



# What to Do

## Part Two:

# Communicate Like a Leader

We get it. Right now it seems like many things are spinning out of control. These are challenging times—especially for those of you who are working constantly to support women and children, ensure equitable access to education and healthcare, close gaps and increase opportunity for everyone. **The work you are doing is critical and you are not alone.**

When everything is up in the air, it's hard to know where to focus, when to push harder, and how to protect your organization and your work. ACS is offering this three-part series, "What To Do," that includes tips and tools to help you keep calm, concentrate on what matters, and take positive actions to keep your work moving forward.

In times of uncertainty, leadership and communication must work hand in hand. Staff, clients, and communities look to you not only for information but also for steadiness and direction. Your words and actions can either build trust or deepen uncertainty.

When confusion and uncertainty are rampant, clarity matters most. Take some time to pause and **REFOCUS**:

### **Reflect:**

Remind yourself why you're here: to lead with truth, protect trust, and guide others.

### **Evaluate:**

Pinpoint the real challenges. What's unclear? What's urgent? What's at risk?

### **Find balance:**

Take a breath. Stay calm. Resist the urge to react too quickly. Panic muddies your message.

### **Observe:**

Look closely. What hidden issues or past mistakes could resurface now?

### **Center:**

Define success. What outcome are you aiming for when this is over?

### **Unite:**

Know your team. Who's with you, who needs clarity, and who might resist? What can you do to support them?

### **Strategize:**

Build your message. What do people need to hear now—and how can you say it in a way that breaks through?

A grounded leader creates grounded messages. What you say, when you say it, and how you say it should all flow from the REFOCUS process.

# Consider the Audience

Strong leaders know that communicating to different audiences requires different approaches and certain nuances. The tips below will help you navigate each with confidence.

## *Internal Messages*

### Sample Internal Message

"We're aware of [INCIDENT OR NEWS] and are monitoring the situation. Please remember that [INSERT FACTS PERTAINING TO INCIDENT OR NEWS—these may have to do with rights, your operations, legal status, or other issues]. If you're approached by the authorities or the media, or if you feel unsafe, contact [INSERT DESIGNATED CONTACT OR LEGAL]. We're here to support you."

When talking to internal audiences (those closest to the mission or organization, like staff, partners, board members, etc.), remember to communicate:

#### **Calmly:**

Lead with facts, not speculation.

#### **Consistently:**

Make sure everyone receives the same core message.

#### **Confidentially:**

Remind internal audiences not to share unconfirmed reports.

## Compassionately:

Acknowledge fear and uncertainty. Offer support and mental health resources.

## External Messages

### Sample External Message

"In response to today's [ISSUE OR CRISIS, ORGANIZATION] is ensuring our [STAKEHOLDER(S)] are protected, informed, and supported. Your continued support allows us to respond swiftly and effectively in these moments of need. [ORGANIZATION] is prepared for moments like these. We're standing up and standing together by [INSERT EXAMPLES OF RESPONSE.]"

When communicating with external audiences (e.g., donors, community members, advocates), use messaging that aligns with the organization's mission and values, emphasizing its stability, humanity, and action.

- Emphasize how the current situation affects the community and how the organization is responding.
- Ensure messages reflect the lived experiences of those most impacted and are developed in partnership with community voices (whenever possible).
- Offer clear ways for external audiences to help, such as through donations, volunteer opportunities, awareness campaigns, and more.
- Frame messages in terms of impact, resilience, and action.
- Reinforce trust.

## Speaking Out

If your organization is thinking about speaking out or taking a public stand (e.g., social media post, talking to media, releasing a public statement), first answer these questions:

Will speaking out...

- **extend the organization's reach** in a meaningful or strategic way?
- **demonstrate the organization's values** and commitment?
- **reduce the negative impact** or lessen harm to those affected?

If you can't answer "yes" to at least two of these questions, pause and re-evaluate with your team. Not every moment is the right moment to speak. Sometimes silence can be protection; other times, action is essential. Be sure you have a clear understanding of the potential risks and impacts of both.

## Reaching Out

Communication is only effective if it reaches your audiences—internal and external. Your messages will travel farther when you:

- Provide translations in the primary language(s) of the community(ies) you serve.
- Use diverse channels that meet varying demographic needs and preferences (such as email, social media, flyers in community spaces, and more).
- Incorporate accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

Communication and leadership are tightly intertwined. What, when, and how you share information sets the tone for your entire organization—especially in times of uncertainty.

Consult the free Check out the ACS [Message Creation Checklist](#) and ACS [Communication Channel Guide](#) to learn more about delivering the right message, to the right people, through the right channels.

## Want more?

Need more support?

Contact any of our team members, call toll free at  
1-877-372-0166 or visit our website at  
[advocacyandcommunication.org](http://advocacyandcommunication.org)



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