

Six Key Messages to Communicate about How Charities Work

Purpose:

This document sets out six key messages that get across key aspects of how charities work (and how they don't) to increase the public's understanding, respect and confidence in charities. This paper is still work in progress and we expect it to evolve a little as people join the Coalition.

What's the worry?

There is now a growing body of evidence that shows that whilst levels of public trust and confidence are high, levels of understanding about charities are not. For example recent research with representative samples of the UK population shows that:

- Only 5% of the public 'strongly agree' that it is worth investing in fundraising even if it raises more money in the long term
- The public think that on average about 40-50% of every pound given to charities goes to the 'cause' while they think an acceptable level is around 80% (the reality is closer to the 80%)
- Conversely they think that an acceptable level of administration is around 10%, but think most charities have actual levels of administration costs around 30%.
- The public are worried and concerned by: how much money actually gets to where it's needed, direct mail, high levels of salaries, telephone calls, administration costs and the need for charities to work together or merge.
- The public are very hazy about who is paid and unpaid in charities. Many are unsure whether presidents and patrons are unpaid or paid, and are more likely to think that fundraisers are unpaid than are trustees.
- While the public are aware that many of the biggest charities are now large organisations, they have very little clarity about who gets substantial funding from government and who doesn't.
- Indeed the public aren't even clear who are and aren't charities: very few were aware that Eton is a charity and that Greenpeace isn't.
- About a third of the public are 'definitely aware' of the Charity Commission, but nearly 30% are 'definitely not aware'. Of those with standing orders or direct debits, nearly 30% are uncertain whether they have heard about the Charity Commission.

As these examples show, many aspects of how charities work that those inside the sector take for granted are, in fact, at best hazy, and at worse wrong, in the minds of the public. It is for these reasons that we believe it is so important to continually reinforce and remind key charity stakeholders and the public at large about some of the most important, but misunderstood aspects of how charities work.

The six key themes for communication

While many of the problems discussed here are generic to the sector, the best approach to tackling them is through the communications of individual charities. So all these notes require an individual charity to take the ideas and concepts and translate them into their specific situation and setting.

Theme 1: Charities are effective and do a great job

Theme 2: To raise (more) money, charities have to spend money

Theme 3: Charities use donations carefully and wisely

Theme 4: Charities are highly regulated and adhere to a range of strict standards

Theme 5: Charities work together

Theme 6: Charities need the public's donations because they really do make a difference

Theme 1: Charities are effective and do a great job

Barrier or myth that is being tackled

The public don't always believe or know that charities do a crucial job in vast swathes of society, neither do they believe they are necessarily effective in their work

The message in depth

Charities play a number of key roles in society. They provide vital services and carry out cutting-edge research. They work with the groups that government can't or won't help. Many challenge the laws and government policies that hurt the people they work with. They come up with new ideas and innovations to work more effectively. And this is happening not just in one or two charities, but in thousands and thousands of charities up and down the country. Moreover because charities are heavily funded by voluntary donations and need to compete to win every grant and every new source of money, they need to be particularly effective and efficient.

The message in a nutshell

Charities help thousands of people every day and because they have to earn every penny they use it more effectively and more innovatively

As a minimum, Coalition members should be able to:

- Demonstrate the scale of their impact for the charity as a whole (ie we help xxx people, we run xxx projects)
- Create and utilise at least two compelling wordbites which show the difference they make through their work

Communication strategies for the theme

1. Measurement of the effectiveness and impact of a charity as a whole, and by individual service
2. Creation of key wordbites which demonstrate effectiveness – and which will preferably make stakeholders sit up and take notice eg we find jobs for disabled people at half the cost of government
3. Repeated use of these key wordbites that show the effectiveness of an individual charity – for example on letterheads, in conversation, in advertising
4. Use examples of individual people as case studies and examples of effectiveness in action

Wordbites which explain the impact of a whole charity

- The largest provider of social care after the Government.
- We helped x thousand people this year/ we help * people per week/per day
- Without your help/X more people would have died from cancer/children suffer/be homeless
- XXX people lived/are alive today because of research funded by you
- If we didn't do this, no else would

Wordbites that explain at the service or beneficiary specific level

- Every day we help X people like Elsie (with small picture)
- Today we gave X people like Elsie a free meal/safe place to sleep

Theme 2: To raise (more) money, charities have to spend money

Barrier or myth that is being tackled

The public is ambivalent, at best, about the wisdom of spending money on fundraising in order to raise additional funds in the long run. Since spending money to raise money is at the heart of most fundraising strategies, this lack of public buy-in is problematic.

The message in depth

Fundraising for charities is not an easy task. It requires professionalism, imagination, rigour and expertise. As more charities raise money, fundraising gets harder and more competitive. Charities seek to increase their fundraising capacity: more staff, more supporters, more events and/or more direct appeals. All of this costs money – but charities know that the rewards are high – but take time. If supporters want their favourite charities to grow, the best way to do this is to endorse their investment in fundraising.

The message in a nutshell

More donations let us do more work – and by spending some of today's donations for tomorrow's income we can raise more money and help more people

Complementary/additional messages that need to be communicated

We fundraise responsibly and try and put our supporters in control of the communications they receive

As a minimum, Coalition members should be able to:

- Tell supporters the overall fundraising effectiveness
- Guide supporters to support them in the most cost-effective way
- Continually watch their costs/income ratio to identify and address poor performing fundraising functions

Communication strategies for the theme

- A critical mass of organisations need to be able to robustly explain about their fundraising activities which are more high profile or appear more expensive
- The sector needs to continuously explain how investment in fundraising is both necessary and universal (all large charities do it)
- At the same time we need to never appear to defend high expense or wastage or condemn those who keep their costs down
- Charities should avoid attempting to make their own results or activities look better by criticising the performance of other charities or practices

Wordbites that explain why fundraising is cost-effective and important

- For every £1 spent on fundraising we get another £* to spend on saving lives etc
- 'Each leaflet costs just *p and could help save a life' etc.
- Fundraising and management costs ensure we can do more and do it better for those we help
- We use professional staff and committed volunteers to make a difference

Wordbites that explain how supporters' wishes are put centre stage

- We only phone supporters who have given us permission to ring them
- We only swap your name and address with your permission
- We allow supporters to influence how their money is invested
- We respect the right of supporters to question how we spend their money

Wordbites that explain how fundraising works and is effective

- Message for F2F collector bibs – 'I am paid, as this work saved the lives of X people last year etc'
- We include a pen as it encourages/ makes it easier for people to support our work and (if overprinted) means that you can promote us by using it.
- For every £1 donated, xxp goes directly to saving lives/ funding life-saving research/ combating poverty etc
- If you are not happy with our work we will give you your money back (as used by Friends of the Earth)

Theme 3: Charities use donations carefully and wisely

Barrier or myth that is being tackled

The public want constant and tangible evidence that an organisation is keeping its costs down and not wasting money. But supporting charities isn't like shopping at Tesco – there is no trolley of goods that a supporter can evaluate to decide if they've got good value. So supporters and the public go on what they can see: evidence of waste and inefficiency (or just the perception of waste).

The message in depth

Charities battle in a thousand ways to keep their costs down. This doesn't mean they don't spend money – but they use money wisely. This may be by tendering for major contracts, by using the internet for purchasing, or reducing the size of mailings. Volunteers make donations go further because they help keep costs down by giving their time for free (although not all jobs can be done by volunteers).

The message in a nutshell

Charities never stop trying to keep their costs down and where they do spend money, it's because they know it is justified

Complementary/additional messages that need to be communicated

For a range of tasks, volunteers allow charities to do more with less

As a minimum Coalition members should be able to:

- Demonstrate numerous tangible examples of how they keep costs down
- Communicate to supporters where expenditure has yielded results
- Defend instances of high expenditure or perceived high expenditure (eg CEO's expenditure)

Communication strategies for the theme

- Tackling people's impression of wastefulness is as much about addressing perceptions as it is about addressing reality
- People's impression of waste are changed by evidence that expenditure works or tangible examples of cost saving – so saying 'trust us' to somebody who feels they get too many mailings isn't necessarily effectiveness

Wordbites that demonstrate carefulness with funds

- All of our post is sent out second class
- We provide information free of charge, but if you can afford to make a contribution we can reach more people
- 'Please re-use or recycle me' message on all bags
- We use email to save money and time
- We use the telephone to contact supporters because it saves money (another way of writing it has a better ROI)
- Nobody travels first class at our expense
- Please tick the box if you would like to help us save money by not acknowledging your donation
- Please accept our thanks now, and tick the box to say you don't need a receipt and help save money

- Every leaflet is an opportunity to find a new supporter to our cause
- If you don't wish to support us, please pass this mailing/insert on to a friend.

Wordbites that help show the importance of volunteers

- The trustees who run our organisation are unpaid (volunteers)
- Telephone response lines – if not available use recorded message to explain it is staffed by volunteers
- * of work is done by volunteers to whom we only pay expenses
- Sign explaining that staff are volunteers
- Our volunteers work for almost nothing
- Xxx% of our income is raised by volunteers who give their time for free
- Face to face/Shop environment - "I am a volunteer. I don't get paid, but ask me what I do get"
- Many of the people who you meet here are volunteers

Theme 4. Charities are highly regulated and adhere to a range of strict standards

Barrier or myth that is being tackled

Charities are unregulated and it would be very easy for somebody to defraud them or steal their money, or for them to use my money in ways that nobody knows about.

The message in depth

Charities are regulated. They are regulated by the Charity Commission in England and Wales and/or OSCR in Scotland and, in certain cases, Companies' House. Certain fundraising activities are regulated by the Financial Services Authority, Ofcom, National Audit Office, Audit Commission, Gaming Board and by their local authorities. They are regulated by the HM Revenue and Customs in relation to tax-effective giving and the taxes we pay and reclaim.

The message in a nutshell

Charities are regulated – you don't need to worry.

Complementary/additional messages that need to be communicated

Charities regulate themselves through the PFRA and the Regulation of Fundraising Unit

As a minimum Coalition members should be able to:

- Tell stakeholders they are regulated by the Charity Commission
- Sign up to self-regulation
- Once in a while splurge the full gamut of their self-regulation to their stakeholders

Communication strategies for the theme

- Constant reinforcement of the nature of charity regulation by drizzling it across a range of a charity communications.

Wordbites that demonstrate charities are regulated

- Most charities set up in England or Wales are registered with the Charity Commission
- Charities are regulated by the Charity Commission
- We are a registered charity, our number is *****.
- Being a registered charity means that we must always be accountable and transparent.
- We operate the highest standards of financial control and accountability.
- We produce accounts every year.
- We adhere to over 20 codes of practice set out by the Institute of Fundraising
- We abide by the Institute of Fundraising Donors' Charter, because supporters have rights and we respect them.
- If you would like a copy of the Donors' Charter you can write to xyz, telephone xyz, or go online to www.xyz.org.uk
- You can request a copy of our Annual Report and Accounts free of charge from xyz.
- We are regulated by the Charity Commission to make sure we meet the legal requirements of charities. We are regulated by the Inland Revenue in relation to gift aid and share giving. We are regulated by Customs and Excise for the VAT we pay and reclaim. We are regulated by Ofcom and the ASA for our advertising. We are regulated

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by the FSA for our affinity credit card. We are regulated by the National Audit Office for our expenditure of government funds.

Theme 5. Charities work together

Barrier or myth that is being tackled

There are too many charities and they don't work together

The message in depth

Charities work together in a whole myriad of ways. One recent study showed that charities typically had xxx charity partners. Charities often work together in ways that the public don't see – such as delivering services or cutting costs. But charities also don't work together when they think they can try something new or different or innovative

The message in a nutshell

Charities work together when it makes sense – and not when it doesn't!

Complementary/additional messages that need to be communicated

Nobody wants all the banks or supermarkets to merge into one – so why is everybody so keen for charities to merge.

As a minimum Coalition members should be able to:

- Let stakeholders know about the partners they have through mailings, email footers and letterheads

Communication strategies for the theme

- Constant drizzling of information of the sheer breadth of partnerships that charities have

Wordbites to demonstrate that charities do work together

- We work with others to make sure we maximise the benefit we provide
- Every charity's work is important and we do work together
- We work with local social service to XXX
- We work with local partners in the countries we work in.
- We share office space with other charities to save administration costs.
- We work with other charities to determine who is best placed to undertake specific work.
- If we can't help, we will find another charity that can.
- We share our learning and experience to improve everyone's work
- We share our fundraising knowledge and expertise to make the most of our fundraising.
- We, along with other overseas charities, through the Disasters & Emergency Committee.
- We belong to a charity consortium to share the cost of promoting legacies.
- This project is jointly funded by X and Y.
- X and Y are working together to ensure that Z gets the best deal.

Theme 6: Charities need the public's donations because they really do make a difference

Barrier or myth that is being tackled

Individual donations don't make a difference because charities are so large and donations are wasted

The message in depth

Many charities survive only because of the individual donations they receive. Sometimes these donations are all they have, and in other cases donations make the difference between a good service funded by government and a great one. And charities are grateful for donations. They try and say thank you directly – but sometimes its more effectively to get on with putting the donation to good use.

The message in a nutshell

Thank you thank you thank you – your donations do make a difference: to us, to our work and to the people we exist to help

Complementary/additional messages that need to be communicated

Individual donations make a difference

Charities need your support and people's lives will be changed by it

Donations & voluntary income are important to charities

As a minimum Coalition members should be able to:

- Develop simple wordbites which help supporters understand how their donations make a difference and how effectively they are used
- Make clear to stakeholders where the organisation derives its income

Communication strategies for the theme

- Every charity is able to do its own communications to get the message across
- In this context 'more is more' in order to build up a generalised awareness of the importance of donations to charities

Wordbites that explain the importance of donations overall

- No gift is too small, every penny helps us do our work.
- Without you and thousands like you, X would be without our support.
- However you give, we thank you. We need your kind gifts, your time and your input to ensure our work continues. Whichever way you choose to support, we hope you'll continue to do so.
- However you give - thank you.
- Our work is only possible with public donations
- For every £1 donated, 88p goes directly to saving lives/ funding life-saving research/ combating poverty etc
- "ABC is a charity that relies on public donations to carry out its work" on every envelope/communication piece
- Our work is only possible with public donations
- Without your support our work for the animals/children etc simply would not happen
- % of our work is funded by public donations

Wordbites that make specific links between donations and how they are used

- Shop window - Thank you, Gloucester. Last month you helped us dig ten new wells in Ethiopia
- The person carrying this bag has helped fund heart research
- This (service) has been made possible by voluntary donations
- Your £10 does X
- Today you have helped X
- Your legacy saves X
- Every month your direct debit X
- This month, next month you will ...X
- Every donated item helps X
- Thanks to you we have helped get x people back to work/x neglected animals rehomed/X people fed
- We saved Billy's life today – thanks to you!

Language and Presentation Considerations – shifting perceptions

Charities can help change supporters' perceptions through their use of language in organisational communications. The following are examples of ways in which the use of language can help to change attitudes and understanding.

- ✓ Donations rather than income
- ✓ Return on investment rather than response
- ✓ 'Fundraising investment' rather than 'fundraising costs'
- ✓ Value rather than volume
- ✓ Supporter rather than donor
- ✓ Smaller numbers rather than big totals (shows focus on detail and pennies)
- ✓ Personal achievement rather than global impact
- ✓ Consider the supporter perception of your location, particularly in terms of how people outside London view London-based organisations – explain why, any rent deals etc in supporter communications
- ✓ Communicate status as a registered charity at every opportunity. Don't assume people know this or appreciate it
- ✓ Make sure there is a collecting tin in every reception – shows you care about pennies
- ✗ Take care over using bureaucratic language, jargon or technical language in your communications
- ✗ Sending letters from 'Administrators', 'Officers', 'Managers' etc
- ✗ Consider the impact of job advertising, including the titles, salaries and language used

Direct Marketing hints and tips

Things to do/consider	Things to not do/avoid/reduce
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Make explicit the data source within reciprocal mailings ✓ Explain the introduction of new products into charity shops e.g. fairtrade etc. ✓ Consider the impact of what you send out on the many who do not respond, but are still charity supporters ✓ Stop mailing sooner those who have only ever given you one donation and tell them ✓ Offering people the opportunity not to be contacted again, if they don't want to support you, e.g. within cold mail/inserts/door-drops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Take care over sending free gifts – it does increase initial results, but long-term value is more suspect and to the 98% who do not respond it looks wasteful ✗ Sending two mail packs to the same address unless they want separate ones. If in doubt ask. ✗ Sending newsletters/magazines to supporters who do not read them, offer the chance to opt-out, check they do read them