



Sooner is Better Than Later: Start Fiscal Communications NOW!

WASA Lunch & Learn | Oct. 29, 2024

J.Marie


Principal, J.Marie & Associates

Your Friend In Communications



jmarie.associates



- 
- Whether or not you've got a fiscal measure on the ballot this school year, no district is immune from the need to communicate complex fiscal realities right now.
 - We'll talk about why now is the time to start these conversations, especially when you've got ballot measures or reductions on the horizon.
 - Explore ways to simplify school financial topics and make them understandable to busy school employees, families, and the general public.
 - Learn how to message complexities like investments in professional development or the continuation of grant-funded activities during budget reductions, as well as important considerations when implementing RIFs.
 - We'll also explore resources WASA has created to help you explain some of the larger / state-level issues at play this year.



Complex concepts require multiple outreach activities

People are busy. When we are the ones motivated to engage their attention, it is our responsibility to engage our internal and external constituents in ways that work for them.

Start with those closest to the issues, especially those who might be negatively affected by the coming budget. “No surprises.”

If you have a communications professional

Bring them into the planning now so they can help you create an outreach and engagement strategy that is comprehensive and timely.

Early in the process, encourage dialogue

Some meeting formats that are good for this include: “Open Space,” “World Cafe,” and “Gallery Walks,” as well as other less formal settings that encourage tabletop conversation.

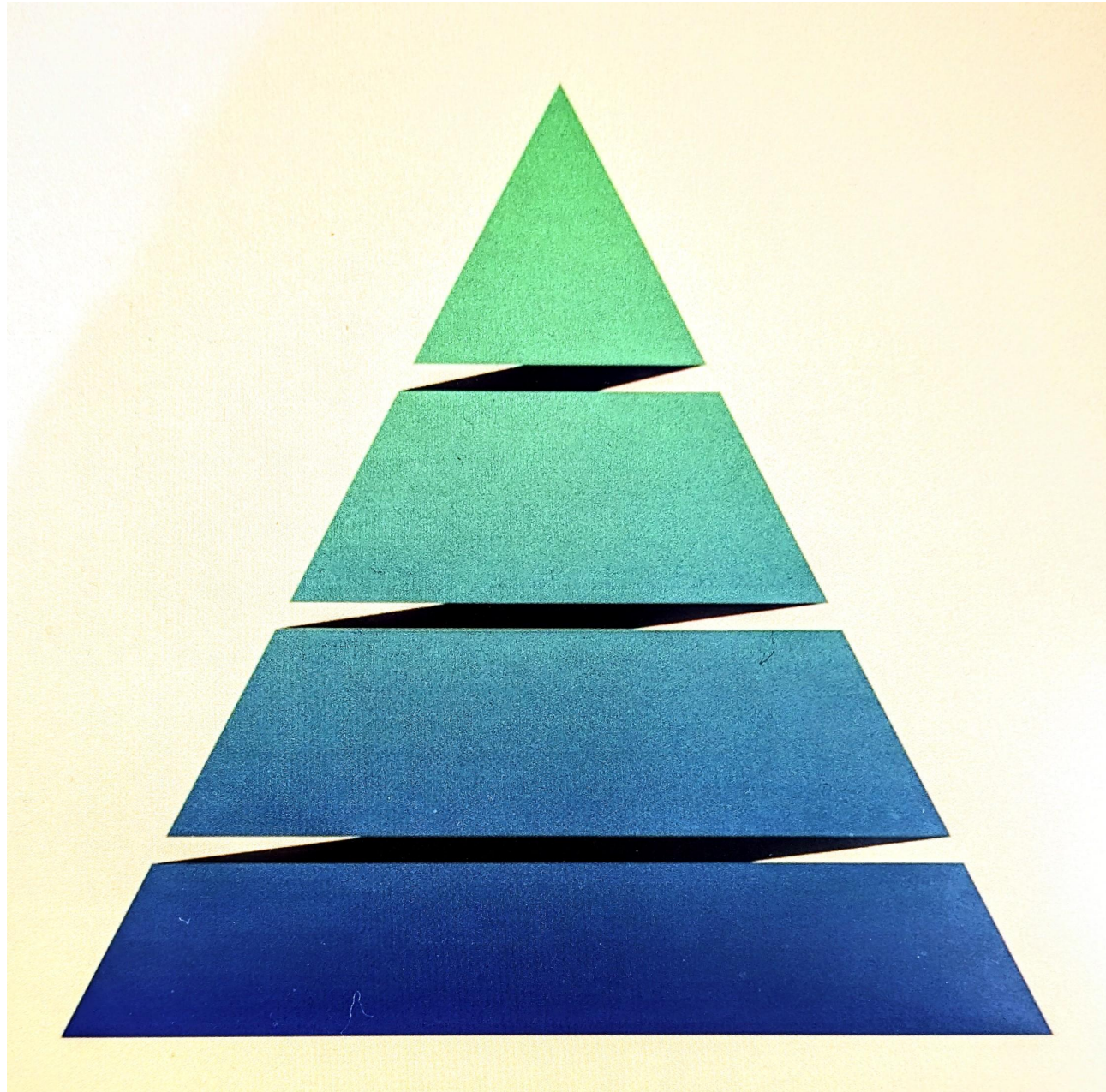
Close the Loop: Demonstrate what you heard

It is not enough to listen well. You have to let people know that you have listened. You can do this by taking the time to reflect back what you have heard AND how what you have heard has **influenced your thinking** as a leader.

WASA Leadership Listening Cycle



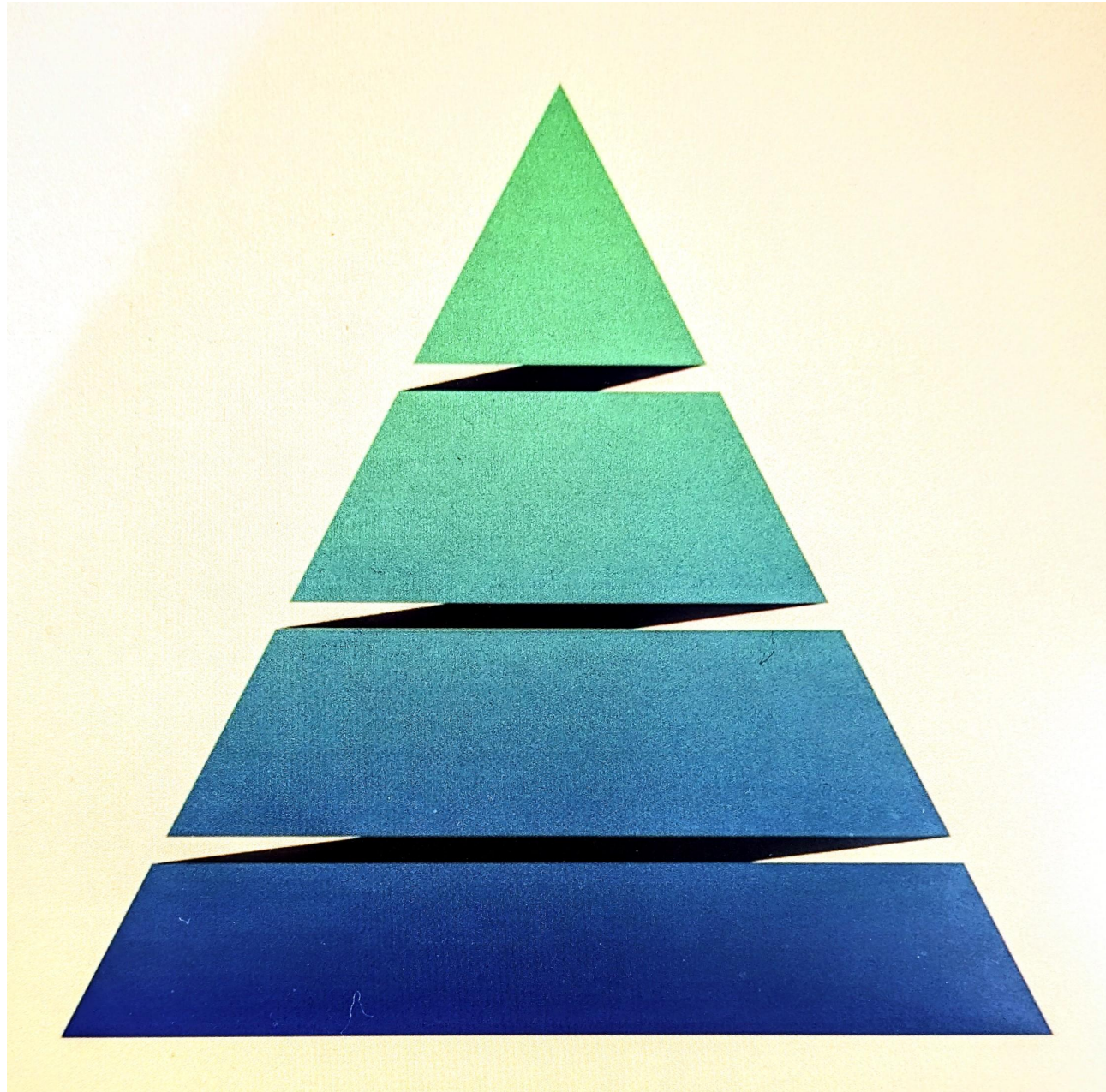
This takes time!



Communications Pyramid: The Top

1:1 Conversations and small group meetings:

- Highest impact, most personal
- Customizable and responsive to constituent interests, values, concerns, and priorities
- Time and attention intensive
- Scalable only by sharing the workload
- Use for key communicators, opinion leaders (formal AND informal)



Mass Communications:

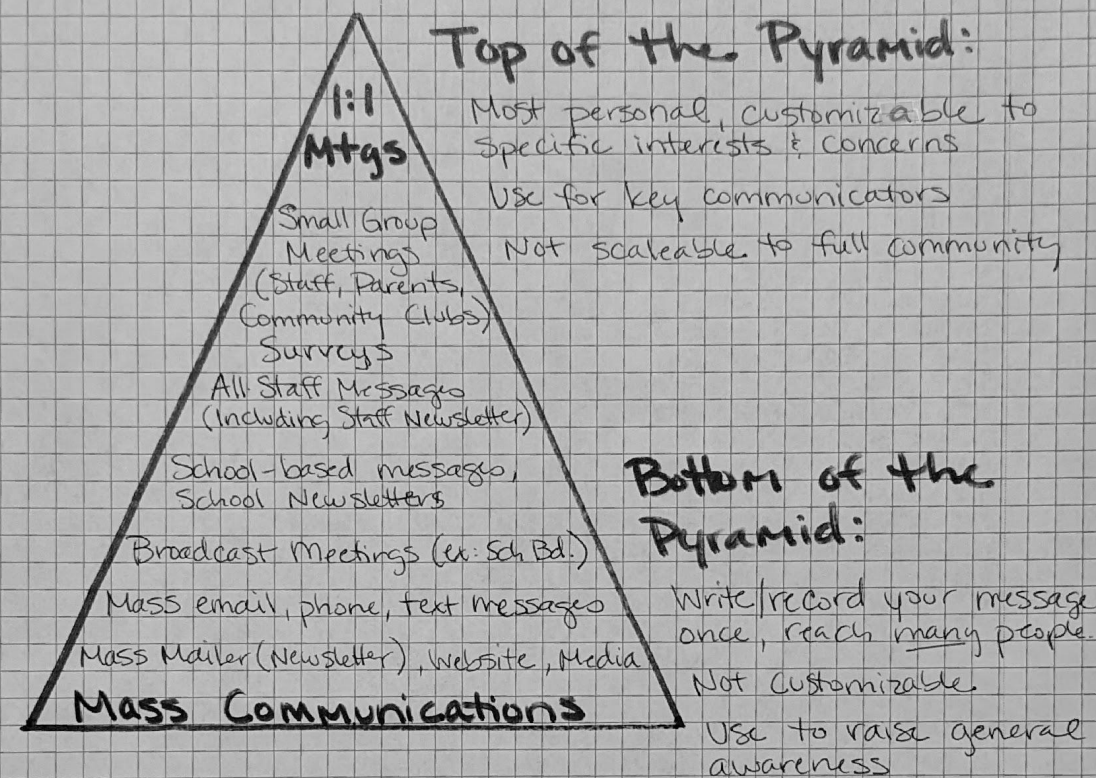
Media, Website, Print and Electronic Mass Mailers

- Not personal or customizable
- Address general community values, priorities, information needs
- Write or record your message ONCE and reach hundreds or thousands of constituents
- Use for building general / grassroots awareness of an issue or topic

Communications Pyramid: The Bottom

Sample Communications Pyramid:

This is just an example. Create your own pyramid with your actual communication tools.



There is no single communication tool that will reach all your critical audiences. The communications pyramid can help you ensure you are using a variety of tools to create both general awareness of key ideas AND personal connections with community influencers.

There is no “silver bullet”

- There is no single communications tool you can use that will reach all of your constituents
- Create a Communications Tools Inventory (a list of all the tools that are available to you)
- Remember internal as well as external constituents
- Draw your own pyramid, filling in where your existing communications tools fall (don't get hung up on details, this is a quick working document)
- If there are gaps, think about tools or activities that can help fill those gaps
- When communicating anything important, plan ahead so you can include tools from the top, middle, and bottom of the pyramid




Use examples people can relate to, and create context to demonstrate that your district is not alone:

- **Compare district expenses to costs of running a household**
Costs of gas, electricity, groceries, insurance, etc.
- **Note the state trends**
While each district situation is unique, there are trends affecting all districts across the state. Be able to speak to those differences. A puzzle metaphor can be particularly useful.
- **Make use of external resources to help tell your story**
 - www.waschoolfunding.org
 - WASA Legislative Platform:
https://wasa-oly.org/wasa/WASA/Government_Relations/Legislative_Platform/WASA/4_0_Government_Relations/Legislative_Platform/2025_Leg_Platform.aspx?hkey=9591f54c-97b6-4e4a-91b8-dde1f7e18eac#gsc.tab=0
 - Upcoming: Binding Conditions FAQ and L&L Nov. 12 (w/ TJ Kelly of OSPI)



If you are facing a reduced budget, be transparent about the potential losses to programs and staff

- **If facing the possibility of RIFs**, start talking about that now.
 - Giving people a long runway for this type of information is respectful and gives staff maximum opportunities to take good care of themselves
 - Get out in front of this topic. Publish the contract language that guides the process - ensures transparency and helps convey the fact that district leaders are not making arbitrary decisions
 - Ensure Staff understand the May 15 deadline
 - Look at historic data: if you've had to issue RIFs before, how many people were you able to call back? Share your expectations and how they change as information changes.
- **Similar guidance applies to potential program reductions.** Be clear and transparent about the pressures guiding this possibility, and the anticipated timelines involved.
- **Why are some programs being protected?**
 - Are they grant-funded?
 - Are they high priorities in your mission and/or strategic plan?
- **Note up front that the projections might change as the year goes on.**



If this is an election year, you should already be scheduling conversations with staff, parents, and the community

- Start internally – don't let your staff be surprised by parents or community members knowing details before they do.
- Do not shy away from hard realities, for instance if you will still need to reduce the budget even with a successful election
- Typical timing for election brochures is to send them so they hit mailboxes just after the first of the year for a February election. So those documents need to be in development now.



Q&A

| What's on your mind?

Marie
& Associates

Thank You

NEW! UPCOMING COURSES

J.Marie & Associates is rolling out a full suite of communications and leadership related classes, taught by a stellar team with diverse areas of expertise.

What to Say When You Can't Say Much;
Crisis Communication for Schools;
Navigating Conflict with Dignity and Respect;
Communications Skills for Non-PR Staff;
Feedback & Listening; and much more!

Visit our webpage for details:



www.jmarie.associates

JMarie
& Associates



- Founder and Principal of J. Marie & Associates as well as Ideal Communications
- Nationally-recognized communications strategist, leadership trainer, facilitator, and presenter
- Former communications director for Snohomish Public Schools; before that, she represented the American Red Cross
- Former Washington School PR Association (WSPRA) President
- Former National School PR Association (NSPRA) Vice President, representing six states and western Canada
- Lover of life, people, books, music, our shared Earth, adventure, fresh air, real food, and BEing
- Full-time working nomad
- Reach me at: +01 (425) 238-7044
or j.marie.associates@gmail.com

