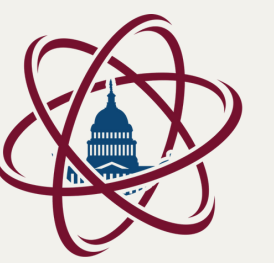


# Messaging Science for Legislators

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Research-to-Policy  
— Collaboration —

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers participating in the Research-to-Policy Collaboration created one-page fact sheets about how the pandemic was affecting various populations and services, then provided ranging policy options. To enhance the reach and intended impact of these fact sheets, we partnered with the authors to distribute their work to legislative officials via email. These distributions allowed us to test strategies to improve access (opening the email) and engagement (clicking the fact sheet link) with the science-based resources. In one year, we conducted over 75 trials. Here is what we learned.

## 1. Cue relevance.

Directly cue relevance by including the legislator's name or district name in the subject line. Also carefully curate a target audience based on who will be able to use the information



## 2. Keep it short.

We have found that policymakers and staffers engage more with a short email, even if it means it is missing important information.

## 3. Understand that policymakers prefer people.

Communicate with authenticity and build rapport! Establishing and maintaining relationships is key. Try: opening with a kind sentence, thanking them for their work, or building your own personal narrative.



## 4. Creating a science frame is transparent.

Mentioning "science" in the subject line does not appear to hurt or help open rates, but it can ensure that recipients know what to expect if they do open it -- thus increasing their likelihood of engaging with the material. But it could also limit your exposure to new audiences who may not open on the basis of scientific information alone. We have a forthcoming paper on this topic.

## 5. Just be normal.

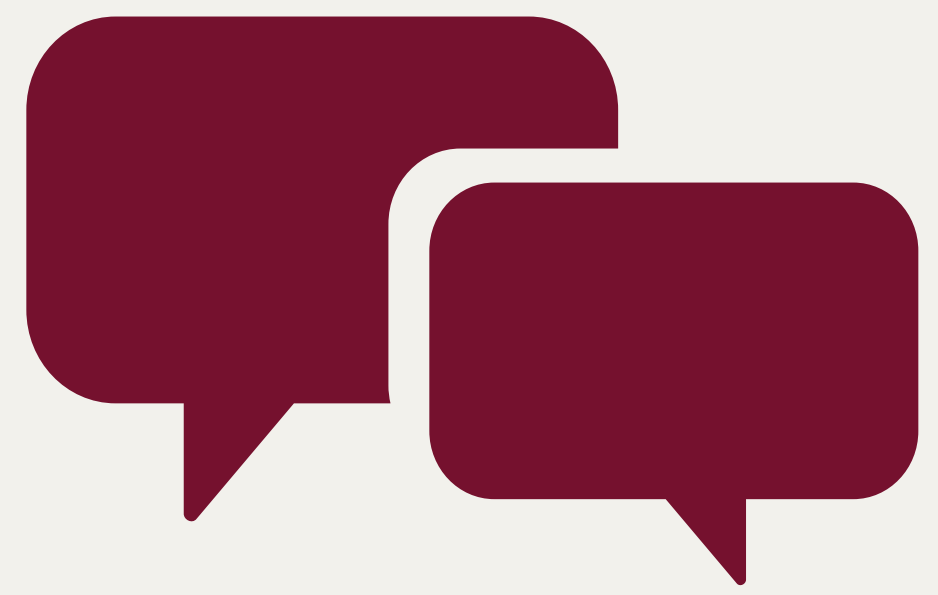
Today, click-bait methods are ineffective and policymakers have become averse to the traditional messaging tactics. They are most likely to open emails that sound like they are written by ordinary people.

## 6. Know that emotions are confusing.

The right emotions at the right levels and in the right context can be engaging, but we are still pinning down what those best practices are. We have a forthcoming paper regarding this topic.

## 7. Problems may garner attention, but...

Problem framing may debilitate action or careful processing of the information. In comparison, “solutions” framing may evoke less emotion but also not debilitate action.



## 8. Policymakers vary in their email behavior.

Dissemination teams may benefit the most by targeting strategies for enhancing engagement among those in the middle. Entirely new tactics are needed for those who never open (e.g., emailing their staffers; scheduling meetings; physical mail). We have a forthcoming paper on this topic.



## 9. Context matters.

Outside events can dilute any messaging tactic; what is effective for one resource at one point in time may not be effective in a different moment. Messaging strategy is not a panacea for engagement – we must be timely, relevant, and personal.

## 10. Routine evaluation is necessary.

Given the importance and unpredictability of context and the fine nuance, ongoing evaluation of messaging tactics is critical. Evaluation capacity should be integrated into dissemination efforts and maintained to properly understand what works.

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