

# What is a message wheel?

A message wheel is a simple visual format to help organize messages that are critical to your issue. Your central message—the one thing you always want to share—is in the middle of the wheel. Supporting messages that help describe challenges and position your issue as a solution are placed around the wheel like spokes. Each supporting message is followed by brief statements that provide more detail and connect the supporting statement to your central message.

## How do I use a message wheel?

Having your most important message points in one place will help you prepare for any opportunity to communicate about your issue, whether you are in a meeting with a policymaker, writing a letter to the editor or Op-Ed, speaking to a neighborhood group, answering questions about your cause, or being interviewed by a reporter. Below are a few tips to help you stay on message in these, and other, scenarios.

### For writing projects and presentations

Working from a message wheel will help you stay focused when you are writing a letter to the editor or preparing a presentation. You want to make sure you use the central message and include the supporting messages that will resonate with your audience—the statements and takeaways they'll be interested in and mostly likely to remember! You should use the central message every time you communicate, but you don't have to use every supporting point every time.

### For meetings, interviews, and speaking engagements

When you are responding to questions—during an interview or meeting or after a presentation—bringing the discussion back to your central message can become tricky. The message wheel is designed to help you prepare for these situations because it provides a simple visual of the connections between supporting statements and your central message. Your response should explain a link between the question and one of the statements in the message wheel. This will create an opportunity for you to direct the conversation back to your central message.

## Tips for delivering an effective message about afterschool

- ▶ **Know your audience:** In 2017 and beyond it will be increasingly important for key lawmakers, business allies, and other influencers to understand the critical role afterschool plays in improving our economy, readying our workforce, and helping our children realize their full potential. Use language that will appeal to readers and listeners—and move them to act.
- ▶ **Flip the subject:** When talking about benefits or outcomes, consider leading with the students, families or businesses instead of afterschool programs. Say “Parents have greater job security thanks to...” rather than “Afterschool programs support parents...”
- ▶ **Make it personal:** As you review the message wheel, think about examples of people and organizations who benefit from afterschool. Use their voices and stories (my kids, my family, our school, our town, my job) in your messages and include state-specific data when you can. Be sure the details you share connect back to your central message!
- ▶ **Prepare and practice:** Before an interview or meeting, think about arguments that those who disagree with your position might raise and plan a response that can bring you back to your central message—then practice your response.

## A prosperous economy depends on youth developing the skills that afterschool fosters.

- ▶ Businesses want to hire responsible problem solvers and team players with tenacity and integrity. They need employees with strong personal and technical skills.
- ▶ STEM jobs are driving global economic growth—7 million students are exploring STEM in afterschool.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ Students in afterschool programs learn by doing, strengthen their social skills and prepare for the jobs of tomorrow.

### Students achieve more with afterschool.

- ▶ When students participate in afterschool, they attend school more often, do better in school and are more likely to graduate.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Afterschool helps students behave better in class, be more engaged during the school day and complete their homework assignments.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ Regular participation in afterschool programs improves students' reading and math achievement scores and grades.<sup>5</sup>

### Afterschool works to keep kids safe, boost student success and help parents keep their jobs.

- ▶ Afterschool equips children and teens with the skills they need to succeed in school and life.
- ▶ By increasing kids' earning potential, improving academic achievement and reducing juvenile crime and delinquency, afterschool saves up to \$9 for every \$1 invested.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Afterschool programs are locally driven solutions that are shaped by the needs of the students, families and communities they serve.

### Communities thrive when parents have afterschool choices.

- ▶ Afterschool gives working parents peace of mind: 4 in 5 say afterschool helps them keep their jobs.<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ Juvenile crime peaks after school.<sup>7</sup> More than 11 million youth are alone and unsupervised from 3-6 p.m.<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ Kids stay on track, learn to avoid risky behaviors and engage with positive role models in afterschool programs.<sup>6</sup>

## The demand for afterschool programs far exceeds the supply, and this affects all of us.

- ▶ For every child in an afterschool program, two are waiting to get in.<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ Four in five parents, across every demographic, support public funding for afterschool.<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ By breaking down the barriers to afterschool, we will help families get ahead, help businesses hire the local workforce they need to thrive, and help students develop into productive, successful members of society.

### Sources

<sup>1</sup> Brown, W. O., Frates, S. B., Rudge, I. S., Tradewell, R. L. (2002).

<sup>2</sup> Afterschool Alliance. (2015).

<sup>3</sup> American Institutes for Research. (2013).

<sup>4</sup> Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P. & Pachan, M. (2010). "A Meta-Analysis of After-School Programs That Seek to Promote Personal and Social Skills in Children and Adolescents." *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 45: 294-309.

<sup>5</sup> Vandell, D. L., Reisner, E. R. & Pierce, K. M. (2007).

<sup>6</sup> Afterschool Alliance. (2014).

<sup>7</sup> Shanklin, S.L., Brener, N., McManus, T., Kinchen, S. & Kann, L. (2007).

# FIVE SKILLS\*

## AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS HELP DEVELOP

### SELF-CONFIDENCE

Programs that allow choice

STEM/Robotics

Student Leadership/  
Government



### COMMUNICATION

Arts Performances

Public speaking

Clubs - Theater  
- Debate  
- Technology  
- Book



### PROBLEM SOLVING

STEM/Robotics

Clubs - Adventure  
- Photography  
- Cooking  
- Gardening



### TEAMWORK

Robotics

Sports  
STEM

### CRITICAL THINKING

Argumentative essays

Reflection

Discussion

