

# Marketing *with* purpose.

Principles for telling a mission's story with clarity —  
*shared freely, for anyone doing the work.*

# Marketing for a *mission* is different.

*And the difference is worth writing down.*

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Most marketing advice assumes you are selling a product to a customer. Mission-driven work is not that. The audience is not a market to be captured — it is people who deserve to be addressed with dignity, partners who extend their trust, and a public whose attention is earned, not bought.

That changes the craft. The words matter more, because a careless phrase can flatten a person into a statistic. The claims matter more, because every number is a promise someone can check. The restraint matters more, because silence is often more honest than noise.

This guide collects the principles a small marketing team works by — the standards we hold, the words we choose, the lines we keep clear. None of it is proprietary. Good marketing for a good cause is a craft, not a secret, and the field gets stronger when the craft is shared.

Read it straight through once. Keep it nearby after that. **The best guideline is the one you actually open again.** Argue with it where it's wrong, and rewrite the part that fails you before the next campaign goes out.

*Talent is everywhere. Opportunity is not.* The same is true of good marketing — so this is ours to give away.

# Four *commitments.*

*Measure every piece against all four, every time.*

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## 01 *Purpose.*

The mission is the brief. If a piece does not advance the cause, it has not earned the cost of producing it. “Raising awareness” is not a goal — it is what happens when a real goal is being met. Name the audience and the action before anything goes to design.

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## 02 *Responsibility.*

You are accountable to the people you serve, the partners who back you, and the public whose attention you hold. Every claim must hold up. No stretching a statistic, no using someone's face without consent, no pitting one audience against another to make a campaign land.

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## 03 *Accessibility.*

If a person cannot read it, hear it, or use it, you have not shipped it. Plain language, alt text, contrast, and captions are the baseline of the craft — not an extra pass added when time allows.

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## 04 *Transparency.*

Every number cites a source. Every quote keeps its attribution. Stories represent the people in them, not the spin around them. Being honest about what you don't yet know builds more trust than a confident number you can't defend.

### THE TEST

These are not aspirations — they are checkable standards. A piece that fails any one of them gets fixed before it goes out. **Catching a failure at the concept stage costs hours. Catching it after publication costs trust.**

# Direct. *Declarative.* Specific.

*Three of the six principles — each anchored in real examples.*

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## 01 Direct.

Don't hedge. Hedging signals doubt; direct language signals trust.

### USE

*"Our doors are open."*

### AVOID

*"We strive to welcome all backgrounds."*

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### USE

*"Apply now. It's tuition-free."*

### AVOID

*"Consider exploring our application process when ready."*

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## 02 Declarative.

Statements over questions. Most marketing reaches for rhetorical questions; reach for facts.

### USE

*"Most students finish what they start."*

### AVOID

*"Have you considered a career in tech?"*

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### USE

*"Six cohorts. Hundreds of graduates."*

### AVOID

*"We've worked with quite a few students."*

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## 03 Specific.

Numbers, names, places — not generalizations. Specificity is the most consistent signal of an honest writer.

### USE

*"Most of our latest cohort finished."*

### AVOID

*"Many programs available at no cost."*

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# Inclusive. *Warm.* Mission-forward.

*The remaining three. Tone without softening, mission without preaching.*

## 04 Confidently inclusive.

Name the people you serve without making the naming feel like charity. Specificity of audience, dignity of address.

### USE

*"For first-generation students, single parents, working adults."*

### AVOID

*"Helping underserved communities access opportunity."*

### USE

*"For working parents and career changers."*

### AVOID

*"Serving struggling families and at-risk individuals."*

## 05 Warm without *softening*.

Warmth lives in the tone of address, not in diluting the message. You can be friendly and clear in the same sentence.

### USE

*"There's a seat for you."*

### AVOID

*"Maybe consider exploring tech careers."*

### USE

*"Your seat in the next cohort."*

### AVOID

*"Hopefully you'll find a spot if one opens up."*

## 06 Mission-forward, *never preachy*.

The work speaks; don't lecture. If a sentence sounds like a sermon, the work isn't loud enough.

### USE

*"Tuition-free. By design."*

### AVOID

*"We strongly believe education is a human right."*

# Say *this*, not that.

*The strongest writing leans on nouns and verbs. These swaps do most of the work.*

## We say

### Tuition-free

Names exactly what's removed. Sharper than "free."

### Participant · Student

Active terms. They are doing the work.

### Career changer

Active — the person is doing the changing.

### Access · Pathway

Doors and roads, not handouts.

### Use · Build · Open

Plain verbs of construction and agency.

### Cohort

A group with a shared start. Specific, not vague.

## We don't say

### Underprivileged

Defines people by absence.

### At-risk

Frames people as problems waiting to happen.

### Beneficiary · Recipient

Reduces people to objects of charity.

### Leverage · Synergy

Corporate cliché. Each has a plain alternative.

### World-class · Cutting-edge

Unfalsifiable boasts. Whose class? Measured how?

### Empower · Authentic

Once everyone claims it, no one means it.

## THE HABIT

Read every draft aloud. **If a sentence sounds like something every nonprofit says, it probably is.** Rewrite until it sounds like you specifically — not mission-shaped wallpaper.

# Six places writing *slips*.

*Each is fixable on a second read — once you know what to look for.*

## 01 *Charity drift.*

### WRITE

*“Tuition-free training for adult learners.”*

### NOT

*“We help the less fortunate find their way.”*

## 02 *The “we believe” hedge.*

### WRITE

*“We open the doors of tech to adult learners.”*

### NOT

*“We believe everyone deserves access.”*

## 03 *“Passionate about” filler.*

### WRITE

*“We train adult learners at no cost.”*

### NOT

*“We’re passionate about equity in tech.”*

## 04 *Mission-creep phrasing.*

### WRITE

*“Workforce development and AI literacy.”*

### NOT

*“At the intersection of work and emerging tech.”*

## 05 *The overclaim.*

### WRITE

*“One of the few free AI programs in the region.”*

### NOT

*“The first-ever revolutionary AI program.”*

## 06 *The passive-subject swap.*

### WRITE

*“Graduates are landing roles in cloud support.”*

### NOT

*“Lives are being transformed by our programs.”*

# Designed *for everyone.*

*If a person can't read it, you haven't designed it. A baseline, not a feature.*

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## 01 **Plain** *language.*

Aim for an 8th-grade reading level on anything public-facing. Short sentences. Define jargon the first time it appears. If a short word carries the same meaning as a long one, use the short one.

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## 02 **Alt text on** *every image.*

Describe who is in the photo, what they're doing, and why it matters — not just “photo of a class.” Screen-reader users get the same story everyone else does.

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## 03 **Color and** *contrast.*

Meet WCAG AA contrast ratios: 4.5:1 for body text, 3:1 for large text. Run combinations through a checker before approving. Never let color be the only signal — pair it with text, shape, or position.

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## 04 **Captions on** *all video.*

Burned-in captions for social, closed captions for longer pieces. Auto-generated captions are a starting point, not a finished product — a human reviews every one for names and terms.

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## 05 **Translate where it** *matters.*

If you serve multilingual communities, translated versions of high-impact pieces belong in the launch plan, not a later follow-up.

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**Body text never below 10pt in print, 14px on screen.** If a person with average vision can't read it at arm's length, it doesn't go out.



# Discovery, in *plain English*.

*How the right people find you when they didn't know to look. A system, not a pile of tags.*

## Five keyword categories

### 01 Branded

People who already know your name. Easiest to rank for, lowest volume, critical for trust.

### 02 Mission

What you do — “workforce development,” “tech equity.” Medium volume, medium competition.

### 03 Topic

What people want to learn. Highest volume and competition — where long-form earns its reach.

### 04 Regional

Where you operate. Pair with a topic term — that's where intent meets eligibility.

### 05 Audience

Who the searcher is. Lower volume, highest conversion — they're self-identifying.

## The *mix* beats the pile

A good hashtag set isn't five tags from one category — it's one branded, one mission, one topic, one regional, one audience. Five across five angles cover more ground than fifteen from one.

And counts differ by platform. A dump of fifteen tags pasted onto every post suppresses reach almost everywhere. Match the platform's sweet spot — a few well-chosen tags, adjusted per channel.

### MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

**Leading** signals move first and tell you what to do next. **Lagging** signals move last and tell you what you accomplished. Likes are neither — they measure exposure, not action.

# Slow is fine. *Wrong is not.*

*A brand is built slowly and on purpose. It won't be damaged in a day — unless you damage it yourself.*

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When a piece doesn't fit a rule, ask three things in order. Does it advance the mission? Does it protect or strengthen a relationship you've built — with the people you serve, your partners, your supporters, the public? And if a journalist asked you to defend it, could you? If yes to all three, you've cleared the bar.

If you cleared all three and still feel uncertain, there's one more tool: wait. The cost of holding a piece for a day is almost always smaller than the cost of publishing the wrong thing. Urgency is rarely a good reason to skip thinking.

None of this is proprietary. *Take what's useful, leave the rest, and make the work better than we found it.*

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A PUBLIC FIELD GUIDE