

OUR VOICE & MESSAGING

Technical Supplement to the Y Voice and Messaging Guide for Quick Reference

To manage our brand and communicate effectively, we must present ourselves as a unified cause with shared values and a common voice.



VOICE

Brand voice is the distinctive tone, manner and style in which we communicate. It is defined by a set of attributes that describe how we look, feel and sound to the public.

Our voice attributes:

- Determined:** We devote our full strength and concentrated attention to strengthening community
- Nurturing:** We care for, support and help develop through encouragement
- Genuine:** We are honest and open in relationships with others
- Hopeful:** We believe we can make a positive impact
- Welcoming:** We accept people eagerly, warmly, hospitably and as equal participants

More than words...

The Y voice should come across through all touch points and experiences, not just communication pieces. Every conversation and interaction is an opportunity to shape opinion about the value of the Y.

- Employee training
- Facility environments

- Interaction with members
- Job descriptions
- Fundraising campaigns
- Events

Overall style recommendations:

- **Speak like a person, not an institution.** “Our broad reach and impact allow us to improve the health of the community” is impersonal on its own. “Your health and the health of all of our neighbors is the Y’s first priority” is more personal and warm and makes an emotional connection.
- **Use imagery that shows people** interacting to convey a sense of community.
- **Use imagery that conveys a sense of movement and energy** or that has emotional appeal.
- **Don’t use Y lingo.** Write and speak in terms all people will understand. Say “programs for parents and children” as opposed to “family strengthening programs” and “expanding our ability to serve” as opposed to “building capacity.”

- **Get specific about impact.** Vague statements of purpose or benefit like “helping support the development of important skills” don’t create a clear picture or inspire engagement. “Providing youth with tutoring, mentoring, workplace training and problem-solving skills that help them realize what they can achieve” paints a clearer picture.
- **Don’t use numbers in isolation**—saying we serve 21 million members—without context that tells a story or shows value—doesn’t clarify our work. Alternatively, “21 million members **who have taken charge of their health, connected with their kids or volunteered at the Y**”—shares a larger story.

MESSAGING

Messaging is **what** we say. For the Y, that means being clear about our **purpose, impact** and **value**. To help accomplish this, here are some questions messaging should answer:

- What our programs “do” – how they **benefit** participants and the community.
- Who our programs help and how – **storytelling brings this to life**.
- How the Y does programs differently from other organizations – shows our **distinction** in the marketplace.
- Why we are worthy of support – conveys our **impact**.
- How someone can participate – **activate, engage stakeholders**.

Standard Descriptions

Our Cause (Brand Promise) –Strengthening community
Our Position – (Our standing as a nonprofit): The Y is a leading nonprofit committed to strengthening community through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility.

Our Areas of Focus

- **Youth Development** – Nurturing the potential of every child and teen
- **Healthy Living** – Improving the nation’s health and well-being
- **Social Responsibility** – Giving back and providing support to our neighbors

What We Do – The Y makes accessible the support and opportunities that empower people and communities to learn, grow and thrive. With a focus on youth development, healthy living and social responsibility, the Y nurtures the potential of every child and teen, improves the nation’s health and well-being, and provides opportunities to give back and support neighbors.

More standard descriptions are available in the Y Voice and Messaging Guide, page 18.

Benefit Statements

Benefit statements are an effective way to communicate the impact of our work. Research told us people do not fully understand what we do, so we need to educate them. When writing a benefit statement for promotional materials, lead with **why** we do what we do rather than the name of programs and services. Ask yourself any of the following questions to generate benefit statements:

- What community or member problem, need or challenge does the program address?
- What is the impact for the participant beyond the immediate benefit?
- How do people feel when they participate in this program/initiative?

Tell a story

People remember “pictures” more than words. Stories bring our work to life by making it personal, showing impact and meaning, and building an emotional connection that more effectively drives people to join, renew, give, volunteer or advocate. If you don’t have room for a story, consider a quote or quotes from a program participant, parent, partner or community leader. Hearing from others about the difference the Y makes is one of the most effective ways to elevate our credibility and value.

Build a Message

It’s important that we **connect our programs to our promise and the impact we want to have** if we are to be known as more than a provider of programs and services. Use a simple framework to help you craft messaging around programs.

1. Start with a story (or quote) of someone benefitting from your program:
–**Jim took control of his weight and has lowered his risk of heart disease through group exercise at the Y.**

2. Then paint a fuller picture of the program and what’s special about how the Y does it:
–**Group exercise at the Y is offered in fun, supportive, low-pressure formats customized to a variety of fitness levels.**
3. Connect the program to the larger community need:
–**Hundreds of people every day make their life a little healthier through the Y, by getting the support and resources they need to improve their health, increase well-being and prevent chronic disease.**

Now put it together. Or reverse it! Start with the community issue or need and demonstrate how the Y program addresses it, and end with story or quote from an individual participant.

Two more examples of good messaging:

1. Make it personal, paint a picture
–**“I can swim the whole way across the pool!” Hearing those excited words coming from a beaming child is about as rewarding as it gets. The kids don’t know that they’ve also learned to be safe in the water, to follow instructions, to develop new skills, to gain confidence and to make friends. But we do. The Y offers swim lessons year-round for every age. Inquire today about your little swimmer.**
2. Connect program with impact
–**The Y offers a large variety of group fitness classes—beginning exercise, cardio, strength-training, low-impact—to meet everyone’s wellness needs so we can all live healthier. The fun and supportive group environment will keep you motivated and coming back.**

For more information, download the Y Voice and Messaging Guide on the Brand Resource Center.