



## COMMUNIQUE 3:

### *Selecting Audiences and Messages*

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With attendance goals set for College Goal Sunday, the next step is identifying who the right audiences are to help you reach these goals. Who are the audiences that should attend College Goal Sunday and how can we reach them? What does this audience care about and what will resonate with them? These are all the important questions that need to be answered to ensure that College Goal Sunday programs are successful in reaching attendance goals. This communiqué walks through the steps of selecting target audiences and developing messages, with tools and tips for you to use.

#### How to Select Targeted Audiences

To be successful in reaching attendance goals for College Goal Sunday, outreach efforts must be targeted at specific audiences since different audience groups need to hear different messages. It is unlikely that the same message will resonate well with both an 80-year-old grandmother in a rural community and a teenager at an urban high school (and do we really want grandmas to attend?). Narrowing down audience targets empowers you to talk directly to your audiences in a way they can hear.

So, how do you decide exactly who your audience targets should be? First, identify the audiences in your state who will benefit most from College Goal Sunday. It is likely that *low-income* high school seniors and the parents of those students will be two of your most important audience categories. Having identified those two fairly broad categories, let's now ask how we can hone targets even more narrowly. Do you need to talk to low-income *Hispanic* high school seniors? Are you talking primarily to low-income parents of Hispanic high school seniors in an *urban* area? These qualifiers help to define your audiences and break down exactly who you need to reach with specific messages. Two distinct audience groups for College Goal Sunday might be:

- Low-income Hispanic high school seniors (urban) and
- Low-income parents of Hispanic high school seniors (urban).

These are just examples of how narrow and targeted each of your audiences should be for College Goal Sunday planning. And remember – there will be a host of possible audiences. The burden falls to you to decide which of the potential audiences you will focus your limited resources on reaching out to. Prioritize the top three audiences based on your available time and resources.

In Montana, the College Goal Sunday program found that its event was not reaching a key audience in the state – rural Native American youth. The program’s decision to focus on a narrow audience made it clear that new approaches would be required to reach this new audience. The coordinators in Montana focused on targeting rural Native American youth by partnering with the American Indian Business Leaders as messengers and holding events at tribal colleges on the reservations. This effort to target this important population has been hugely successful – last year over 40 percent of Montana’s College Goal Sunday participants were Native American.

### Audience Values

Different audiences care about different things. For instance, youth today are concerned about what their friends are doing and making their parents proud, while parents want the best for their kids and have very limited time for outside activities.

When it comes time to develop messages for your target audiences, identify the things this audience already cares about – what things do they value? It is important to note that most of your audiences will likely have different values and many will have limited knowledge about a lot of the program information that you are prepared to share with them. For instance, it is likely that most of your audiences will not know what “FAFSA” means. Even if you explain the acronym, it can be confusing. (See messages in the College Access Marketing Toolkit for talking about benefits of College Goal Sunday without talking about FAFSA per se.) In developing messages, be sure to use simple and direct language so that target audiences can easily hear what it is that you are saying.

You can identify these values by working with your youth advisory committees or by evaluating your past experiences with College Goal Sunday. Take a look at the research. For example, we learned at the summit that many teens today have a closer relationship with their parents and have a lack of trust in government. This tells us that parents may be strong influencers, and that tying College Goal Sunday to the government may not be effective. For more on research related to teen audience targets see Tab #2 of the College Access Marketing Toolkit.

### Developing Effective Messages

After you’ve identified your target audiences’ core concerns, it will be easier to develop clear messages that will resonate. The College Access Marketing Toolkit includes messages that tap core concerns held by five sample audiences. The messages in the Toolkit highlight ways to address misconceptions held by your audience targets (like time or language barriers) and how to clearly ask them to show up at your event.

As an example, let’s look at the sample messages for low-income Hispanic youth. One message is: *“There is money available for you to go to college and show Mom what you can do.”* This straightforward message makes it clear that there is money for everyone and taps into pride and family – important values to this audience group

### You Have Messages – Now What?

Once you have messages laid out for your target audience, consider the people that can effectively deliver these messages. Credible messengers are just as important as good messages in reaching your audiences. See Challenges below for more details on selecting a messenger that really resonates with your audience targets.

And remember to be consistent with your messaging. Stick to a few key messages and repeat them over and over again to your audience targets. Research shows that **repetition** and **consistency** are the most effective ways to build awareness and motivate behavior.

### Challenges

Two overarching questions we heard on the TA (Technical Assistance) calls are answered below.

1. *How do you talk to an audience that is not ready to think about college as an option – much less applying for financial aid through College Goal Sunday events?*

If a College Goal Sunday program has identified an audience group that is not “college ready,” you may have to re-prioritize. Since College Goal Sunday is really about connecting kids who are ready to go to college with the money they need to make it a reality, it is likely that audiences that are not ready to think about preparation for college are not a priority audience for this type of event. Instead, focus efforts on audiences that will be receptive to your messages and will likely attend and benefit from a College Goal Sunday event.

2. *Are celebrities (e.g., former football players) the most effective spokespeople?*  
Crafting targeted messages that will resonate with your target audiences will be most effective if they are delivered through a credible spokesperson. This means that all your messengers should be appropriate to the particular audience target you’re reaching out to. If you are reaching out to an urban, Hispanic teen audience, a football celebrity may very well fall flat.

In general, teens want to hear from someone in the community they can identify with. Messengers should also have a real connection to the message. Did your football player messenger benefit from federal financial aid to get through school? Does he have a compelling story to tell? If not, this is likely not the best spokesperson for College Goal Sunday. Consider radio DJs and student leaders as great messengers for your teen audiences.

### Interested in Learning More? Check Out These Resources

The College Access Marketing Toolkit includes great resources to assist you as you select target audiences and draft messages for College Goal Sunday.

- Research Report (Tab #2) – Provides detailed findings to help identify the values of important audience groups from urban teens to adult learners.
- Sample Messages and Talking Points (Tab #4) – Highlights tips on how to draft messages, as well as sample messages and talking points for five potential audience targets.

If you don’t already have the College Access Marketing Toolkit, visit the College Goal Sunday Web site ([www.collegegoalsundayusa.org/support/presentations.asp](http://www.collegegoalsundayusa.org/support/presentations.asp)) to download a copy.