

Head Start Diamond Jubilee

Message Platform

What is a message platform?

A message platform is a document that describes what you want to communicate about your Head Start program in the context of the 60th anniversary of Head Start. It is organized around a set of messages followed by “proofs” or statements of facts that support the message to make it credible and compelling. In marketing terms, a message is communications content that is designed to bring about a desired effect on your audience. Before you can craft a message you have to ask what will I say to who to make them do what.

So that means you need to answer three questions:

1. *Who do I need to send a message to?* (Who is your target audience? Who are the people in which communities who you need the action from?) Here is a list of possible stakeholders that might be included among the target audiences or stakeholders of a Head Start programs.
2. *What action do I need from this audience?* (Typically, what we need from most audience is a continuum of responses that begin with simple awareness and interest or the arousal of curiosity, then it moves on to more emotional responses that signal desire or a positive feeling, and finally it moves on to action, some concrete behavior. This continuum is sometimes known by its acronym, AIDA: Awareness, Interest, Desire and Action.)
3. *What message can I send to this target audience that will best move them toward the desired action?*

The process as an example

Let's take an example. Suppose you are struggling to find qualified teachers to fill your classrooms. Who might a target audience be if one of your program goals was to have all your teaching positions filled with individuals that meet the Head Start Performance Standards. Quickly brainstorming, you might come up with: AA or BA graduates, their faculty members, teachers in other programs, your assistant teachers or teacher helpers currently working in your program. That answers Question #1.

What do you need to say to these audiences? Identifying them by name in as narrow a way as possible allows you to say something different to each group based on their circumstances. The action you need by these audiences may vary. For recent grads you want them to apply for one of your job openings. You want faculty to tell students about your available positions and the benefits working for your Head Start program.

To answer the last question, you might start with something very basic and straight-forward. To AA and BA graduates your message might be: “ABC Head Start gives every child the best start in life and you can too.” Then follow that with a call to action: “Join our team for the hardest job you'll ever love.” When you want to address a specific audience, always think in terms of their needs and wants, and how you can be a response to their needs.

So how does this fit into a celebration of 60 years of Head Start? Use the 60th anniversary as a hook. So your message may be this: “We have hired great teachers for Head Start for 60 years. Today, you can be the next one.”

What is a message and what is not?

These messages are not the final copy that might appear in a brochure, a website, social media, a Lions Club speech, etc. They are a succinct listing of what you want to say to your target audience. How you say it may change based on the communication context and how to best connect with the target audience. Coming up a creative tag line or a perfect picture that will attract interest is a later step. The message platform helps you discipline your planning to make sure that the most important thing you need to say gets said.

THE MESSAGE PLATFORM

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- 1. Sixty years of Head Start means its durable national model for how to support the healthy development of young children has been proven with the test of time.**
 - a. The Head Start Model Head Start is so much more than child care. It is a comprehensive child development program that includes early education, health, family engagement and social services.
 - b. Head Start serves as a National Laboratory for early childhood education, bringing new innovations into the field (services to dual language learners, social emotional development, multicultural approaches, a comprehensive parent, family and community engagement framework, the use of teacher-coaches).
 - c. The Head Start model is a multi-sectored intervention (health, education and social services) and was so from the beginning. Designed by physicians, child psychologists, community development experts, and educators.
 - d. For additional supports and ideas about the “Head Start Model” see <https://nhsa.org/whole-child-whole-family/>
- 2. Sixty years of Head Start means sixty years of Head Start graduates who have blossomed into successful adults.**
 - a. Head Start has provided more than 32 million children with comprehensive early learning experiences, including school readiness, health, mental health, nutrition, and family engagement supports. [Research and insert local information. How many children have you enrolled over the past 60 years? How many parents were supported to be their child’s first teacher?]
 - b. Thanks to the work done every day at Head Start centers across America, children’s lives have been changed. Millions of kids will learn to love reading and graduate on time. They will grow up a little more secure, more likely to attend college and obtain a post-secondary degree, more likely to stay out of trouble with the law and find jobs. As adults they will have greater self-control, self-esteem and exhibit positive parenting

practices. (source: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-long-term-impact-of-the-head-start-program/>)

- c. Hold up famous Head Start alumni.
 - Sylvia Mathews Burwell, former United States Secretary of Human and Human Services
 - Cornell Brooks, President and CEO, NAACP
 - Dr. John Paul Kim, Cambodian refugee and anesthesiologist to Ed Ziegler
 - Darrent Walker, President, Ford Foundation
 - Angel Taveras, former mayor of Providence, Rhode Island
 - Bonnie St. John, Paralympic Medalist and worked in the Clinton White House as Director of National Economic Council.
 - Loretta Sanchez, former U.S. Congresswoman (D-TX)
 - Steven Osunsami, Senior National Correspondent, ABC News
 - Duchesne Drew, president, Minnesota Public Radio; senior vice president American Public Media
 - Jahanna Hayes, former U. S. Congresswoman (D-CT)
 - Read more stories [here](#).

3. Sixty Years of Head Start means 100,000s of teachers and staff, trained and dedicated to supporting the healthy development of young children.

- a. Head Start has been the first career for many Head Start parents. (Currently, among Head Start staff, X% are current or former parents.)
- b. Head Start requires an AA degree for all teachers, but with the effort to move to a BA. It is a growth mindset. It expects all teachers to be learners, too. (It also requires every teacher to have a professional development plan.)
- c. Head Start has always been focused on training and professional development for staff, beginning 60 years ago.
- d. Head start is a great place to work.

4. Sixty Years of Head Start means more than half a century of being essential services in many cities and towns, rural and urban, across [service area, state, nation].

- a. Head Start settings are as varied as the communities it serves. You will find them in community centers, stand along building, storefronts, shopping malls, Indian reservations, church basements, public and private school buildings. Since the beginning, Head Start had no restrictions on where a Head Start program can be located as long as it met safety standards and was accessible to families.
- b. Head Start, though a national program, is deeply embedded in the community they serve. Their boards and policy councils include members from the community including those most benefiting from the services.
- c. Head Start programs maintain partnerships with all kind of community agencies and services including health care providers, mental health care providers, services to children with disabilities, school districts, child welfare agencies, family preservation and support services, libraries and museums, service clubs like Lions and Rotary, welfare and WIC, homeless services and domestic violence shelters (1302.53).