

Talking about Youth Transitions – Audio Conference Highlights
Youth Transition Funders Group
Thursday, June 28
2pm Eastern

Call Facilitators: Lisa Sohn and Burt Glass, Fenton Communications

Lisa McGill, director of YTFG, opened the discussion by introducing the genesis behind the toolkit's development, citing the important groundwork provided by Connect for Kids and Spitfire Communications in recent years.

After the introduction Lisa Sohn and Burt Glass facilitated the meeting as follows:

REVIEW OF AGENDA:

- Goals of today's call
- Review "recommended messages and more" document
- Identify ways to make use of recommendations
- Receive your feedback on the call so that this becomes a living document

METHODOLOGY OF TOOLKIT CREATION:

Target Audience—means narrowing the scope. The general public is not focused enough. Media is never a primary audience, sometimes a secondary, usually a conduit.

YTFG's target audiences:

1. policy-makers (most important because they can push for reforms)
2. people who influence policy-makers
3. media because they reach policy-makers

A Snapshot of Thoughts from Callers

- "With regard to general public never being an audience: Building public will is not addressed. A legislator would be listening to constituents. There is a place for general public, isn't there?"

Fenton response:

- Your comment alluded to targeting a narrowed audience, because it would be a certain legislator and possibly demographic. People who influence policy-makers.
- Goal should be to appeal to a variety of target audiences with one message.

Messengers—characteristics of the best picks

- Power; Policy-makers (chairperson, relevant constituencies, head of a community organization in his/her district)
- Humanity (people with personal stories, personally affected)

- Knowledge (credentialed, with good information)
- Counter-intuitive messengers. (unexpected endorsement is especially compelling).
 - i.e., Tough police chief that comes out in favor of crime prevention programs.

A Snapshot of Thoughts from Callers

There was a lot of support in YTFG's Washington meeting for using young people as messengers. They may be the most powerful messengers, because they use storytelling as opposed to facts and figures.

Framing

George Lakoff at Berkeley coined the term. The way you define a problem you're seeking to solve. Graphically fences in the ideas that can be considered.

EX: War on Terror is a frame of the problem facing the US after 9/11 attack; limited the debate that could be had. Tax relief is a good example of successful framing, hemmed in the idea that taxes are burdens.

YTFG recommended values from Fenton Communications:

1. *Fairness*. Chosen over justice or equity or equality, because they are outcome-based and don't resonate as well with the broader concept of what's fair. Applies to foster care, juvenile justice and out-of-school youth.
2. *Responsibility*. This is a two-way street. The joint responsibility to take advantage of programs resonates with American values, and across the political spectrum.

Other values, such as respect, promise, interconnected, effective—are all true. But with a frame, it's better to hone in and build from there. Best to frame youth transition issues around one or both of the above frames, it puts you at an advantage.

*See pg. 8 for articulation of the frame.

A Snapshot of Thoughts from Callers

There was a brief dialogue (that is, push back) about where the framing of social justice fit into the discussion and how that frame could be leveraged with particular audiences – for example, policy makers with an interest in Latino, African American, or immigrant communities.

Examples of Caller Comments on Framing

- “Can you explain why people picked fairness over justice or equity?”
 - Fenton Response: We're recommending fairness because equality can mean equality of outcomes, which may have less public support. Fairness

doesn't guarantee outcomes, rather equal opportunity. Fairness is the cousin of opportunity, and resonates with a broad spectrum of people across classes, etc. Fairness doesn't take away from the responsibility that some people feel these groups have (juvenile justice-involved youth, for example).

- “Policy studies say fairness has no meaning because it's so subjective, especially in legislative settings.”
 - Fenton Response: Communications in a popular setting relies on emotions and values. The fact that it's not exact or quantifiable may not be a hindrance.
- “Fairness feels soft. Opportunity cost and hard cost are not being articulated as a crisis. For example, the hard cost of continued care, incarceration, dependence on public support. These things resonate with the legislative community.”
 - Fenton Response: These costs currently appear in the messages, such as the effects on families and communities in the long term, and they concern the whole country. They are more hard-nosed arguments, which are less unique than some others. This rationale is not a unique attribute of youth transition issues.
- “Fairness works well in my experience, especially when youth speak from their experiences.”

Positioning. Perhaps more abstract, but possibly most important

It is the unique space that an organization or product occupies in the mind of a target audience. Positioning sets you apart because partly because it offers a comparison.

History of positioning comes from advertising. In the 1950s and before, most products were sold by highlighting their attributes: the unique selling proposition. i.e., a car that was fast, reliable. In the 1970s, people began to articulate an 'image' recognizing that Americans buy out of emotion. A car is sexy, movie stars like it. An explosion of info resulted in positioning because it is an effort to strip away a lot of excess information to get to the product's core essence, which is all that can be retained in prospective buyers' minds. Ask yourself: what do you have that is unique, your unique real estate?

*See pg. 11 for positioning planks.

These planks came out of an analysis of past messaging, materials and surveys. It is useful to think about how these planks are distinct from other issues a policymaker, etc, might have in his/her head.

Education and teen substance abuse are related issues and offer one way to explore how youth transition issues are distinct.

Youth transition issues:

- affect those lower on socioeconomic ladder
- require more community responsibility

Positioning:

These messages are the actual language used to describe your attributes and position. The purpose is to get people to take action. The most effective messages are crystal clear and elicit the right emotions, which is not the same as killer statistic. Speak to the heart, not the head. Crafting a story line that speaks to values and emotions is the most effective lead-in for a more hard nosed point.

We developed them through surveys. They ensure that we're not just talking to ourselves. * See Page 14.

A simple narrative includes problem: solution: action.

There are also additional messages that springboard off of fairness and responsibility for specific items: Message nubs.

Note: Race is a differentiating factor, true, but it does resonate with audiences. This was debated.

A Snapshot of Thoughts from Callers

- “All of this work seems powerful. The challenge with funders is that solutions are scattered and we’ve not been effective at talking about them. Glad to see that we can cluster these issues.
Race is problematic because these systems treat kids differently (different resources, etc.). Need to pay attention to what’s more effective for kids that are black, Latino or poor.”
 - Fenton Response: Yes, this puts the onus on the idea of discrimination and speaks more directly to the idea of fairness. Fenton will incorporate this.
- “Is there value in trying to change language like ‘dropouts’? We’ve tried ‘interrupted education’. If it’s pejorative but it resonates, is there value in trying to change it?”
 - Fenton Response: People differ in opinion on this. Burt thinks it’s more important to be clear than try to change people through word choice.

AUDIO CONFERENCE CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, the group was not able to engage in the final ten minutes reserved for Q & A, as one of the callers placed the audio conference on hold with music in the background. This forced the facilitators to place the audio conference in listen-only mode for the final part.

Lisa Sohn and Burt Glass discussed the following to conclude the call:

How to use message documents:

- As a positioning check.
- Ask yourself if a legislator, or audience, would be prompted to act?
- Hand them to a media consultant, designer or advertisers.
- Take this doc and share with fundraising colleagues or communications colleagues.

EDITORIAL NOTE

We apologize for the technical glitch in the audio conference – although there was no clear-cut way to avoid the music instrumentals from the caller. In the future, we will make a note to establish call ground rules at the beginning of each call. We've also made a decision to use operator-assisted calls in the future. Thus the call-in number will change.

To make up for the glitch, Fenton Communications has recorded a short podcast of the call's highlights. That podcast can be found on the YTFG website using this link: <http://www.ytfg.org/Audioconferences.html>.

Thanks to everyone for your feedback and participation. A revised copy of the document has been placed (embargoed) on the YTFG website. You can access it using this link: <http://www.ytfg.org/documents/TalkingaboutYouthTransitions.pdf>.

If you haven't taken the time yet to share your thoughts with us, make use of the teleconference blog at <http://ytfgteleconferenceblog.blogspot.com/>.

We will have a formal release of the toolkit on Wednesday, July 25, via an email blitz.

Thanks again for participating on the call.