Streets Built to Share™

Tips for Effective Complete Streets Messaging

✓ Your audience may be new to the term "complete streets," so be ready to explain it (first message).

✓ Messages are strongest when they highlight both the health and safety benefits of complete streets.

✓ Sharing personal stories are great ways to help fill information gaps, add urgency, and build support.

✓ Avoid jargon and use clear, simple terms when you talk about city and neighborhood design.

✓ Be prepared to respond to challenging questions regarding funding. Complete streets policies are typically paid for through existing funding that state and local governments receive and only in some cases involve securing new revenue.

Complete Streets Messages (*Use key messages consistently and repeatedly)

★ We all want and deserve to live in safe, healthy communities. Complete streets policies make communities and neighborhoods more livable by ensuring all people can get safely to where they need to go – work, school, the library, grocery stores, or parks. They also help people feel more connected to their neighbors, which improves quality of life.

• Let's make it safe for people to share the road with cars and trucks. Sidewalks that connect to parks, public transportation, and schools; roads that include designated and protected bike lanes; and streets that accommodate all people, can help us safely be active and improve our quality of life.

• When children can walk to school, parks, and playgrounds, they are more likely to be healthy and do better in school.

• We know there are fewer crashes involving walkers when streets have sidewalks. People – including moms with strollers, people with disabilities, children, and older adults – need sidewalks and crosswalks to feel safe.

• Some low-income communities and communities of color have lacked well-maintained routes to parks and schools, roads, bike lanes, and sidewalks for decades. In many cases they simply do not have transportation options at all. The same neighborhoods often experience higher rates of chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease. We must make up for years of lost opportunities and make these neighborhoods a priority moving forward.

Language to Emphasize/Language to Avoid

Messages that resonate best are clear and simple. They use everyday language free of jargon and communicate shared values and emotion. Below you'll find a list of words/phrases Voices for Healthy Kids encourages you to use (left-hand column) when talking about complete streets. Language in the right-hand column includes terms and phrases not as easily understood or impactful when looking to engage your audience.

Use This Language	Instead of This Language
✓ Roads, protected bike lanes, access to parks and sidewalks that can accommodate all users	✗ Built environment and active transportation, infrastructure
✓ Improving the quality of life for people in the neighborhood	✗ Improving the built environment
✓ People walking, walkers, walking	✗ Pedestrians
✓ People riding bicycles, bike riders, biking	✗ Bicyclists
✓ Neighborhood, town, city, school, church, family, local business	✗ General "community" which means something different to each person
✓ Crashes, collisions	✗ Accidents
✓ Helping children grow up at a healthy weight	✗ Preventing childhood obesity

Tips for Effective Messaging to Support Public Policy Change

1 Connect with supporters.

When communicating to gain support for policy, systems, and environmental changes that help kids grow up at a healthy weight, it is important to use language that will move people to take action. By framing your message in a way that paints a picture of how the current environment makes it difficult, if not impossible, to make healthy choices, you can create a sense of urgency and the need to take action. Make sure to clarify that the change and action you're calling for is about transforming environments to make it easy for people to eat healthy and be physically active and less about creating personal behavior change.

2 Use the right words.

While obesity is a chronic disease, most people still think of it as a personal problem with a personal solution. They believe if someone is obese or overweight, that person just needs to eat less and be more physically active. They don't immediately see the need for public policy solutions. However, when talking about people facing obesity-related diseases like diabetes and heart disease, most people agree that we need to work together to find a solution to the problem. Avoid using "obesity" and instead emphasize the health threats posed by heart disease and/or diabetes.

3 Emphasize choice.

People are most supportive of healthy changes if they don't fear their choices will be limited. When talking about adding healthy options, stress the array of overall choices offered to people, especially parents who we are here to support, so the focus is not on the removal of unhealthy options.

4 Use the right messenger.

Messages are only as strong as the person delivering them. Is the person delivering the message credible? Are they representative of the community most affected? Do they have personal experience related to the issue? Are they respected by the audience? The best messenger needs to be determined for each situation and location. For example, when messaging on health issues, the best messenger could be a doctor, a nurse, or a patient. Make informed decisions about the most culturally appropriate messenger on an issue.

5 Stress consumer education as ONE piece of the puzzle.

People believe education is the best way to encourage behavior change. But helping all children grow up at a healthy weight is a complex challenge and education is only one part of the solution. Reinforce consumer education as key to awareness building about the problem and solutions, but emphasize other initiatives that drive system-wide policy change. For example, with tobacco use, warning labels did a great deal to educate consumers but the change in norms and dramatic drops in smoking rates happened when environmental changes happened like prohibiting the sale to minors and making workplaces smoke-free.

6 Alleviate skepticism and build trust.

People are very skeptical of government and framing our solutions only from that lens can prevent us from getting our message through to key audiences. Introduce policy, systems, and environmental change efforts to the public with words like "services," "resources," "partnerships," as people are more inclined to embrace this terminology instead of "regulations," "mandates," "bans," "funding," and "government."