

# Institutional Media Messaging Framework

## Approved Talking Points and Spokesperson Guidance

PORTFOLIO WORK SAMPLE

# Liz Sahadi Smith

## Collection

Institutional Narrative  
Architecture

## Engagement Type

Narrative Infrastructure Design,  
Media Spokesperson Preparation

## Organization

Healthcare Nonprofit, Phoenix,  
Ariz.

## Audience

Organizational spokespeople,  
executive leadership,  
communications staff

## Purpose

Establish approved messaging,  
define scope boundaries and  
equip staff for media and public-  
facing interactions

# How to Read This Piece

## Work Submission

This is an original work submission: a spokesperson preparation framework and institutional messaging architecture built from scratch upon entering the role. No prior framework existed. This document is the system that replaced that gap.

## What This Shows

- Narrative infrastructure design from a standing start
- Message discipline architecture across 12 topic areas
- Crisis-readiness planning
- Spokesperson coaching
- Policy communications fluency
- The ability to translate complex public health and political issues into consistent, defensible institutional language

# Why This Framework Exists

Organizations serving vulnerable populations operate in a high-scrutiny media environment where a single off-message response can shift public perception, strain partner relationships or create political exposure.

Upon stepping into the communications role, there was no media training, no approved messaging and no spokesperson protocol – leaving the organization without a framework to govern public narrative, manage sensitive topics or maintain message discipline during high-visibility media moments.

Talking points are not a limitation on authentic communication. They are a **resilience tool**. They define what the organization speaks to with authority, what it declines to own and how it navigates politically sensitive questions without compromising mission or relationships.

This framework establishes institutional voice across **12 topic areas** and provides a model response for one of the most common high-pressure media scenarios: being asked to evaluate government performance.

# Core Talking Points by Topic

## Healthcare Access for Individuals Facing Homelessness

This healthcare nonprofit is committed to providing comprehensive, compassionate and accessible healthcare services to all individuals facing homelessness in Maricopa County. We work to bridge the gap in healthcare access, offering a wide range of services including primary care, mental health support and substance use treatment.

## Climate Change and Individuals Facing Homelessness

Climate change disproportionately affects individuals facing homelessness, who are more vulnerable to extreme weather events such as heat waves, cold snaps and natural disasters. The organization recognizes the urgent need to address the impact of climate change on this population and is committed to working with partners to develop and implement strategies to mitigate these risks.

## Collaboration and Partnership

The organization believes in the power of collaboration to address the complex issues surrounding homelessness and healthcare. We actively seek out partnerships with local government agencies, community organizations and healthcare providers to develop comprehensive and sustainable solutions.

## Physician Shortage and Individuals Facing Homelessness

The physician shortage in the United States disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, including individuals facing homelessness. The organization is committed to addressing this shortage by attracting and retaining skilled healthcare professionals who are passionate about serving this community. We advocate for policies and programs that incentivize providers to work in underserved areas.

## Immigration Status and Healthcare Access

The organization provides healthcare services to all individuals facing homelessness, without discriminating based on immigration status.

(as of July 2025 this would need to be updated)

## Mental Health and Substance Use Services

Individuals facing homelessness often struggle with mental health issues and substance use disorders, which can be both a cause and a consequence of their housing status. The organization offers a range of services including counseling, therapy and medication-assisted treatment to help our patients achieve stability and improve their overall well-being.

## Housing as a Social Determinant of Health

The organization acknowledges that housing is a key social determinant of health, and that stable, safe and affordable housing is essential for individuals to maintain their health and well-being. While our primary focus is healthcare delivery, we work closely with housing providers and advocates to connect patients with housing resources, recognizing that a comprehensive approach is necessary to break the cycle of homelessness and poor health outcomes.

## Health Equity and Social Justice

The organization is committed to promoting health equity and social justice for individuals facing homelessness. We recognize that homelessness is often the result of systemic inequities – including poverty, racism and discrimination – and that these inequities also contribute to disparities in health outcomes.

## COVID-19 Response and Vaccination Efforts

The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected individuals facing homelessness, who are at higher risk due to underlying health conditions and lack of access to preventive measures. The organization was at the forefront of the pandemic response for this population, offering testing, treatment and vaccination services and working closely with public health authorities to ensure individuals experiencing homelessness were prioritized in vaccination efforts.

## Trauma-Informed Care

The organization recognizes that individuals facing homelessness have often experienced significant trauma. We employ a trauma-informed care approach across all healthcare services – creating safe, supportive and empowering environments, using evidence-based practices that help individuals heal from trauma and build resilience.

## ⚠️ High-stakes topic: requires careful message discipline.

**Record Heat-Related Deaths:** The record number of heat-related deaths among individuals facing homelessness is a tragic reminder of the urgent need to address the intersection of climate change, housing instability and health inequities. The organization works closely with partners to provide preventive education, distribute water and sunscreen, and offer respite from the heat at our clinics and through outreach efforts. We remain committed to developing and implementing strategies that save lives and protect the health and well-being of individuals facing homelessness.

# Scope Boundaries — Staying in Our Lane


## Maintaining Focus on Healthcare

At this organization, our core mission is to provide comprehensive, high-quality healthcare services to individuals facing homelessness. When faced with questions about government policies or partner organizations, we respectfully acknowledge the complexity of the issue while redirecting back to our core competency: providing healthcare to those who need it most.

## On Encampment Sweeps and City Enforcement Actions

The organization understands the complex challenges surrounding encampments and local government efforts to address them. While we recognize the need for public health and safety, we believe any actions taken should prioritize the well-being and dignity of individuals facing homelessness. Sweeping encampments without providing adequate housing alternatives and support services can disrupt continuity of care and exacerbate the health challenges faced by this population.

# Model Media Response — Being Asked to Evaluate Government Performance

 **Scenario:** A reporter asks whether the city, county or state is doing enough to support individuals facing homelessness during summer months.

## Approved Response

At the organization, we focus on providing comprehensive healthcare to all individuals facing homelessness in Maricopa County. We actively participate in heat relief efforts alongside our partners to protect the health and well-being of this vulnerable population. While we appreciate the city's efforts, we recognize that the challenges posed by extreme heat are complex and require ongoing collaboration. Our goal is to work closely with the city and community partners to ensure that individuals facing homelessness receive the healthcare and support they need – not just during the summer, but year-round.

## Why This Response Works



### Acknowledges Importance

It acknowledges the question's importance without deflecting or dismissing the reporter's inquiry.



### Affirms Partnership

Affirms the partnership without endorsing or criticizing government performance.



### Active Participant

Positions the organization as an active participant in the solution, not a passive bystander.



### Mission Redirect

Redirects back to organizational mission – keeping the narrative anchored in healthcare delivery.

# About Liz Sahadi Smith

Strategic communications executive with **25 years of experience** architecting institutional narrative, governing AI-era brand reputation and building resilience infrastructure for organizations operating under high public scrutiny.

## Narrative Arbitrage — Category Engineering

Engineered the climate-adaptive healthcare category to bypass political friction and generate **\$18M in earned media value**. The category was adopted by partner organizations statewide.

## Algorithmic Brand Governance

Architects organizational Share of Model strategy, ensuring authoritative citation status in AI-generated outputs and governing how institutional reputation is synthesized across media and information platforms.

## Resilience Architecture — Reputational De-risking

Designs crisis communications infrastructure that outlasts staff transitions and survives narrative hijacking. Built systems that achieved **143% positive sentiment** across 113 consecutive days of record heat and contributed to the first heat death decline in a decade.

## Relational Capital Stewardship

Manages high-value media and institutional relationships as balance-sheet assets — PBS/WETA documentary feature, coverage in The New York Times, Reuters, AP, NPR, BBC and Politico. **91% award win rate** — 20 wins from 22 submissions.

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