be newsworthy, succinct, and rehearsed but not scripted. See Tool 9 for more information about pitching to reporters.

Capture, assess, and reuse the news coverage.

When a source is quoted or one of your stories gets published, share the coverage with allies, encourage them to amplify it with their networks, and keep an eye out for opportunities to reuse the content. The power of the news coverage comes from its legitimacy and credibility with your target — put the piece in front of them yourself so you know they see it. Your allies will get a boost from the coverage, too, as they see their hard work and policy goal represented in the news.

* Using social math to support your policy issue. (2015). Berkeley Media Studies Group. http://www.bmsg.org/blog/social-math-support-public-health-policy

A word about health equity

As you work through the layers, think about how the decisions you make will impact equity — whether it's equity in health outcomes related to violence, equity in how people interface with the criminal justice system, equity in how the news covers these issues, or other forms of equity. For example:

- Can you define the problem in a way that focuses on not just decreasing violence overall but also decreasing inequities in exposure to violence?
- In determining how to influence your target who has the power to make the change you seek, consider how you can build community power and make government more accountable to those who have been left out of political decisions.

There are a growing number of equity-focused toolkits that can be paired with the Layers of Strategy. For example, the Government Alliance on Race & Equity's Racial Equity Toolkit[*] can help your organization or coalition think about which overall strategies will advance racial equity.

[*] Nelson J. & Brooks L. (2016). Racial equity toolkit: An opportunity to operationalize equity. Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race & Equity. https://www.racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/GARE-Racial_Equity_Toolkit.pdf

Examples of strategy development

The following pages contain prompts for fleshing out your strategy at each layer, as well as hypothetical examples of how a violence prevention organization might answer them.

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.

Step	Example
Define the problem.	The Youth Violence Prevention Center (YVPC) is a community-based program that prevents violence in the city of Addison with comprehensive community programming. Its activities include restorative justice circles that meet regularly, a youth leadership program, and a midnight basketball league. As a small organization, YVPC was concerned by several newspaper stories indicating that Addison's newly elected mayor would cut funding for violence prevention activities by up to 45 percent in the upcoming fiscal year. These funding cuts would directly translate into reduced services for its clients, so YVPC formed a coalition with other violence prevention groups in the city to apply pressure to prevent these cuts. The coalition defined its core problem as the potential loss of vital resources for violence prevention programs in the city.
Clarify the policy solution.	A specific, measureable objective: In 2019, full funding (at the 2017 and 2018 levels) will be maintained for the city's violence prevention activities in the municipal budget.

Identify the target with the power to make the change.	Because the proposed budget cuts would need to go through the five-person city council, the coalition defined its primary target as the three city council members they believed would be most likely to oppose the cuts. YVPC members began asking around to see if anyone in their coalition had relationships with these city council members. They were able to identify several individuals who had worked with city council members in their prior jobs and who said they would be willing to speak with them.
Enlist allies who can help make your case.	To enlist allies, YVPC began with the organizations already represented in their coalition. Then, they had each of these organizations enlist one or two other organizations that would support their cause.
Identify how you will influence the target.	After clarifying their overall strategy, YVPC decided to create a sign-on letter. All coalition partners and allies brought their sign-on letter back to their respective organizations to lend support.

Media strategy

Identify the best way to communicate with your target.

Decide whether engaging the media will advance your overall strategy.

Find the media outlets that will reach your target(s).

Compile the media tactics you will use.

Step	Example
Identify the best way to communicate with your target.	The group decided to deliver the letter to the city council in person. They believed that having one-on-one conversations with the city council members would be the best way to communicate their position and elicit the council's support.
Decide whether engaging the media will advance your overall strategy.	After delivering the sign-on letter to city council members, several council members invited YVPC leaders to a brief meeting in their respective offices. Despite the meetings being cordial, they did not lead any of the council members to make firm commitments to sustain funding levels, even when YVPC asked them to do so. While some coalition members were concerned that media involvement might strain their relationships with city council members, YVPC made the decision to reach out to the local media.
Find the media outlets that will reach your target(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 put public pressure on the council members to agree to YVPC's demands. Staff identified and followed reporters on Twitter who were covering violence and related issues at the various media outlets.
Compile the media tactics you will use.	YVPC decided their media strategy would be to hold a press conference to showcase data on the effectiveness of violence prevention programs and to demand city council members sustain full funding for them. To create a stronger news hook, they decided to hold their press conference on October 2, the International Day of Nonviolence.

Message strategy

Frame the issue to reflect your values and support your 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.

Step	Example
Frame the issue to reflect your values and support your policy goals.	YVPC staff identified the values of caring, inclusion, and community interconnectedness to emphasize with outside audiences. These values helped frame their cause as not just serving victims of trauma but also supporting families and loved ones — ultimately, serving entire communities impacted by violence.
Create a message that describes the problem, the solution, and why it matters.	By having already identified a specific problem, a solution, and corresponding values, YVPC staff had all three components for an effective message.
Assess and improve the effectiveness of your message.	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.
Decide who will convey your message, and prepare them to deliver it.	YVPC briefed local physicians, survivors of violence, local business and faith leaders, and others who volunteered to speak on the organization's behalf about the problem, solution, and why it matters; YVPC also encouraged these spokespeople to relay the core message through their own experience and point of view.
Gather the materials you will need to make your case.	YVPC staff gathered local data that supported their proposal and the names of all organizations that joined their sign-on letter into a bound book, complete with photographs and other compelling visuals. They also produced a one-page FAQ sheet to give to the media at their news conference.

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.

Step	Example
Determine when media attention could affect the policy process.	YVPC coalition members began preparing materials six weeks before their planned date for the news conference, which was the International Day of Nonviolence on October 2.
Figure out how you will gain access to the media.	Coalition leaders drafted a news release and media advisory to invite media professionals and members of the public to the news conference. YVPC staff and allies sent tweets to key reporters with information about the event.
Prepare newsworthy story elements to offer reporters.	YVPC staff determined there were many newsworthy elements that would interest reporters and social media users: controversy — the fact that council members were considering cutting funding to important community programs; broad and local appeal; a global observance date — International Day of Nonviolence; and a personal angle — spokespeople with compelling personal stories would be speaking about the impact of violence on their lives.
Pitch the story.	With newsworthy story elements in hand along with their core message, YVPC staff emailed and called reporters and direct messaged them on social media to alert them to the story; afterward, they followed up with the news release and media advisory.
Capture, assess, and reuse the news coverage.	After advocates were successful in getting their news conference covered in the local news and on 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 spokespeople also co-authored an op-ed explaining the value of the program to the whole community. YVPC sent clippings of the local coverage to the council members and posted them on coalition members' websites.

Worksheet: Developing your strategy

Instructions: To plan your media advocacy, begin by answering these questions related to the four Layers of Strategy. Answering the questions for each layer will help you hone 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?

What is the solution?

Who has the power to make that change?

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

What allies must be mobilized to apply the necessary pressure?

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

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

Media strategy

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

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

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

Who will be involved in developing your media advocacy strategies?

What communication protocol do you have in place?

How will you build your organization's communication capacity?

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

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

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

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

Message strategy

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

Who is portrayed as responsible for the problem?

Who is portrayed as responsible for the solution?

What is left out of current coverage?

What sources are quoted often? Whose voices are missing?

Who could make the case for the policy solution?

What values support your perspective and policy solution?

What is the most important message that would help persuade your target to act?
Make sure to answer the questions: What is the problem? What is the policy solution? Why does it matter?

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

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

Access strategy

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

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

What can you do to get your story in the media?
Options could include releasing a report, holding an event, piggybacking on breaking news, using editorial strategies (e.g. op-eds, editorial board visits, and letters to the editor), purchasing paid ads, or contacting reporters through Twitter or other social channels.

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

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

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

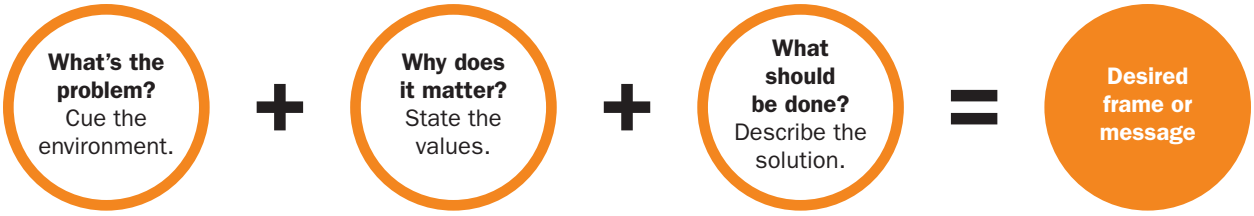
Developing powerful messages

"In a real sense, all life is interrelated. All men 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., February 1963

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 prevention, 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 of this tool is a message development worksheet you can use to personalize your own messages.



Stating the problem:
How can we frame violence at the community level?

Framing violence from a public health or community 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 often portrayed as perpetrators of violence but infrequently represented as survivors of violence. And the environmental contributors to violence, such as disinvestment in schools and local economies in communities of color, are seldom brought into view in stories about violence. 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" tool to identify your key target audiences.)

In the U.S., "rugged individualism" is a strongly held default frame. Most people think that individuals are masters of their own destiny. That's partly true, of course: The choices we make as individuals matter. But that's not the whole story. The trouble with this default frame is that it doesn't bring the structural and environmental context into view. To reframe violence using a public health approach, we have to make this context visible 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 proposal makes sense.

Our task is to tell stories that bring the broader context and the root causes of violence into view. When a story focuses entirely on an individual, it can reinforce the idea that violence can solved by individual effort alone. We call individually focused stories "portraits" because while the person or incident of violence is in clear view, the frame misses the surroundings, history, or other context. Broader stories, what we call "landscape" stories, bring the broader environment into view. The discussion of broader context in landscape stories helps us illustrate how our solutions can address the problem.

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 we describe how our institutions can help create the kinds of safe environments that prevent violence, the more clearly our audiences will understand the importance of investing in structural solutions.

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. Name the values that motivate your work and that you think will resonate with your target. Three examples are fairness, interconnection, and prevention.

Fairness

There is enormous injustice not only with 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 lead to conditions of trauma where violence can take hold. You can also describe unfairness in the overall poor quality of treatment people of color receive when they survive violence.

Interconnection

The value of interconnection evokes the idea that all people in a community are fundamentally linked. This 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. You can describe how preventing violence in the community creates a safer, more connected, cohesive community where neighbors know one another and support one another's well-being.

Prevention

Prevention is a core value for many practitioners who recognize that intervening early to address trauma can improve health and save lives in the long run. Prevention also saves money and is simply the smart thing to do.

In your messages, articulate the values that ring true to you, are consistent with the way you frame the problem, and support your solution.

Solution

Violence prevention at the community level requires a complex array of strategies — more than can be conveyed in a brief statement or interview. Time and space constraints in news stories require being strategic about elevating one core part of the solution — the part that you have identified in your overall strategy. A good rule for your solution statement is to ask yourself whether it answers each of the three parts of the following question: *Who* needs to do *what* by *when*? The answer will come from your overall strategy (see Tool 1). The more specific you can be in naming the solution you seek, the person or group responsible for implementing the change, and the date you need the change made by, 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, people 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. Since you can't talk about all of the contextual factors in every message, choose the part of the context that links logically to the structural solutions you're seeking in your overall strategy right now, and explain how your immediate goal is helping to 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 who see the effects in schools, social workers grappling with overburdened systems, local business owners who support thriving communities, faith leaders organizing their congregations, and others. What's important is that they can speak with conviction and understand the specific demand.

Sample messages

The following message provides an example of how a problem statement, solution statement, and values statement can come together in a cohesive message. Although you can appeal to more than one value, this example emphasizes fairness.

> 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. When the city council votes on the upcoming violence prevention ordinance, it's imperative that they approve funding for violence prevention outreach workers. These outreach workers connect with the individuals most at risk of experiencing *or* perpetrating violence. They are changing lives, making our entire community strong and healthy for years to come. All young people in our city deserve the opportunity to realize their fullest potential — and to simply live. That's why we are calling on the city council to safeguard the resources our outreach workers need to succeed in their vital work.

Below is a similar statement, this time emphasizing the value of interconnection:

> Here in our city, we understand that when all our young people are supported — especially those who have experienced harms — our entire community is strengthened. Violence is the number one cause of death among young African Americans here in the city they call home. Today, our city has a historic opportunity to transform this reality by approving funding for violence prevention outreach workers. These outreach workers connect with the individuals most at risk of experiencing *or* perpetrating violence. They are changing lives, making our entire community stronger and healthier for years to come. We are one community, and today we call on the city council to safeguard the resources our outreach workers need to succeed in their vital work.

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 embedding portraits within landscape stories will make it easier for people to see that changes in the systems that govern neighborhoods, schools, and hospitals will help us end community violence. Once these connections are clear, our audiences will understand why we need to support violence prevention at the community level. While the specific order is flexible, remember that strong messages include three components: a statement of the problem, a statement of your values, and a description of the solution.

Use the worksheet on the next page to develop your own message with these three components.

Worksheet: Message development

Instructions: Keeping your goal in mind, use this worksheet to develop a brief message that will convey the problem, why it matters, and the solution.

What's wrong?

Why does it matter?

What should be done?

tool 3

Evaluating your strategic communication

Evaluation is important because, ultimately, you will want to know if your communication efforts are having the intended impact. One way to use this tool is at the end of a strategic communication 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 that will help you determine 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?
Did we have the right people at the table when we developed our goals and objectives? Who should be included as we go forward?
Have we identified specific communication 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 communication activities have proven most successful? Which have been less helpful?

Equipping spokespeople

How many spokespeople did we train for this campaign?
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?
Did we have the right people at the table when we developed the talking points?
Are staff members and spokespeople familiar and comfortable 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 local journalists have we identified who cover violence or related issues? Do we have their contact information? Have we met them?
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 for this campaign? Were any published?
How many op-eds did we submit for this campaign? Were any published?
Does everyone on our staff know what to do when a reporter calls?
How can we better equip staff and/or coalition members to respond to media requests? Do we need to have more staff members trained to handle media requests, or do we want to centralize this with just a few staff or coalition members?

Evaluation example: Urban Peace Movementt

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 Reinvestment" frame. To Urban Peace Movement and its allies, Truth and Reinvestment 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. (It is important to note that organizations should carefully consider legal and grant-related restrictions before engaging in policy advocacy.) Their strategy, including questions used to evaluate their efforts, is outlined below.

Overall strategy	To pass the Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act of 2016.
	To foster youth development, youth voice, and youth participation in setting policies related to criminal justice reform and community investment.
	To collect 1,000 signatures in support of the Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act. • **Primary target:** communities of color, new voters, allies. • **Secondary target:** all California voters.
Media strategy	To develop and disseminate messages to advance the "Truth and Reinvestment" frame.
	To generate news and opinion coverage: • With coalition partners, to get three op-eds published in local newspapers between April and May 2015. • 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.

Message strategy	To develop a message that clearly articulates the problem, solution, and why it matters: • **Problem:** 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. • **Solution:** 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. • **Why it matters:** Children have no place in the adult criminal justice system. When you try kids as adults, they are denied education and rehabilitative services and, at the same time, are exposed to extreme sentences and harsher conditions.
	To train five spokespeople from partnering organizations who can reliably be called on to respond to interviewer requests: • **Messengers:** Formerly incarcerated youth; community leaders; local educators
Access strategy	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 the Truth and Reinvestment frame.
	To ensure that at least one of the events above makes it onto local TV news.
Evaluation	Did we successfully collect 1,000 signatures?
	Did we successfully publish three op-eds?
	Did we get at least five letters to the editor published?
	Did we train five spokespeople from our organization? Did these spokespeople report greater confidence in speaking to the media?
	Did we hold at least two press conferences, rallies, or other public events? Were these events covered on local TV news? How many outlets covered the event?
	Through our news monitoring, did we observe other reporters reinforcing our frame of "justice reinvestment"?

News monitoring

In the absence of direct, personal experience with violence, much of what the public knows and believes about it comes from the news. 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. Because of its far-reaching impact on the public and decision-makers, we encourage violence prevention advocates to monitor the news. The insights you glean from news monitoring can shine light on how the public currently understands violence — and what's likely missing from common perceptions of it.

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 questions helps identify gaps in news coverage about violence and points the way toward strategies to shape news coverage in ways that illuminate the importance of policies and systems changes that can prevent violence.

Reasons to monitor the news

It will come as little surprise to violence prevention advocates that the news, on the whole, paints a partial, even distorted, picture of violence in our communities. 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[1] the rate of 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 by simply making better choices. Personal responsibility is important, of course, and it's necessary 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. 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 violence prevention advocates identify reporters who need more background information on the root causes of community violence. It can also help locate reporters who are covering the issue in a balanced, effective way.

[1] Mejia P., Seklir L., Nixon L., & Dorfman L. (2016). Changing the discourse about community violence: To prevent it, we have to talk about it. Berkeley Media Studies Group. http://www.bmsg.org/resources/publications/community-violence-prevention-discourse

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 for news monitoring to be worthwhile; however, you do need a way to easily find the news coverage that has an impact on how your key audiences see violence. Here are a few examples of low-cost, user-friendly tools that can help with news monitoring:

Google Alerts allows users to identify key words they wish to track and receive daily emails, with links to relevant stories.

Feedly is a news aggregator application that combines news from different sources and stores them in one place. Google Alerts can also be set up from within Feedly.

Hootsuite allows users to sort and organize social media feeds by platform, issue area, and follower groups, making content 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 that covers violence and other public health issues.

* Subscribe for free from any page on BMSG's website at www.bmsg.org.

Key news monitoring questions

If we want to build support for the policy changes we seek, we need to make sure not only that the work of violence prevention 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 news outlets are paying attention to violence. Knowing who wrote the article or produced the segment allows you to track and build relationships with the journalists that are covering your issues (see Tool 7, "Building Relationships with Journalists," for more about this).

Who speaks?

Journalists are continually 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[2] 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 with the sources who can speak to your overall strategy.

How are people who survived violence portrayed?

Are survivors of violence 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? Use what you learn from these observations when you prepare your own spokespeople who have survived violence to be sure they won't be surprised by insensitive questions and will be comfortable pivoting to the message they want to deliver.

[2] Mejia P., Seklir L., Nixon L., & Dorfman L. (2016). Changing the discourse about community violence: To prevent it, we have to talk about it. Berkeley Media Studies Group. http://www.bmsg.org/resources/publications/community-violence-prevention-discourse

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 issues. Are there examples you want to share with your target audience or allies?

Does the story provide an equity or racial justice lens?

Contemporary and historical racial injustices are often among the most important root causes of violence, yet these factors are rarely discussed in the news. Journalists who write compellingly about racial justice can be key allies in highlighting your work to end violence.

What solutions, if any, are discussed?

Traditionally, news highlights problems more than solutions. Stories that bring solutions to the fore, however, help the public and policymakers understand that violence is a solvable problem in our communities. If your solution is featured, share the story. If it is not, contact the reporter to explain that you have another angle that might be of interest.

In an ideal world, news monitoring would be done on an ongoing basis. But if that's not feasible, you can also do news monitoring in response to an immediate need. For example, if your organization or coalition aims to equip young people to speak with reporters, a news monitoring exercise might be included as part of their training. Using one of the news aggregating tools on page 44, you could pick out five or 10 print, digital, or broadcast stories and then work as a team to analyze them, using the following worksheet 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 read and analyze the news critically.

If you are planning to hold a news conference or some other media event, you could monitor the news in the weeks leading up to the event so that you have a clear sense of which reporters might be interested in your event, 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 to be as systematic as possible. You can use the table on the worksheet below, or create your own to help you organize any news monitoring process.

Worksheet: Monitoring the news

Instructions: Use the table on the following page to monitor news coverage of violence in news outlets in your area. If time is limited, you may start by simply recording the news source, reporter, headline, and date. When it comes time to shape the news, pick a few key categories to focus on. For example, if your goal is to humanize survivors by demonstrating the very real impact of violence on their lives, carefully examine the extent to which stories do this effectively. When you've identified a gap, consider: How could the story be improved? What do you need to do to make sure the reporter gets it right when she or he works with your organization? Collect the information you can provide reporters — such as fact sheets, compelling visuals, powerful anecdotes, or recently released data — to help them tell a more complete story.

	Story 1	Story 2	Story 3
News source			
Reporter, headline, date			
Who speaks? Who is left out?			
How are survivors portrayed?			
Does the story address root causes of violence? How could it?			
Does the story provide an equity and/or racial justice lens? How could it?			
What solutions, if any, are discussed? What solutions would you like to see?			

tool 5

Shaping stories across sectors

Ensuring that our communities are safe, trauma-informed, and free of violence is a multisector effort. Systems upholding health care, schools, businesses, public health, youth-serving organizations, and other groups all can be improved to support violence prevention. 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 news beat: crime stories.

BMSG research[3] found 10 news stories about crime for every story about community violence. This means that when policymakers or the public read or watch the news, 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. If the problem is framed solely in terms of "bad people," punishment may be the only solution that comes to mind. More complete news coverage — across all news beats — could change those perceptions.

[3] Mejia P., Seklir L., Nixon L., & Dorfman L. (2016). Changing the discourse about community violence: To prevent it, we have to talk about it. Berkeley Media Studies Group. http://www.bmsg.org/resources/publications/community-violence-prevention-discourse

To help policymakers and the public understand the root causes of violence and what can be done about them, seize every opportunity to tell more complete stories about violence and violence prevention across news beats. 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 social-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 include interviews with local businesses that are willing to "ban the box" and hire people regardless of whether they have prior convictions.

Excercise: Shaping stories across sectors

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 campaign to the next, here are a few possible 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 and how this solution also addresses disparities*."

"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 schools improve graduation rates*."

This exercise doesn't need to take long. In fact, you could do it in just a few minutes at a coalition meeting. The answers can help you focus your strategic communication goals and identify the information you will want to share with reporters so that it reinforces the frame and overall strategy you've developed.

If you're looking to take a slightly deeper dive, the following resources provide 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 systemic changes you want to see in each sector, and how would news coverage need to change to garner public support for those changes?

Worksheet example: 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. This page contains an example of how to fill out the worksheet. On the next page, we've provided a blank worksheet for you to complete, using your own answers.

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?
Education	A story about how trauma affects the lives of school children who live in areas with high rates of violence.	A story about social-emotional learning in California 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 well-being.	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.
Business (finance, business development, private sector, etc.)	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 offers low-interest loans to low-income people, helping to create a thriving, safe community.
Health care	A story describes the unmet mental health needs of patients who have survived violence.	A feature story on a trauma surgeon who has taken the initiative to create a peer support program for gunshot survivors in the hospital.	A story about how increasing access to mental health services for survivors of violence reduces trauma, thereby decreasing the chances of revictimization.
Other			

Worksheet: Shaping stories across sectors

Instructions: Use this worksheet to brainstorm how you can link community safety to news stories in sectors that are not typically associated with community violence and safety.

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?
Education			
Business (finance, business development, private sector, etc.)			
Health care			
Other			

tool 6

Finding your news hook

Unfortunately, community violence happens every day — but, fortunately, so do efforts to make our communities safer. When a story about community violence 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.

Worksheet example: Identifying news hooks for your organization

Element of newsworthiness	Key questions	Example
Controversy	What drama or controversy do you want to highlight? What is at stake? For whom? Should a business, institution, or government agency be doing something differently? Are rules or regulations being violated? Who is benefiting from this problem not being solved? Who is losing out? How?	A controversial proposition 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 proposition inspired could be the catalyst for a great deal of thoughtful coverage about the challenges, risks, and rewards of building and maintaining safe communities across the state, and an opportunity to talk about how our criminal justice system disproportionately and negatively impacts communities of color.
Irony	What is surprising about this story? Is there a contradiction to point out between how things should work and how they are really happening? Is there hypocrisy to reveal?	In an effort to fulfill a campaign promise to "get tough on crime," a local mayor approves a $2 million spending bill for new vehicles and weapons for the local police department. Advocates respond by penning an op-ed noting that in his previous term, the mayor had cut funding for a variety of social services that would have done more to prevent violence than the augmented law enforcement budget.
Injustice	What is inequitable or unfair in the story you are pitching? About the decision of an institution, business, or government agency? About the treatment of a community or vulnerable group? Is this injustice serious enough for the media to adopt an ongoing watchdog role?	Advocates denounce inflammatory coverage of a proposed statewide policy that would eliminate unfair barriers to hiring formerly incarcerated people. In denouncing it, they focus on a positive vision of how the policy will create safer and healthier communities.

Element of newsworthiness	Key questions	Example
Anniversary	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?	On the two-year anniversary of a mass shooting, politicians and gun control advocates call for stricter and more comprehensive background checks for people purchasing guns online and at gun shows.
	Was legislation passed or regulation approved that has made communities safer — or should have?	
	Does the anniversary offer the opportunity to ask what happened then, and where we are now?	
	What progress has been, or should have been, made?	
Broad population interest	Can you think of a way that the story affects a lot of people, even if it is related to a specific group, like children, young men of color, or the unemployed?	Advocates making the case for community safety initiatives highlight how members of the public — even those not directly impacted by violence — benefit when hospitals, schools, and community organizations adopt trauma-informed practices.
	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?	

Element of newsworthiness	Key questions	Example
Event/story with local interest	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?	Advocates working on community violence hold a commemorative event to celebrate a local milestone — a month-long moratorium on gun violence brokered by local community leaders.
	How can your story about the event emphasize solutions and collective action?	
	What about your story is important or meaningful to the local audience that reads a specific publication or watches a specific channel?	
	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.	
Seasonal/holiday link	What about your story, issue, or policy goal can be connected to a holiday or seasonal event?	As Christmas approaches, writers evoke 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, lead to safer communities.
Breakthrough/milestone	Does the story describe breaking news related to community violence?	A housing project in your city is the site of an innovative violence interruption program. The precedent-setting program, located in one of the city's most violent areas, has led to a significant milestone: 365 days without a single homicide.
	Does the story mark an important medical, political, or historical first?	
	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?	

Element of newsworthiness	Key questions	Example
Personal angle	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?	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.
	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?	
New data	Does the story describe novel data or statistics that are important for understanding community violence and what to do about it?	The release of local crime data shows a decline in violent incidents and creates opportunities to discuss the cross-sector collaboration and collective action that caused these declines.
	Can the data be reported in a way that emphasizes implications for policy solutions and preventing future incidents?	
	Are there national data that can be disaggregated and made local?	
Celebrity or pop culture appeal	Do any celebrities support your issue and policy goal? Would they be willing to lend a hand to your efforts?	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.
	Is there a local celebrity or community leader with public standing whose affiliation with your site would bring good attention?	
	If you can form a partnership with a celebrity or public figure, will the relationship be worthwhile — and predictable?	
	Note 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?	

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**	**Possible news hooks**
Controversy	What drama or controversy do you want to highlight?	
	What is at stake? For whom?	
	Should a business, institution, or government agency be doing something differently?	
	Are rules or regulations being violated?	
	Who is benefiting from this problem not being solved?	
	Who is losing out? How?	
Irony	What is surprising about this story?	
	Is there a contradiction to point out between how things should work and how they are really happening?	
	Is there hypocrisy to reveal?	
Injustice	What is inequitable or unfair about this situation? About the decision of an institution, business, or government agency? About the treatment of a community or vulnerable group?	
	Is this injustice serious enough for the media to adopt an ongoing watchdog role?	

Element of newsworthiness	Key questions	Possible news hooks
Anniversary	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?	
	Was legislation passed or regulation approved that has made communities safer — or should have?	
	Does the anniversary offer the opportunity to ask what happened then, and where we are now?	
	What progress has been, or should have been, made?	
Broad population interest	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?	
	Can you think of a way that the story affects a lot of people even if it is related to a specific group?	
	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?	

Element of newsworthiness	Key questions	Possible news hooks
Event/story with local interest	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?	
	How can your story about the event emphasize solutions and collective action?	
	What about your story is important or meaningful to the local audience that reads a specific publication or watches a specific channel?	
	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.	
Seasonal/holiday link	What about your story, issue, or policy goal can be connected to a holiday or seasonal event?	
Breakthrough/milestone	Does the story describe breaking news related to community violence?	
	Does the story mark an important medical, political, or historical first?	
	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?	
Personal angle	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?	
	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?	

Element of newsworthiness	Key questions	Possible news hooks
New data	Does the story describe novel data or statistics that are important for understanding community violence and what to do about it?	
	Can the data be reported in a way that emphasizes implications for policy solutions and preventing future incidents?	
	Are there national data that can be disaggregated and made local?	
Celebrity or pop culture appeal	Do any celebrities support your issue and policy goal? Would they be willing to lend a hand to your efforts?	
	Is there a local celebrity or community leader with public standing whose affiliation with your site would bring good attention?	
	If you can form a partnership with a celebrity or public figure, will the relationship be worthwhile — and predictable?	
	Note 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?	

tool 7

Building relationships with journalists

Journalists covering violence will be more likely to incorporate community safety 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, editors, producers, 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 issues 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?

On the following pages 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 weekly and monthly (like magazines). Does your target respond to national news or local outlets? Mainstream or alternative publications? What about outlets that target specific racial or ethnic communities?
- 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 reporters 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 contacts 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.
- 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 in 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 explain 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 you can 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 offering background data or introductions to local sources who can help them fill gaps in their reporting on communities affected by violence. Providing reporters with fact sheets containing updated data related to violence and community safety 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 champions working to sustain a recent drop in crime? Could you introduce them to an organization with 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. 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.
- One of the best ways for reporters to develop a deeper understanding of your work is to invite them on a site visit, attend an open house or another event put on by your organization, 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 show the solution and not just the problem.

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

- Provide journalists 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 perspective. You can't control how the reporter will develop their story, but information you provide can influence the form the story takes.

- TV producer Don Hewitt famously said that reporters don't tell issues; they tell stories. 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. But a story about a grieving — or angry — family doesn't lead the reporter to the root causes or structures that caused the problem in the first place. That's an important connection you can make for the reporter. 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, work in advance 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.

  Visuals are particularly important in today's media landscape. To determine what visuals to include, envision your story through the lens of a camera. What images will demonstrate what your work is all about? Compelling visuals can illustrate 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.

  Media bites are short, memorable statements that help audiences understand your frame. Reporters face serious time and space constraints. Therefore, a media bite should be simple enough to be copied down verbatim by a reporter, easy to repeat, and short enough to appear unedited in a nightly news clip. Keep in mind that a television segment on your work may be as short as 30 seconds.

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, health care 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 your authentic voices have an opportunity to practice developing and delivering their message.

Social math helps make large numbers more comprehensible to audiences. To calculate social math,[4] 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 you can "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.

[4] Using social math to support your policy issue. (2015). Berkeley Media Studies Group. http://www.bmsg.org/blog/social-math-support-public-health-policy

Build client safety into the relationship from the beginning.

- Many violence prevention organizations have noted that when engaging with reporters, it is important to clearly establish boundaries and expectations to ensure that the interview is a positive, empowering experience for your clients and not retraumatizing. 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 retraumatize them. The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma's "Ethical Reporting on Traumatized People"[5] webpage is a helpful resource to share with journalists.
- Individuals who are further along in the recovery process, or who are past survivors and are now working to support others through trauma, may be more appropriate spokespeople than a more recent survivor.
- Practice and preparation can help your clients confidently tell their own story in their own voice. Help clients craft their 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 advance can reduce the anxiety of the interview, ensure message consistency, and help clients understand the important role they play in changing the media narrative about violence.

[5] McMahon C., Ricketson M., & Tippet G. (2014). Ethical reporting on traumatized people. Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma. https://dartcenter.org/content/dvd-launched-ethical-reporting-people-affected-bytrauma

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"):

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

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

Newspapers:

Radio stations and programs:

TV stations and programs:

Online outlets:

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

Journalist name _____
Media outlet _____
Recent articles/segments _____
Twitter handle _____
Email address _____
Phone _____

Journalist name _____
Media outlet _____
Recent articles/segments _____
Twitter handle _____
Email address _____
Phone _____

Journalist name _____
Media outlet _____
Recent articles/segments _____
Twitter handle _____
Email address _____
Phone _____

Journalist name _____
Media outlet _____
Recent articles/segments _____
Twitter handle _____
Email address _____
Phone _____

5. The story elements we will have prepared for journalists are:

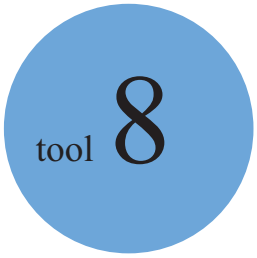
Story element	How we will use this story element
What are our key visuals?	
Who are our authentic voices?	
What media bites can we use?	
What key data or statistics are important for our audience to know?	
How can we calculate social math for the data and statistics above?	

6. To ensure the safety of our clients if they engage with the media, we will:

Help prepare talking points

Schedule practice sessions

Other



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?

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

What do you need?

What are your deadlines?

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?

If you know who else a reporter has talked to, that can tell you a lot about what they may already know about the issue — and what might be missing from the picture. For instance, you'll want to know if they've spoken with people whose perspective on community violence prevention opposes yours. Some reporters may be unwilling or unprepared to reveal their sources, but often they will share that information. And, at the end of the interview, you can suggest other contacts who can help them flesh out their reporting.

What do you need?

Sometimes a reporter just needs a quick fact or a quote to fill out a perspective they've already determined should be represented in the story. Other times, the reporter will need lots of background information. 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 educators)? Whatever you provide, make sure to offer current information. When information gets stale or outdated, it loses its news value, so providing the most current data will increase the likelihood that reporters can use it.

What are your deadlines?

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, even if it is inconvenient. When you drop everything to get a reporter what they need to tell a more complete and accurate story, they will remember. A helpful, fast response is a good long-term investment.

Knowing to ask these four questions and being responsive to reporters helps build relationships that will increase your organization's ability to improve the narrative around violence. Even so, there is no obligation to respond to reporters or to answer their questions the moment they call. Be sure that saying yes to the interview request meets your goals. And, depending on the story and the deadline, you may not need to answer right away. Many 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 call back later with the information the reporter is requesting. Calling back in the timeframe you promise helps establish trust.

tool 9

Pitching your story

Once you've built relationships with journalists (see Tool 7) and decided which of the elements of newsworthiness you will highlight, how will you get your story covered? You have to pitch 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. Pitches can be for original story ideas, or they can piggyback off other news stories by applying a new angle to a story already in the news.

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 persuade their editors to let them do the story. Use the tips on the following pages to create an effective pitch.

Preparing your pitch

Pitch stories, not topics.

Emphasize the action your story's characters will take. The general topic of "trauma-informed care" or "violence prevention" isn't a story, but when someone is doing something about it, it is — especially if that something is new. For example, you could pitch stories about a new or improved program to help violence survivors get 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.

Use the 5 Ws (who, what, when, where, and why).

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 our 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, our 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 6, "Finding your News Hook"). 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 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 the community."

Who is the story about?

Example of pitching an original story, continued:

"This is a chance to show how motivated teens from our county — and their families, friends, teachers, and neighbors — are working to end violence in their lifetimes."

Example of piggybacking, continued:

"The people of our neighborhood are painted with an unfair brush. We are the residents of a resilient and vibrant community whose stories were lost when our homes — and our 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 amazing people born and raised right here. Come and meet them!"

Who is impacted?

Broaden the base of the story to the largest possible audience. 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 whole community, then 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, continued:

"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 the groundbreaking work that's changing this city for all its residents."

Example of piggybacking, continued:

"As residents of this county, we deserve to know our neighbors and fellow residents and to learn and celebrate what makes our community so rich and 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 to conduct business, go to school, and just live together."

Where and when will it happen?

Example of pitching an original story, continued:

"Come see what these young people are doing on Wednesday 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 residents who would be happy to take you through their work on a typical day and share their stories about their community and how it got this way."

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 policymakers? 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.

Delivering your pitch

Rely on relationships.

Return to your media list to figure out who to pitch your story to. Ideally, this will be a reporter with whom you have a relationship. If not, you can still use your media list to pitch your story to a reporter with a history of covering violence in a fair and balanced way.

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). Reporters will get dozens of voice messages or emails throughout the day and may be unable to go through all of them in a timely fashion. Be persistent and contact them again if you don't get a response.

Be brief.

However you contact a reporter, keep your pitch simple, clear, and concise. Just as reporters are often told not to bury their lead, or main point of their story, sources should heed the same advice. 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.

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 voicemail if the reporter is not there. 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 local 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 then need to 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 overprepare — 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 will be more responsive if they already know you.

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.

Keep in mind …

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.

Worksheet: Pitching your story

Instructions: Respond to 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?

What happened (or is going to happen)?

Why is it interesting/important/newsworthy?

Who is the story about?

Where and when will it happen?

tool 10

Writing effective letters to the editor

Letters to the editor can signal community concern about violence and send a message to policymakers. But what makes for a compelling letter, and how can advocates increase their chances of getting published?

Letters should be short and punchy, and if it the subject matter is in response to a news article, it is best to respond the same day the article is published. As with other media strategies, always keep your overall goal in mind. It can be tempting to respond with anger to an article or column to set the record straight, but will your response further your overall advocacy goal? What would you like readers to do? What solutions would you like them to support as a result of reading your letter?

When writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine, keep the following tips in mind:

Respond quickly.

If you read or see something you want to respond to, send your letter by email (or use the news site's online form if they have one) the same day, or by the next day at the latest.

Mention your reason for writing, preferably in the first sentence.

If you are responding directly to an article you've read in the publication, state the article headline and publication date. If you are commenting on a local current event, be specific about the issue or event.

Limit the content to one or two key points.

A letter to the editor offers the chance to make a concise statement or argument, not an in-depth analysis. Focus on the overall message you want readers to get from your letter.

Take a strong position.

Letters section editors look for fresh facts, honest statements of opinion, and creative takes on news. If you can, offer a compelling fact that shows the urgency or importance of your issue. Include a call to action.

Make sure to include your full name and contact information.

You may be contacted to verify your identity before the letter is published.

Look up the editorial policies for each outlet you submit to.

Some have different word-count restrictions or policies on how many letters they will accept from the same individual in a specific time period.

Don't send the same letter to competing publications.

Newspapers and magazines want to publish original content. Engaging your allies may be a way to have several different letters published that are worded differently but point to the same policy solution. Also, follow the news your target follows. Your choice of where to submit your letter should be a strategic one.

Worksheet: Writing effective letters to the editor

Instructions: Use the following template to help structure a letter to the editor. Remember to keep it short — about 100 to 200 words.

Dear editor:

Re: [put the date and headline from the article you are responding to here]

Yesterday, you reported that

_____

_____

_____

_____

This is [timely/interesting/ironic] because

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

What people don't realize is

_____

_____

_____

_____

One thing that could really make a difference is

_____

_____

_____

_____

Sincerely,

Signature

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