

Communications Guide

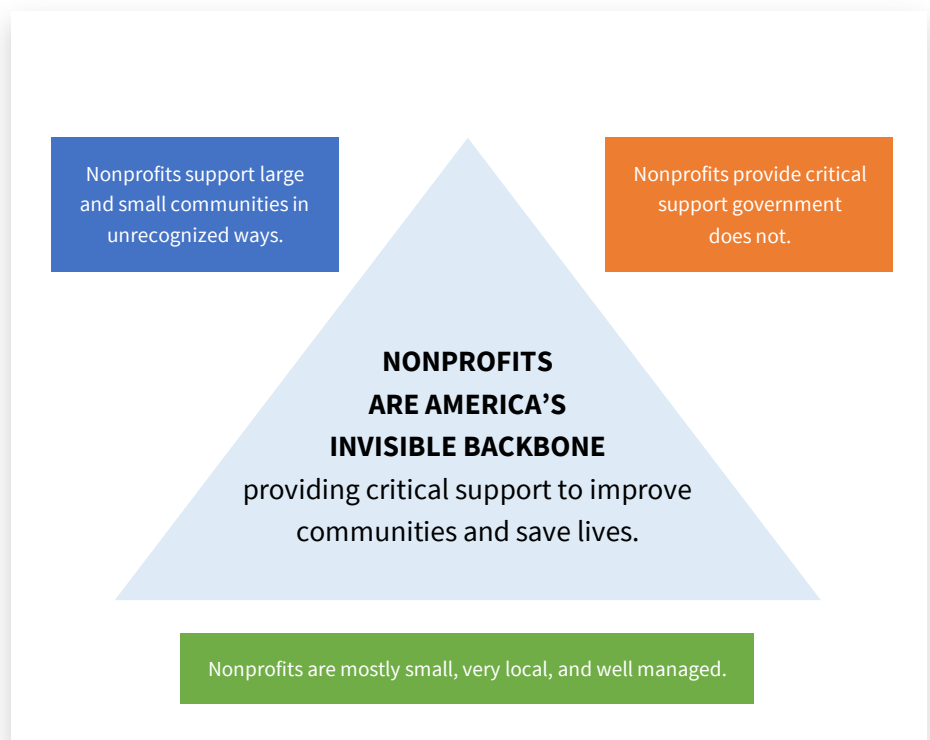
Our Opportunity

Trust in nonprofits is being undermined by leaders at the highest levels of our government, threatening the critical work that nonprofits do in communities across the country. This guide is intended to help our community tell the value story of the nonprofit community, before it is defined by others.

Our Message Framework

A message is like the thesis statement of any interview, written statement, or presentation. It summarizes everything you'd like your audience to walk away with.

The message framework is composed of an umbrella message and three themes. It is designed to be impactful, concise, and easy to remember.



Break It Down

The message framework is a starting point for your conversations, but there will be many ways to dive deeper to illustrate your point. Here's how we recommend talking about these themes as a starting point.

We always recommend weaving in the stories of your organization and most importantly, the communities and people you serve.

Umbrella	Nonprofits are America’s invisible backbone, delivering critical services efficiently, driving economic growth, and strengthening communities.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Nonprofit” is more than a word — it’s people coming together across the country to lift each other up. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In times of crisis, they’re food banks, shelters, recovery programs, and hotlines. • In everyday life, nonprofits bring us joy through the arts and sports, our kids, hobbies. • Nonprofits are how we organize to make our lives better — and often, to save them. • Millions of Americans in towns and cities of all sizes engage with nonprofits every year. • Nonprofits boost the economy – helping with affordable child and elder care, job training, and other support that allow Americans to stay in the workforce. • Nonprofits offer an opportunity for Americans to give back to their communities — though religious organizations and recreation sports leagues — connect people with their neighbors and strengthen bonds among all Americans.

Theme	Nonprofits support large and small communities in unrecognized ways.	
	<p>Talking Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonprofits are everywhere — serving both rural towns and major cities, large and small communities alike. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While 36% of nonprofit headquarters are in urban centers, a full 64% are based in suburban and rural areas. • Nonprofit impact often goes unnoticed, but nonprofits touch lives across all income levels — every single day. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over half (56%) of nonprofit headquarters are located in lower-income communities, with 27% in middle-income areas and 17% in high-income neighborhoods. • Nonprofits fuel the economy, contributing \$1.4 trillion and providing hundreds of thousands of jobs — often serving as major employers in their communities. 	<p>Go Deeper</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonprofits are a lifeline for millions of Americans in times of crisis. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2024 alone, World Central Kitchen served hundreds of thousands of meals to disaster victims in California, Florida, and North Carolina. • Catholic Charities supported 15 million people last year with essentials like food, health care, and job training. • Local food banks are an example of the nonprofit lifeline. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2023, nearly 50 million people turned to them for help — and demand surged even higher in 2024. • When times get tough, nonprofits show up — and step in — for those who need it most.

Theme	Nonprofits are mostly small, very local, and well managed.	
	<p>Talking Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonprofits are local and respond to community needs. • Nonprofits are mostly small: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 97% have budgets of less than \$5 million. 92% operate with less than \$1 million a year. 88% spend less than \$500,000 annually. • Nonprofits learn to be lean and frugal; when every dollar matters, you learn to make them count. • Local control ensures nonprofit funds are spent smartly and consistent with community priorities. 	<p>Go Deeper</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonprofits are experts at doing more with less. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food banks purchase bulk food at four to 10 cents per pound. • Feeding America provides 10 meals — roughly 12 pounds of food — for a dollar.

Theme	Nonprofits provide critical support government does not.	
	<p>Talking Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonprofits provide support where there are gaps, including life sustaining services and care for the most vulnerable. • They provide support the government doesn't. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food, disaster relief assistance, crisis support, and safe harbor from dangerous situations are just a few ways nonprofits offer help. 	<p>Go Deeper</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonprofits fill the government support gap. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 2 million women survivors receive assistance from nonprofit domestic violence shelters each year. • Since launching in 2022, the nonprofit crisis support hotline 988 has answered 11 million calls, texts, and chats. • Nonprofit volunteer fire departments and EMS services rely on federal grants to fund training, equipment, and more. • Nonprofits have distributed hundreds of thousands of Naloxone kits to reverse opioid overdoses. • Operation Homefront has provided more than \$44 million in financial support to veteran families.

Interview Techniques: Staying on Message

Every interview is an opportunity to tell the story of your organization and the value you contribute to communities every day. The following tactics can help you take full advantage of the opportunity in each question.



Bridging is when you acknowledge the question, but redirect focus back to your core message.



Flagging is when you bring specific attention to what you are about to say by adding emphasis at the front of your statement.



Reframing the question is when you adapt the question at hand to re-emphasize your point tactfully.

Bridging

“I can’t speak to that, but what I can tell you is...”

“Historically, that was the case, but today...”

“Before we get off that subject, let me point out...”

“That’s correct but let me put things into perspective.”

Flagging

“The most important thing for people to note.”

“What’s important here is...”

“The main point is...”

“What I really want to make clear is...”

Reframing the Question

Think Positive, Not Negative

Q. If this is such a great idea why hasn’t it been done before?

A. There is a right time for everything. We think this is the right time...

Thinking thematically is also helpful in staying on message. With a few key themes in mind, it’s easier to organize your thoughts. Here are a few examples of how that could manifest in this current moment:

When approached with:

- Critiques of a “woke” agenda
- Attacks on financial stewardship and use of resources
- Questions of partisanship



Emphasize these themes:

- Lifesaving services supporting families and communities, with specific examples
- Small operating budgets, more with less, working locally, frugal, and responsible
Community backbone, often invisible, mostly small and locally

Answering Tough Questions

When tough questions arise, recognize that each is an opportunity to make your point.

Avoid repeating the negative: By repeating the negative framing of a question, you may unintentionally reinforce the very message you are trying to counter. For example, if someone says, "Aren't you mishandling funds?" and you respond with, "We're not mishandling funds," the word "mishandling" is re-emphasized.

A more effective approach is to reframe positively, focusing on your strengths or values instead: "We prioritize transparency and fiscal responsibility."

Sample Questions	Sample Answers
Aren't nonprofits just a way to spread messaging and promote left-leaning political agendas?	Nonprofits serve a wide range of missions and exist across the ideological spectrum. But most nonprofit work is about making sure people get the help they need, whether it is a meal, place to stay, or access to life-saving care.
What regulations/audits are currently in place that hold 501(c)3s accountable to grant-making government entities and donors?	There are rigorous processes in place to secure government grants and contracts. Nonprofits must go through extensive vetting processes and fulfill ongoing audit and reporting requirements to receive funding. Donors have access to lots of information via nonprofits Form 990s, which are all publicly available.
What do you say to the argument that philanthropy is just a way for rich people to avoid taxes?	Tax benefits provide an additional incentive for individuals to support nonprofit work. Donors receive deductions, but they don't get full dollar-for-dollar tax write-offs, meaning they still incur a financial cost. And we have seen that the tax incentive is a motivator for donors to be able to dig deeper to support their communities.

Please continue to share your stories, both of the harms your organization may be experiencing and of the positive impact you make every day.

[Share the Effects of Executive Actions on Nonprofits](#)

[Share Your Story of Nonprofit Impact](#)