



PSEO
COALITION

Communicating Postsecondary Value:

A Hands-On Messaging Workshop

PSEO Coalition Summit 2026

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Welcome!

During this half-day workshop, Postsecondary Value Framework Implementation Community members will begin by aligning on a shared understanding of what postsecondary value means and why it's more complex than any single metric can capture. From there, participants will learn how to communicate that value credibly and clearly to the specific audiences they serve. Through individual reflections, small group exercises, paired feedback, and full-group discussions, participants will draft, test, and refine messaging in real time, co-creating and testing communications that can be put to use immediately within unique institutional or state contexts.

By the end of today's workshop, you'll be equipped to:

- Articulate why the value of a postsecondary credential is multidimensional and why that complexity matters
- Identify the mindset, priorities, and information needs of specific audiences you communicate with
- Draft and deliver an elevator pitch for postsecondary value grounded in your own state or institutional context
- Apply audience-specific messaging templates to create tailored messaging
- Identify at least one tool you can adapt and use right away

SINA Team Overview

SINA is a strategy and communications agency that helps organizations translate complex ideas into clear, audience-centered messages and strategies. We work across education, workforce development, philanthropy, policy, and other interconnected fields, bringing a cross-sector perspective to challenges that are often communicated in siloes. Through deep listening, strategic thinking, and storytelling, we help clients build shared understanding, strengthen their influence, and turn big ideas into action.



Faye Davis, Senior Director: Faye brings 15 years of experience in strategic communications, marketing, and consulting to her role as senior director. A natural communicator focused on collaboration and strategy, her ability to build trusting relationships is her superpower. Before SINA, Faye led marketing and communications for a large portfolio of projects at Jobs for the Future, a national nonprofit focused on transforming the U.S. education and workforce systems. She has also consulted with communities nationwide on their business and talent attraction marketing strategies and facilitated leadership development programming for mid-career leaders.



Thomas Holton, Associate: Thomas is inspired by the potential of strategic communications to drive social change. At SINA, he helps guide comms strategy for clients at the intersection of work and learning. Thomas has previous experience in the B2B tech space, as well as journalism, where his byline has appeared in publications such as The Associated Press, U.S. News & World Report and WUFT.



Elisabeth Wright, Director: Elisabeth is a communications professional excited to support mission-driven organizations as they grow their visibility, influence, and impact. With more than a decade of experience across nonprofits and national organizations — particularly in K-12 education, higher education and workforce development — she brings a strategic, narrative-driven approach to brand building, donor engagement, and thought leadership. Her work centers on helping organizations translate complex ideas and programs into clear, compelling stories that resonate with funders, partners, and broader audiences.

Pre-Work Review

Before the workshop, we asked you to hold a short, structured conversation to surface your biggest current communication challenges, identify at least one specific use case to work on during the workshop, and your highest priority audience.

What communication challenge did you identify during the pre-work?

Who is your highest priority audience?

- ☐ Prospective students
- ☐ Current students
- ☐ Families
- ☐ Employers
- ☐ Policymakers
- ☐ Institutional leaders
- ☐ Faculty and staff
- ☐ Community partners
- ☐ Other: _____

By the end of the day, I hope to:

Understanding the Landscape

Today's conversations about higher education are increasingly shaped by questions about value. Students, families, employers, policymakers, and institutional leaders are all asking whether a postsecondary credential is worth the investment — but they aren't always asking the same questions. Some are focused on career outcomes and earnings, while others care about workforce needs, talent pipelines, societal impact, or long-term economic mobility. Effective communication begins by recognizing that postsecondary value is multidimensional.

At the same time, audiences are navigating an environment filled with competing narratives about higher education. Data alone rarely changes minds. Building trust requires presenting outcomes in ways that are transparent, contextualized, and connected to the questions stakeholders are already asking. Strong communication helps audiences understand not only *what* the data tells us, but *why* it matters to them.

Throughout today's workshop, we'll focus on four principles that guide effective communication about postsecondary value:

- Value is multidimensional.
- Trust is built through transparency.
- Insights should lead to action.
- Context matters.

In your own work, what makes communicating postsecondary value challenging?

Knowing Your Audience

One of the biggest reasons that communication falls flat is a mismatch between audience and message. The conversations you have about postsecondary education will look vastly different with a prospective student, a university president, and a state policymaker. To successfully communicate with each of these audiences, we need to understand the full scope of what they care about — and the full context that informs how they make decisions.

To start, we're going to walk through an audience mapping exercise that will help us understand your highest priority audience more deeply. Below is a series of questions related to your audience's motivations; take around 20 minutes to fill out the questions with as much relevant detail as you can. Feel free to discuss with your table or other virtual attendees as you go, and at the end of the 20 minutes, each table will share its findings.

Part 1: Who is your highest priority audience? Describe them in detail. What does their day-to-day life look like?

Why is it important for you to reach this audience?

What is your desired outcome in reaching this audience?

Part 2: What does this audience value? What are their motivations? What are their pain points?

What questions or concerns does this audience have regarding the value of postsecondary education? How do these questions and concerns relate to their values and motivations?

Now, we're going to use these answers to fill out the following template, which will help you formulate 2–3 audience-specific messages that you can adjust depending on the context.

Audience-Specific Messaging

Desired outcome(s): List your desired outcomes in communicating to this audience.

Value themes: List three relevant values/motivations for this specific audience.

Concerns and pain points: List three questions or concerns this audience might have related to postsecondary value.

Voice and tone: What level of jargon is appropriate or inappropriate for this audience? How in the weeds should you get?

Core elements of value: List three core elements of postsecondary value that would resonate with this audience.

Using your previous answers, draft an audience-specific message that:

1. Connects to one of your audience's values or motivations
2. Addresses one of their questions or concerns
3. Advocates for one applicable element of postsecondary value
4. Uses the appropriate voice and tone for the specific audience

Make the message as short or long as you want; the key is making sure you've addressed their concerns in a way that maps back to postsecondary value.

Messages

Proof points: What are some relevant proof points, statistics, or anecdotes that support the above messages?

Elevator Pitch Lab

Next, we're going to apply the messages you just created and package them into a practical elevator pitch. While many of you are likely familiar with how to craft an elevator pitch for yourself or your organization, crafting one specifically related to postsecondary value or specific audiences may be less familiar.

As we've been discussing, messaging is not one-size-fits-all. It's directly informed by the context of the situation and what your goals are in the interaction.

You may utilize an elevator pitch:

- In conversation with a campus provost about program design and student advising
- With a mother who's uncertain about sending her son to college
- With a policymaker who needs evidence on the economic return of a specific program

Each of these will require a slightly different approach. Your pitch can be anecdotal in nature, or grounded in simple, factual statements. It can be 10 seconds long or two minutes long. Refer back to the insights surfaced earlier in the workshop to inform how you craft this new pitch.

Elevator Pitch Format

- **Introduce yourself** (Greeting the person in a compelling way that's appropriate for the occasion, stating your name and title if applicable)
- **Present the problem** (Addressing the problem or concern that the member of your audience is facing, pulling in real-world examples and information when appropriate)
- **Offer the solution** (Explaining how postsecondary education addresses the audience member's problem)
- **Value proposition** (Addressing why the solution you just stated is better than alternatives)
- **Call to action** (Moving the conversation to whatever the appropriate next steps are)

Follow the steps below to begin drafting your pitch:

- ☐ **Choose your audience.** You may use the primary audience identified in the pre-work.
- ☐ **Pick a real scenario.** Think of a specific, real-life situation where you'd be communicating with this audience (a hallway conversation, a board meeting, a community event, etc.).
- ☐ **Draft your pitch.** Write a 30- to 60-second elevator pitch about postsecondary value that connects to both your goals and your audience's goals. Don't worry about getting it perfect on the first try — this is a working draft.
- ☐ **Find a partner.** Pair up with someone at your table or in your Zoom meeting to exchange pitches.
- ☐ **Share and strengthen.** Take about 10 minutes to deliver your pitch to each other and offer feedback on ways to strengthen it. *Remember: this is meant to be a stretch. It's okay if your first draft feels rough — that's exactly what this exercise is for!*

Elevator pitch:

For Evaluator

- What worked well? What part of the pitch was most compelling or memorable? What would you want to see them keep?
- What questions came up? If you heard this elevator pitch as your audience, what immediate questions or comments would you have? What would you want more information about?
- How was the tone? Did the speaker strike the right tone for the audience? Did it feel like something was missing? Is there a clear next step or call to action?
- What could be sharpened? Was there a moment that felt unclear or didn't quite land? What part might benefit from a second pass?
- What's another angle? What's a different approach or entry point the speaker could consider?

Notes:

Toolkit Deep Dive

The resources introduced during this workshop are designed to help you move from strategy to implementation. Rather than providing one-size-fits-all messaging, each resource is intended to be adapted to your goals and audiences, institutional context, and communication goals.

- **Messaging Templates:** These fillable messaging templates provide a structured framework for developing audience-specific communications. You'll use them to identify audience priorities, draft key messages, and consider how those messages should be delivered across different contexts.
- **Digital Messaging Toolkit:** An interactive, web-based resource that distills core messaging principles, audience-specific examples, and bite-sized use cases into an accessible, browsable format any member can reference on demand.
- **Visual Guidance Toolkit:** Strong visuals make complex information or data easier to understand. This guide showcases examples of effective charts, graphics, and other visual approaches for communicating postsecondary value, along with practical guidance for designing and adapting visuals that strengthen your message.

Adapt a Tool

At your table, work in a small group and select one element from one of the toolkits. Then, have a brief discussion about how you would adjust it for your own use and why. Capture notes from your discussion below.

What tool are you adapting?

What changes did you make and why?

Notes:

Pressure Test

The real test of this workshop isn't whether a room full of people already steeped in postsecondary work leaves convinced of its value; it's whether you can communicate just as effectively with people who have different priorities, less familiarity with postsecondary education, and even real skepticism about the work you're doing.

Use the provided common objections and FAQs, and pair up with someone at your table to assign one person the role of your primary audience. Together, go through the FAQs and discuss how you might respond to the question.

This exercise may prompt you to strengthen one of your existing messages, or it may prompt you to think of a different message entirely. Feel free to discuss ways to address certain objections with the rest of your table. Afterwards, we will debrief as a group and document shared findings.

Notes:

Commitments

One message I will use:

One audience I will communicate with differently:

One action I will take in the next 30 days:

Borrow This

Share your reflections from the above prompts. For virtual attendees, please share in the link provided. SINA will share the responses with the participants post-workshop.

Notes:

Thank You!

Throughout today's workshop, you've explored audience mindsets, drafted and refined messaging, tested new approaches, and practiced adapting communication for unique contexts. These tools and frameworks are designed to evolve alongside your work, so continue to test, gather feedback, and refine. Even small improvements in how we communicate can build greater understanding, strengthen partnerships, and increase confidence in the value of postsecondary education. Thank you for your participation today, and the work you do every day to help learners, institutions, and communities thrive!



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