

Human Services COVID-19 Sample Messages

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To help human service organizations respond during the COVID-19 crisis, the National Reframing Initiative surveyed the Network to see what communications aids would be most helpful to the sector. Based on the results of that survey, we developed a sample message to policymakers to support public funding and sample communications to private donors to support development efforts. Human service organizations and allies are welcome to freely borrow or adapt any language that meets their communications needs.

Overarching Messaging Guidance:

- Appeal to our society's interconnection and our responsibility to each other.
- Feature the collective, societal benefits of human services and/or your organization's work before getting into the particulars of your request.
- Move quickly from expressing urgency around the COVID-19 crisis to offering solutions when possible.
- Avoid framing that focuses on the vulnerability of specific people, which activates zero-sum, us vs. them thinking.
- Offer explanations and concrete examples relying on the tested [Construction Metaphor](#) for human services. Do not assume the public and policymakers will understand how your organization operates in typical times, how your organization's work is being impacted by the pandemic, or what role your organization would play in the long-term recovery effort.
- Consider your audience's existing relationship with your organization as you craft your messages. For example, if your request is not specifically related to responding to COVID-19, it may not be the best time to reach out to new donors and funders.

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Additional National Reframing Initiative COVID-19 Messaging Resources:

Tip Sheets on [Individualism](#) and [Fatalism](#) – Follow these guides to avoid cuing up these strongly-held beliefs

On-Demand Webinar: [Human Service Messaging During the COVID-19 Crisis](#)

The National Reframing Human Services Initiative is brought to you by the National Human Services Assembly and is generously funded by The Kresge Foundation.

SAMPLE MESSAGE FOR POLICYMAKERS – General Human Services Advocacy

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting our community's health and well-being at unprecedented levels, causing major disruptions for people of all ages and walks of life. While we are all weathering this storm together, the effects are intensified for people who were already on shaky ground prior to the pandemic because of things like low wages, a lack of health insurance, or a health or mental health challenge.

Human service organizations are buffering against some of the most serious health, mental health, economic, and social consequences for our community members. We are calling on our policymakers to include human services in COVID-19 response efforts by adequately funding our work in the face of increased demand and by engaging our skills and expertise in a rebuilding process that repairs the gaps in our systems exposed by the pandemic.

Here are some of the ways that human service organizations are shoring up our community during this crisis.

- Providing meals to people who are experiencing hunger, including sourcing, packaging, and delivering nutritious food directly to people who are unable to safely leave their homes.
- Making sure everyone has the stability of a safe and nurturing home by offering things like rental assistance so people can stay in their homes without risk of eviction, and by providing a home for people who would not otherwise have a place to live, are unable to live on their own, or are not safe in their home due to issues such as domestic violence.
- Providing child care for the workforce that is keeping our hospitals, grocery stores, delivery services, pharmacies, fire departments and other essential systems functioning.
- Transitioning to online programming when possible, including mental health services, early childhood home visiting, mentoring programs, and support groups.

Human services are designed to strengthen our community by providing the solid foundation of essential supports that help people live up to their full potential. The sector's deep experience and commitment to the well-being of every one of our community members makes us uniquely prepared to help our community navigate through the immediate response to COVID-19 and the long-term rebuilding process that will follow. Our policymakers must make a meaningful and sustained commitment to bolstering the community's health and human service infrastructure through adequate funding and must ensure that human service leaders have a seat at the table as important decisions are made about our community's response.

SAMPLE MESSAGE FOR DONORS – Housing and Homelessness Prevention

Dear [Name],

Having a safe and stable place to live is at the very foundation of overall health and well-being and it's [Organization Name's] goal to make this a reality for everyone in our community. The COVID-19 pandemic is creating a health and economic environment that is rapidly destabilizing this foundation for our community members at levels that we have never seen before. The effects are intensified for people who were already on shaky ground prior to the pandemic because of things like low wages and high housing costs.

[Organization Name] is working hard to shore up our community during this crisis, **but we need your help to continue this work over the coming months**. There are now more people in our community who are unable to pay their rent due to lost income and more people who cannot leave their homes for essentials like food and prescriptions. Meanwhile, the highly transmissible nature of the virus means that our shelters have had to reduce the number of people living in each facility in order to create safe distances. It also means that our staff and volunteers must now wear personal protective equipment to do their work safely and responsibly.

With your support, we can help our community weather this storm by:

- Providing rental and mortgage assistance so that people who have lost their job and a reliable income do not lose their home.
- Delivering groceries and prepared meals, assisting with personal care and hygiene practices, and making sure that health and mental health needs are being met for our many community members who need additional support to be able to live healthy at home.
- Ensuring that homes remain functional and safe by advocating to end the practice of shutting off water and other essential utilities when people cannot afford to pay their bills.
- Offering a safe and nurturing place to live for people who do not have a home, are unable to live on their own due to a disability or a health or mental health challenge, or are not safe in their home due to issues such as domestic violence.
- Partnering with our community leaders and policymakers to identify spaces that can be repurposed to shelter unhoused people while maintaining appropriate distances that reduce the likelihood of COVID-19 transmission.
- Purchasing the protective gear, disinfectants, and cleaning products that will keep our staff and the people we support safe.

With your partnership, we can help ensure that our neighbors have the solid foundation of essential supports that we all need and that their gifts and talents are available to our community as we rebuild.

Sincerely,

SAMPLE MESSAGE FOR DONORS – Food and Nutrition Support

Dear [Name],

[Organization Name's] goal is to make sure everyone in [community name] has the nutritious food necessary to power their well-being because when people experience hunger, they're missing one of the most important building blocks for being healthy and contributing to the vitality of our community. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, is driving up unemployment and underemployment, making it harder for many of us to buy nutritious food to keep us and our families healthy. The effects are intensified for people who were already on shaky ground prior to the pandemic because of conditions like low wages and a lack of affordable, nutritious food options.

[Organization Name] is working hard to shore up our community during this crisis, **but we need your help to continue to feed our neighbors over the coming months.** There are now more people than ever in our community who are unable to afford food due to lost income. At the same time, the highly transmissible nature of the virus has resulted in the closings of schools and other settings that provide meals to prevent hunger. It also means that our staff and volunteers must now wear personal protective equipment to do their work safely and responsibly.

With your support, we can help our community weather the storm caused by COVID-19 by:

- Increasing the amount of nutritious food we can purchase and provide to the growing number of our community members whose lost income puts them and their families at great risk of experiencing hunger.
- Delivering groceries and prepared meals for the many people who cannot safely leave their homes, including older adults, people with disabilities, and people with health conditions that make them more susceptible to COVID-19.
- Partnering with our school district to continue to provide meals to the children who were getting their nutritional needs — that are so vital to their health and development — met by school breakfast and lunch programs.
- Working with our community leaders and policymakers to open additional food pickup sites and mobile food banks across the region so more of our neighbors will have food options close to home.
- Purchasing the protective gear, disinfectants, and cleaning products that will keep our staff and the people we support safe.

Through your partnership, we can help ensure that our neighbors have the essential supports of nutritious food that we all need so that they can contribute their gifts and talents to [community name] as we rebuild. Thank you for your generosity.

Sincerely,

Sources:

Bales, Susan Nall, Volmert, Andrew, Baran, Michael, O'Neil, Moira and Kendall-Taylor, Nat (2015). Talking Human Services: A FrameWorks MessageMemo. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute, available at <https://www.nationalassembly.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/TalkingHumanServicesFrameWorksMessageMemoFINAL.pdf>

FrameWorks Institute, Framing COVID-19, available at <http://frameworksinstitute.org/framing-covid-19.html>.