



Rapid Response Decision Framework

When breaking news hits, the pressure to say something is immediate—and often internal. Board members, staff, members, and partners all want to know: where do we stand? But speaking before you've thought it through can dilute your message, drain your team, or put your organization on record in a way that doesn't serve your mission.

ACS' Rapid Response Decision Framework helps you move quickly and strategically when time is of the essence. Use it anytime a news cycle, policy action, or public moment is pulling your organization toward a response.

Follow these four steps in sequence to make your decision: each one is a filter designed to narrow your options and clarify your choice. Reference the example scenario throughout to see how the framework works in practice.

Step 1:
**Does the issue
relate directly to
our mission?**

Step 2:
**Does the issue
affect our work or
the communities
we serve?**

Step 3:
**Is there strategic
value in speaking
publicly?**

Step 4:
**Who should
speak, and
how?**

***Example Scenario:** A regional nonprofit operating 10 child care centers receives news that the governor has released a budget proposal that includes a 30 percent cut to publicly funded child care assistance. Within hours, the board is asking the CEO if the nonprofit will release a statement.*

www.advocacyandcommunication.org

For more information about ACS, please contact us at info@advocacyandcommunication.org.



Cleveland
1277 West 104th St.
Cleveland, OH 44102

Columbus
2612 Zollinger Road
Columbus, OH 43221

Washington, DC
300 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Suite 900, PMB 9005
Washington, DC 20001

Phoenix
207 North Gilbert Road
Suite 007
Phoenix, AZ 85234

Step 1:
**Does the issue relate directly
to our mission?**

Not every news cycle is YOUR news cycle. The first filter is the simplest: if the issue doesn't connect to your core mission areas, you don't need to weigh in. Start by naming your organization's core mission areas:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Tip: If your list is longer than five or six, the tool will struggle to function as a filter. Name your key, defining priority areas, not everything you touch.

If NO → Do not issue a public communication. Continue monitoring.

If YES → Proceed to Step 2.

***Example:** Our mission includes child care access, quality early learning, and family economic stability. The proposed cut directly affects all three areas. PROCEED.*

A reminder

Not responding is also a strategic choice. Sometimes the sharpest move is to stay quiet, monitor, and save your voice for the moments where it will matter most.

Need help honing your strategic communication processes? Contact us: info@advocacyandcommunication.org and check out our website for more strategic communication tools at advocacyandcommunication.org.



**Advocacy &
Communication
SOLUTIONS**

ACS Rapid Response Decision Framework

Visit www.advocacyandcommunication.org or email info@advocacyandcommunication.org for more information.

©2026 Advocacy & Communication Solutions, LLC.



2

Step 2:
**Does the issue affect our work
or the communities we serve?**

Relevance to your mission isn't the same as material impact. This step asks whether the moment actually impacts the people, partners, or systems you work with—or whether it's adjacent enough that amplifying others' voices is the more useful contribution.

Check the boxes where the statement is true. Proceed if at least one item is checked. Does this moment:

- ☐ Address policy or government decisions affecting the people we serve?
- ☐ Affect major national, state, or sector developments in our issue space?
- ☐ Involve key partners, coalition members, or allied organizations?
- ☐ Shape the public narrative around our mission?

If NO → Consider amplification only
(share partner content, repost on
social media, internal updates).

If YES → Proceed to Step 3.

***Example:** Seventy percent of the families our centers serve rely on publicly funded child care assistance. A 30 percent cut would push thousands of families out of the system and destabilize families and providers in our community. PROCEED.*

**Step 3: Is there strategic value
in speaking publicly?**

Just because you CAN respond doesn't mean you SHOULD. A public response costs time, attention, and political capital—and should advance at least one of the following:

Check the boxes where the statement is true. Proceed if at least one item is checked. Does this moment:

- ☐ Reinforce our leadership on our core issues
- ☐ Support our advocacy priorities
- ☐ Clarify our organization's values
- ☐ Elevate our network's or coalition's collective voice
- ☐ Educate the public, policymakers, or press
- ☐ Support partners, allies, or directly impacted communities

If NO → Hold the public response.
Consider private channels instead—
member communications, direct
policymaker outreach, or internal
channels.

If YES → Proceed to Step 4.

***Example:** We are one of the largest direct service providers in the area. While some staff worry this could damage our relationship with the governor's office, speaking publicly would reinforce our leadership, support our coalition's advocacy already underway, and give voice to the families we serve. PROCEED.*

Step 4: Who should speak, and how?

This final step is about determining the correct vehicle and voice to deliver your message.

Determine the most credible voice. Common spokespersons include:

- ✓ CEO or Executive Director—for national or sector-wide leadership moments
- ✓ Organizational voice—for the official institutional stance
- ✓ Coalition spokesperson—when yours is one voice among several aligned partners

Match the vehicle to the moment. One vehicle or multiple can be appropriate.

Communication Vehicle	When to Use	Select Your Vehicle and How You Will Use It
Public Statement	Clear organizational stance on a major issue	
Press Release	Announcing news, partnerships, funding, or programs	
Leadership Blog or Note	Reflective voice, complex issues, values framing	
Op-ed	Influencing public policy or shaping national discourse	
Social Media	Rapid awareness or amplification	
Internal Memo	When staff or board members need guidance more than a public response	

Example: There are several possible opportunities:

CEO Statement: We can release a statement within 24 hours of the news, including local data on how the cuts would affect families. We can amplify this on social media and publish on our blog.

Coalition amplification: We can sign on to a joint letter organized by our state child care advocacy coalition.

Internal Memo: We can share the statement and joint letter with staff so they can speak consistently with families and partners.

Press Release: NO—We have no specific news of our own to announce.