Recovering Stronger: State Innovations
Messaging Framework

A renewed commitment and revised approach to managing water can protect public health, prepare us for a changing climate, advance equity, put people to work, and fuel economic recovery, i.e., it can help our nation recover stronger. Change is possible, but not guaranteed—it will require the best of us, and every person and organization has a role to play.

To help changemakers inspire, engage, and persuade key audiences, the US Water Alliance created this Messaging Framework for its network. The Messaging Framework is designed for you to adapt to your messenger and audience.

The following pages outline steps that an individual, organization, or coalition can take to understand an audience, build a message, and include supporting examples of existing policies and programs.

Messages about water sector recovery...

...to adapt and use in your own voice...

...with different audiences.

The Messaging Framework
A formula for building a message

Step 1.

Identify and understand your audience.

Every message should be crafted with an understanding of the values, motivations, and preferences of your audience.

Step 2.

Build your message using a simple frame.

Messages can be structured using a simple frame: value, problem, solution, call to action. The simple frame can be adapted to incorporate supporting messages that emphasize climate, equity, jobs, or collaboration, i.e., the issues that resonate with your audience.

Step 3.

Add supporting examples.

As a companion to this Messaging Framework, the Alliance created the Recovering Stronger Knowledge Map to plot and share programs and policies highlighted by water leaders across the country. Use this digital, geographic tool to find relevant programs or policies that support your message.

Step 1.
Understanding your audience

Identifying and understanding your audience is the key to unlocking the best messaging for your campaigns. Before you build your message, ask key questions that your team can explore through multiple means including webpage analytics, online surveys, focus groups, or interviews. *(Questions provided by Water Hub).*

An Illustration

Ask yourself:	Possible answer:
What audience are you interested in communicating with?	**State policymakers**
Why should your audience care about your cause/ organization?	**State governments are essential to realizing the promise of water solutions. State agencies have a primary role in implementing and enforcing clean water, surface water, and drinking water laws. State policymakers can establish targets and goals, create enabling conditions, and optimize funding and finance.**
What do they care about?	**They have expressed concern about the state's ability to respond to multiple crises: COVID, climate, racial inequity, forever chemicals.**
Whom do they trust?	**They typically like to hear from coalitions that include multiple perspectives. They also appreciate the perspectives of other policymakers who face similar challenges.**
Where do they get their news and information?	**They listen to constituents, local news sources, and opinion articles from thought leaders and experts.**
What is keeping them from being supportive?	**The need for solutions is clear, but staff need help to move things forward.**

Step 2.
Building your message

Identifying four key elements—value, problem, solution, and call to action—can help you build an effective message framework.

Value

Messages that start with core values can help you connect to your audience. Key questions to address are why is water important, what about water is inspiring?

Sample language:

"[Organization] believes water can strengthen economies, revitalize communities, and nurture healthy environments. Here in the [city/state/region], that means the ability to grow healthy food, our kids playing in [body of water], and a caregiver preparing a baby's bottle without worry."

Problem

Messages should describe the problem in a way that demonstrates core values are being compromised or threatened. It should provide the context for a conversation about solutions and a call to action. Facts are important, but stories can also be powerful communication tools. If and when your organization does use personal stories to demonstrate a problem, ensure that the people represented in those stories have been consulted, and preferably quoted.

Sample language:

"As we see with [recent climate event in the region], a changing climate is dramatically affecting the water cycle and is threatening the health and safety of our community." [+ Illustrative Story]

"Due to historic underinvestment and systemic racism, [community/neighborhood] has inequitable access to safe and reliable drinking water [and/or] wastewater service. This inequity can be exacerbated by climate impacts." [+ Illustrative Story]

"Our infrastructure is reaching the end of its lifespan and without greater federal investment, aging and failing infrastructure poses public health and safety risks. For example, [name local or regional infrastructure challenge] jeopardized the ability to provide safe and reliable water." [+ Illustrative Story]

Solution

Messages should not stop with the problem, be sure to give your audience a sense of hope and possibility, and highlight a path forward. Also, try to make the link between value, problem, and solution clear.

Sample language:

"Investing in water infrastructure like [project example] can make the water services people and businesses depend on safer, more reliable, and more accessible to all."

"Investing in water infrastructure like [project example] can help communities adapt to climate impacts, including intense droughts, flooding, and wildfires."

"Investing in water projects like [project example] can expand opportunities by creating new, high-wage jobs, building transferable skills, and diversifying the water workforce."

"Investing in water creates an opportunity to prioritize and center historically underserved communities and empower community leaders to develop priorities and plans for new investment."

Call to action

Now the most important part: a call to action. What can your audience do to help advance these solutions? Is there the urgency?

Sample language:

"With [recent policy window like infrastructure bill, emergency funding, etc.], we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build more equitable and resilient water systems. State governments are essential to bringing about the promise of One Water. In this moment of opportunity, state leaders can:
• Distribute resources efficiently and effectively with a focus on underserved communities
• Build trust with local communities and strengthen cultural competency
• Take a whole-of-government approach to policy and programs
• Ensure policies and programs address the intersection of water, climate, equity, and jobs.
• Incorporate digital tools and technology, as well as traditional knowledge, into programs."

Step 3.
Include supporting examples

Across the country, there are inspiring examples of sustainable, integrated, and inclusive water resource management. These examples can serve as proof points as well as sources of inspiration.

As a companion to this Messaging Framework, the Alliance created a Recovering Stronger Knowledge Map to plot and share programs and policies highlighted by water leaders across the country. Use this digital, geographic tool to learn about the Recovering Stronger policies and programs implemented by water leaders across the nation and incorporate those examples into your messages.

Sample Language:

"A stormwater program in California includes funding for community-level coordination capacity and empowers local decision making via a Watershed Committee Structure."

"Minnesota prioritized partnership with tribal nations and supported a tribal-relations training program to build the cultural competency of state employees."

"As part of its climate strategy, New Jersey created a new state office to create green jobs that prioritize equity and convene the New Jersey Council on the Green Economy."

"States across the West are working with a new web application called OpenET to enable western US farmers to use data from satellites and weather stations to track water consumption."

"In response to concerns about forever chemicals, Wisconsin called for a multi-agency PFAS Action Plan. Nearly 20 state agencies, an advisory group, and the public participated in creating the plan."

"The Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grant program provides communities with funding to complete vulnerability assessments and develop resiliency plans."

For more, explore the Alliance's Knowledge Map for examples of policies and programs.

Putting It All Together

[Audience] State policymakers

[Value] "We believe that water supports the Massachusetts economy, revitalizes communities, and nurtures healthy environments.

[Problem] "Unfortunately, as we see with the flash flooding this summer outside of Boston, a changing climate is dramatically impacting the water cycle and threatens the health and safety of our community. According to a new report by First Street Foundation, major storms and sea level rise pose a significant threat to the state of Massachusetts. The report estimates that 2,500 critical buildings and facilities are at risk of becoming deluged. In Lawrence, MA this would include the city's wastewater treatment facility.

[Solution] "Investing in water infrastructure can help communities adapt to climate impacts, including intense flooding. **[Call to Action]** By distributing resources efficiently and effectively, state policymakers can help Massachusetts address the challenges presented by a changing climate by finding ways to ensure policies and programs address the intersection of water, climate, equity, and jobs.

[Supporting Example] "We know this is possible—here in Massachusetts, we created the Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grant program that provides communities with funding to complete vulnerability assessments and develop resiliency plans. Neighboring states have also taken important steps. For example, New Jersey established an executive-level council that focuses on the intersection of climate resilience and green jobs. This is exactly the type of leadership that state policymakers can provide to create a resilient and equitable water future for Massachusetts."

Additional Resources

This Messaging Framework is but one piece of a broader US Water Alliance initiative: Recovering Stronger. Recovering Stronger is a multi-faceted initiative that aims to transform how we view, value, and manage our nation's water systems.

This Messaging Framework is a direct extension of the Recovering Stronger State Innovations project. The State Innovations project set out to identify strategies, policies, and programs that are enabling states to recover stronger. To do this, the Alliance held roundtable discussions with One Water leaders and state policymakers across the country.

For additional Recovering Stronger State Innovations resources, please see:
- Regional Listening Session Summaries. Summaries from listening sessions in the West, Midwest, Mountain & Southwest, Mid-Atlantic, Northeast, and South highlight opportunities and challenges in these regions.

- State Blueprint. The State Blueprint spotlights key themes that resonate across the nation as One Water leaders described what elements are critical to recovering stronger in a sustainable and equitable way.

Other Recovering Stronger components include:
- Federal Policy Blueprint. The Federal Policy Blueprint outlines a policy agenda for the 117th Congress and the Biden Administration and showcases the water sector's best legislative, regulatory, and administrative policy ideas.

- Pilot Projects. The five innovation pilot projects address water access, affordability, utility collaboration and consolidation, scaling smart water, and using water as a pathway to address climate change.