Message Reframe Matrix Tool

APAP's Message Reframe Matrix Tool

Repositioning the Arts for Partnerships, Resources, and Impact

In the wake of H.R. 1—and amid intensifying scrutiny of the nonprofit and cultural sectors—arts organizations must evolve not only how they operate, but how they communicate their value. Too often, our field is misunderstood, mischaracterized, or excluded from funding and policy conversations entirely.

That's why APAP developed this Message Reframe Matrix: not just to improve messaging, but to sharpen power. This guide is a practical tool to help you rethink how the performing arts are positioned—not as charity, enrichment, or entertainment, but as civic infrastructure, economic engines, and strategic partners in public problem-solving.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL: TURNING LANGUAGE INTO LEVERAGE

Whether you're writing a grant, meeting with a policymaker, pitching a sponsor, or mobilizing your board, this matrix ensures your messages are current, catalytic, and compelling. It's more than reframing—it's reclaiming our rightful place in the national conversation.

Use this tool to:

- Replace outdated narratives with language that reflects your organization's civic, economic, and cultural relevance.
- Engage funders, policymakers, and partners using clear, mission-aligned messaging that aligns with their strategic goals.
- Strengthen your positioning in an environment where visibility is higher, scrutiny is sharper, and every message shapes your organization's perceived value.

- Turn passive interest into passionate investment using proven campaign messaging tactics

The *Message Reframe Matrix* Tool is meant to act as a roadmap for reclaiming the arts' public value at a time of rapid policy, funding, and cultural change. As nonprofits and arts institutions navigate the aftermath of H.R. 1 and other shifts in public perception, this tool helps ensure your language reflects your *strategic importance*, not just your service offerings. To begin:

Assess Your Current Messaging

- Review your grant proposals, donor appeals, sponsorship materials, website copy, and board documents.
- Look for legacy language—words like "programming," "charity," or "enrichment"—that may no longer reflect your organization's role or impact.

Use the Matrix as a Strategic Reference Point

- Start by scanning the "Term" column for language that resembles your current messaging—even if it's not an exact match.
- Use similar terms as a proxy. If your term isn't listed, find the closest conceptual neighbor and follow that reframe as a model.
- Read across to the Strategic Reframe and Why It Matters columns to understand how language can evolve to better reflect your mission, context, and audience.
- Note the impact lens for each example—it can help you connect your work to broader policy, funding, or equity goals.

Tailor the Language to Your Audience

- Use the **Strategic Reframe** as a baseline for new messaging.
- Apply insights from the **Matrix Applied** section to target funders, corporate sponsors, policymakers, or media outlets.
- Don't copy-paste—adjust tone, voice, and emphasis to match the audience while keeping the core framing intact.

Align with Sector-Wide Language

- The Matrix uses terms that resonate across philanthropic, civic, and policy sectors—helping you speak the language of systems change.
- Using shared terminology (e.g., "civic infrastructure," "cultural equity," "community resilience") signals your relevance and builds trust.

Reinforce with Story and Data

- Support reframed language with real-world examples, human stories, and credible statistics.
- Use APAP's supplemental tools (e.g., Message Reframe Matrix, Impact Story Library, and Strategic Messaging Framework) or field-aligned sources to strengthen your message.

Embed the Messaging Internally and Externally

- Train staff, board members, artists, and partners on the reframed language.
- Bake this messaging into fundraising campaigns, annual reports, program notes, policy memos, and talking points.
- Consistency builds recognition, credibility, and momentum over time.

MESSAGE REFRAME MATRIX – IN PRACTICE

Don't see the term you're trying to reframe?

We're building this tool collaboratively and continuously. If a word or phrase you use isn't listed here, or if you want help crafting language for a specific audience, email us at advocacy@apap365.org. We're here to help.

Message	Outdated Framing	Strategic Reframe	Why it Matters (Impact Lens)
Performing Arts	niche	**local impact, national network**	Demonstrates the expansive influence and unity of the performing arts in shaping national identity and policy, especially in areas that drive national trends.
Performing Arts	local programming	**foundational civic connectors**	Positions performing arts as critical infrastructure for bridging divides, creating social bonds, and supporting community resilience.
Arts	charity	**strategic investment, essential civic and economic drivers**	Establishes the arts as integral public assets, on par with education, health, and safety—driving robust economies and social wellbeing
Arts	soft value	**proven platform for health, innovation & community strength**	Shows how arts investment delivers quantifiable impacts in mental wellness, adaptive thinking, and social connection, supporting research-backed outcomes.
Arts	entertainment	**motor of opportunity, engagement, and belonging**	Highlights the arts as a gateway to civic engagement (56% voting, 27% volunteering increase), economic advancement, and inclusive democratic participation.
Youth Arts	afterschool enrichment	**launchpad for youth mobility empowerment and**	Frames youth arts as critical to cultivating tomorrow's leaders, building skills, and opening doors,

Message	Outdated Framing	Strategic Reframe	Why it Matters (Impact Lens)
		future creative workforce	with lasting community payoff, especially for marginalized groups.
Artists	vulnerable	**civic first responders, cultural stewards, creative strategists**	Underscores artists as central to healing, remembrance, and rebuilding—enhancing collective agency and jumpstarting resilience after crisis.
Presenting Arts Centers	venues/passive hosts	**civic anchors and economic engines, driving cultural vitality**	Recognizes live performing arts spaces as trusted community anchors, essential for public safety, dialogue, innovation, and economic recovery.
Agents	middlemen, deal brokers	**cultural architects and market shapers**	Elevates agents as essential to ecosystem design and opportunity access.
Managers	admin role	**field catalysts, visionaries, leaders**	Recognizes management as leaders who scale impact, sustain field-wide infrastructure and drive economic sustainability.
The Field	fragmented	**uniquely rooted and networked: local experts, national leaders**	Frames the Field as present and knowledgeable in every community, yet powerfully unified nationwide. This dual reach amplifies policy influence and public trust, bridging local realities with national perspective.
Grants	supplemental support	**catalysts for workforce development and systems change**	Communicates that grants unlock sustainable solutions, innovation, and inclusivity, enabling sector-wide progress.
Cultural Sector	peripheral	**pillar of community prosperity and wellbeing**	Positions the sector as central to societal health, economic growth, and public resilience—arguing public sector investment is nonnegotiable.
Cultural Organizations	project grantees	**accessible onramps to economic and civic mobility**	Frames as vital bridges and intermediaries, connecting people to opportunity, belonging, and advancement, with sector-wide benefits.
Dance	aesthetic or leisure	**physical storytelling powerhouse for wellbeing and social bridgebuilding**	Dance improves public health outcomes, reduces trauma, and bridges identity and generational divides.
Canvas	decorative	**platform for collective memory, civic dialogue, and cultural bridgebuilding**	Elevates the visual arts as foundational spaces for shared grief, pride, protest, and healing, shaping community narrative.

Message	Outdated Framing	Strategic Reframe	Why it Matters (Impact Lens)
Choreography	steps planner, entertainment	**storycraft and movement-based narrative design for civic dialogue and emotional connection**	Spotlights choreographers as public storytellers, weaving narratives that drive empathy, memory, and social cohesion.
Production	behind-the-scenes	**adaptive systems orchestration, core to access and impact**	Clarifies production as the linchpin of accessibility, public safety, and the quality of cultural experiences.
Patrons	ticket buyers	**civic partners and cultural co-investors**	Elevates patrons as participants in community-building and shared outcomes, reinforcing purpose beyond transaction.
Stakeholders	tangential influence	**co-creators of community narrative, community Influencers**	Centers the lived experience stakeholders bring, deepens their civic agency and community power.
Funders	donors	**co-architects of systemic change, movement builders, story shapers**	Appeals to funders as visionary partners co-creating public good and generational impact.
Corporate Partners	sponsorship logos	**drivers of lasting community impact and workforce resilience, stewards of brand power**	Aligns business support with societal outcomes: brand leadership, CSR, and healthier, more engaged communities.
Rural	underserved	**high-return investment opportunity, civic impact multiplier**	Articulates the high yield of supporting rural arts—local jobs, healing, and identity—making them a wise public investment.
Urban	over-resourced	**innovation labs for scalable change**	Positions urban arts centers as testbeds for new solutions in health, safety, and civic vitality, with lessons for national adoption.

MESSAGE REFRAME MATRIX – APPLIED

Continue reading for examples of how these frames can be applied across your stakeholder Landscape, from government to funders to the communities you serve.

For Policy Decisionmakers (Federal, State, Local)

Scarcity Mindset Messaging: When budgets are tight, the arts are often the first to be cut. But reducing arts funding risks losing valuable programs that support student engagement, local economies, and community well-being.

Why Arts Matter (reframed): You're not just managing budgets—you're shaping the long-term resilience of your district. The performing arts are not discretionary; they are essential infrastructure that strengthens civic trust, youth development, public health, and economic mobility.

Claim Your Space: *"Investing in the performing arts is investing in public infrastructure. Our work fuels workforce pipelines, local economic growth, and systems of care—especially in under-resourced and rural communities. In a time of growing demand and shrinking safety nets, we deliver scalable, culturally grounded solutions where other systems can't reach."*

✳ ***Strategic Reframe Used:***

- Arts → strategic investment, essential civic and economic drivers
- Performing Arts → local impact, national network
- Rural → high-return investment opportunity, civic impact multiplier

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For Philanthropic Funders (Foundations, DAFs, Legacy Donors)

Scarcity Mindset Messaging: Performing arts organizations are facing unprecedented budget cuts and declining public support. Without donor funding, many programs—especially those serving youth and underrepresented communities—may not survive.

Why Arts Matter (reframed): Your support isn't just charitable—it's catalytic. In today's constrained funding landscape, performing arts organizations are **innovation labs for civic resilience, education, and social cohesion**.

Claim Your Space: *"A grant to our organization fuels impact far beyond the stage. From trauma recovery and youth opportunity to economic vibrancy and civic connection, we are infrastructure—resilient, scalable, and aligned with your deepest values. Together, we aren't subsidizing—we're co-architecting the future of public good."*

✳ ***Strategic Reframe Used:***

- Grants → catalysts for workforce development and systems change
- Funders → co-architects of systemic change, movement builders, story shapers
- The Field → uniquely rooted and networked: local experts, national leaders

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For Corporate Partners (CSR, Local Business, Brand Teams)

Scarcity Mindset Messaging: With declining sponsorships and shrinking marketing budgets, arts organizations rely on corporate partners to stay afloat. Your support helps ensure visibility and survival for programs that might otherwise disappear.

Why Arts Matter (reframed): Your brand can be a cultural stakeholder—not just a logo. Arts partnerships now deliver more ROI through **civic relevance, employee activation, and narrative power** than tax incentives ever could.

Claim Your Space: *"Today's consumers and employees want purpose. Our organization delivers visibility, trust, and authentic community impact—while aligning your brand with*

inclusion, innovation, and local economic vibrancy. We don't offer sponsorships—we build civic platforms."

✳ ***Strategic Reframe Used:***

- Patrons → civic partners and cultural co-investors
- Arts → proven platform for health, innovation & community strength
- Presenting Arts Centers → foundational civic connectors

For Major Donors and Individual Philanthropists

Scarcity Mindset Messaging: Arts organizations can't survive without donor support. With rising costs and reduced public funding, we need philanthropy to keep programs running and doors open—especially for vulnerable communities.

Why Arts Matter (reframed): You're not a donor. You're a civic builder. Your support unlocks cultural belonging, educational access, and community resilience—at a time when these are under attack.

Claim Your Space: *"Your giving tells a story: that the future belongs to communities that create, connect, and care. Every contribution sustains civic spaces, fuels local leadership, and nurtures the cultural stewards shaping America's next chapter. This is more than philanthropy—it's legacy-making."*

✳ ***Strategic Reframe Used:***

- Artists → civic first responders, cultural stewards, creative strategists
- Arts → motor of opportunity, engagement, and belonging
- Funders → co-architects of systemic change, movement builders, story shapers

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For Values-Aligned Political Donors / Strategic Philanthropists

Scarcity Mindset Messaging: Without greater support, the arts risk becoming an afterthought in our democracy. Funding is declining, audiences are shrinking, and organizations are struggling to survive. We must act now to preserve this vital part of our civic fabric.

Why Arts Matter (reframed): In an era of disinformation and division, the arts offer a **frontline strategy for civic renewal, truth-telling, and belonging**—reaching across geographies, generations, and ideologies.

Claim Your Space: *"This is movement infrastructure. We are restoring trust, building shared civic identity, and creating space for emotional connection at a national scale. In communities where politics fail, culture heals. If you fund systems change, fund the systems that reach hearts and shift norms."*

✳ ***Strategic Reframe Used:***

- Cultural Sector → pillar of community prosperity and wellbeing
- Arts → motor of opportunity, engagement, and belonging
- APAP → national catalyst for policy and field power

CRAFTING THE STORY: FIELD-TESTED MESSAGING TACTICS

To deepen your impact, we recommend also applying these campaign-tested storytelling strategies, drawn from leading frameworks:

Begin with Audience Clarity: Before crafting your message, get clear on who you're speaking to—what they value and what motivates them. Tools like **Spitfire's Smart Chart 4.0** can help you design messaging that fits each stakeholder's priorities and context.

Center Stories on Real People and Places: Bring your work to life with human-centered narratives. Follow **Fifty & Fifty's nonprofit storytelling guide** highlighting individual journeys. Practice spotlighting one main character with three-act storytelling to foster connection and credibility.

Define the Stakes Clearly: Make it unmistakable what's at risk and what's possible. **Forbes Nonprofit Council's "20 Useful Storytelling Techniques"** (Sept 2024) underscores opening with urgency—and why now matters.

Ensure Credibility by Telling the Whole Truth—Not Just the Success: Donors trust honesty. Blend wins with real-world challenges. The **Meyer Partners' Ethical Nonprofit Storytelling Guide** recommends transparency about both outcomes and complexity.

Inspire Investment and Action Through Storytelling: Great stories don't just inform, they *move* people. According to the **National Council of Nonprofits,** storytelling builds emotional connection, drives memory retention, and mobilizes support. Think of it as your own form of **Get Out the Vote**: storytelling is how nonprofits "get out the funders."

FROM STORY TO STRATEGY: TOOLS TO ACTIVATE YOUR REFRAMING

Your story is only as strong as your strategy. To help you activate reframed messaging across advocacy, communications, and fundraising, we've curated **free, AI-friendly tools** built to optimize capacity and scale impact for nonprofit and arts professionals.

Map Messaging to Impact Strategy: Stay focused on outcomes that matter. The free newsletter from the **Marketing AI Institute** shows how to apply AI to storytelling, segmentation, content planning, and stakeholder engagement.

Write Smarter, Faster, and with Purpose: The free, open-source platform **Learn Prompting** teaches you how to write clear, strategic prompts for tools like ChatGPT or Claude. While not nonprofit-specific, it's widely used to accelerate grant writing, personalize outreach, and streamline policy drafts.

Build AI into Everyday Communications: The **Nonprofit Marketing Guide** by Kivi Leroux Miller offers free resources and blog posts on AI-powered audience segmentation, campaign messaging, and content calendars tailored to nonprofit realities.

Stay Ahead of the Tools Curve: **The Rundown AI** is a short, digestible newsletter that helps you keep up with new tools for content creation, outreach, reporting, and operational efficiency, making it easy to experiment without being overwhelmed.

Explore the Cutting Edge, One Tool at a Time: If you want to stay ahead of what's next, **Ben's Bites** is a fast, daily newsletter highlighting the newest AI tools and use cases from across industries. While not nonprofit-specific, it's a great discovery resource for arts professionals ready to experiment, adapt, and lead the field in applying emerging tools.