



**How Ethical
Creative is
Transforming
Fundraising
Best Practices**

**MINNESOTA
COUNCIL OF
NONPROFITS**

**2023 MCN
Fundraising
Conference**

Nice to meet you!



MAGGIE FLANAGAN
MWD, SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE
MFLANAGAN@MWDAGENCY.COM

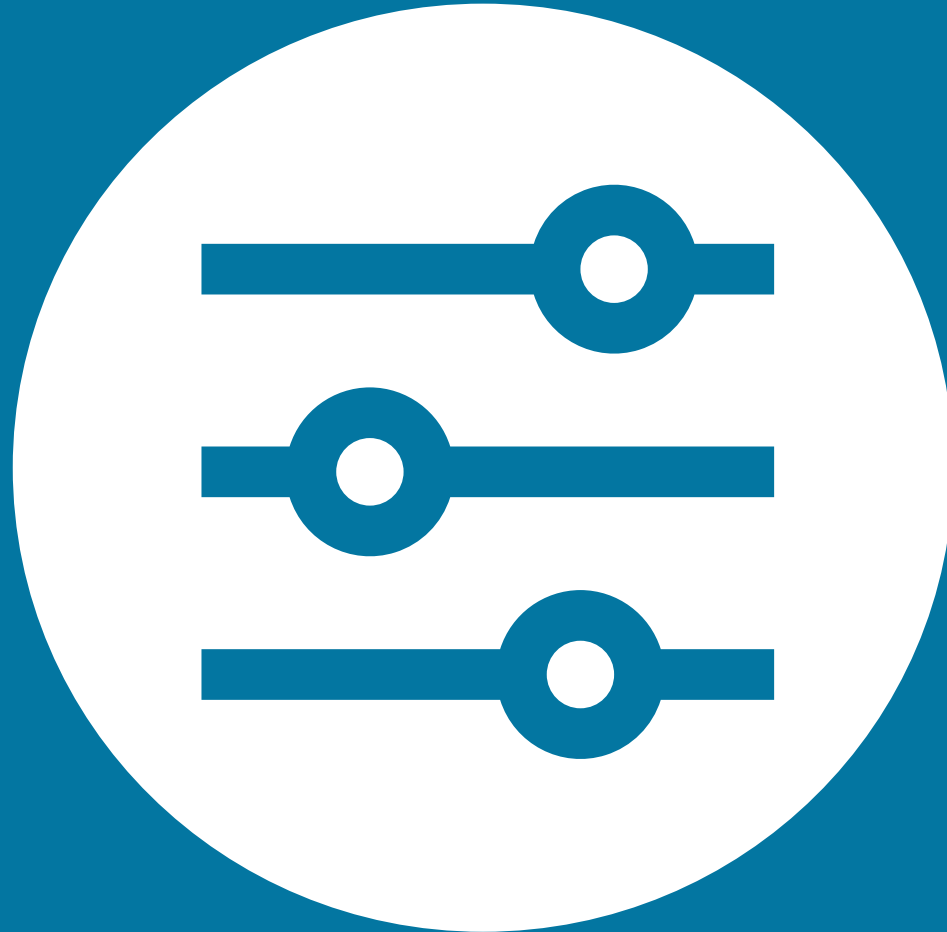


ZOE CLARKE
MWD, SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE
ZCLARKE@MWDAGENCY.COM

Today's session

- This is a safe space — no one gets it right all the time
- Ask questions and dare to be vulnerable
- Be prepared to be uncomfortable and keep your mind open — best practices are shifting, and change is tough!

Level Setting Activity



It's a fundraiser's job to
raise as much money as
possible.

It's a fundraiser's job to
make the world a better,
more equitable place.

A sad photo in an appeal
will raise more money
than a happy one.

My organization refers to
donors as heroes.

Best practices in
fundraising are changing.

My organization talks
about ethical creative and
what it means in our
work.

My organization is using AI
in some aspect of our
fundraising program.

Talking about ethical creative
makes me nervous – I'm
afraid I'll make a mistake or
do something wrong.

Ethical Creative



What is Ethical Creative?

Ethical creative connects your audience with your cause in a way that preserves human dignity, promotes equity, accessibility, and inclusion, and positions community members as capable partners.

Ethical creative is comprised of the images we display, the words we choose, the stories we tell, and the designs we create.



Why Ethical Creative?

- It's likely aligned with your values.
- Establishes trust and credibility for your organization by bringing your values to life.
- Builds long-term relationships with donors.
- Goes hand in hand with building a more diverse audience.
- Is not at odds with effective creative — or bottom-line results!



Creative Values



Ethical Creative Values Statement

- Align on your values – and clearly articulate them.
For example:
- ORG NAME is committed to being anti-racist, anti-ableist, anti-sexist, and inclusive of all gender and sexual identities.
- ORG NAME rejects creative that exploits suffering, perpetuates stereotypes, or reinforces white saviorism.

Your Values Statement serves as a starting point as you create additional guidelines, which we'll explore in this presentation.





Video produced by Leger Uten Grenser for Doctors Without Borders: [youtube.com/watch?v=8DFemg94ufU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DFemg94ufU)

Accessibility Guide



Accessibility Guidelines

- Roughly 1 in 4 people in the US lives with a disability
- Principles of accessibility = POUR
 - **Perceivable:** Is the information presented in ways users can perceive with their senses?
 - **Operable:** Can the user interact and navigate various components?
 - **Understandable:** Is the information beyond a user's comprehension?
 - **Robust:** As technology advances, is your content still accessible?

Accessible Copy

- Write at or below the 8th grade reading level
- Avoid idioms and figures of speech
- Avoid using all caps in digital (screen readers will read out every letter)
- Include image descriptions in social media copy
- Use camel case in hashtags:
#CamelCaseForReadability vs.
#camelcaseforreadability



Perkins SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

We LOVE our Perkins community!

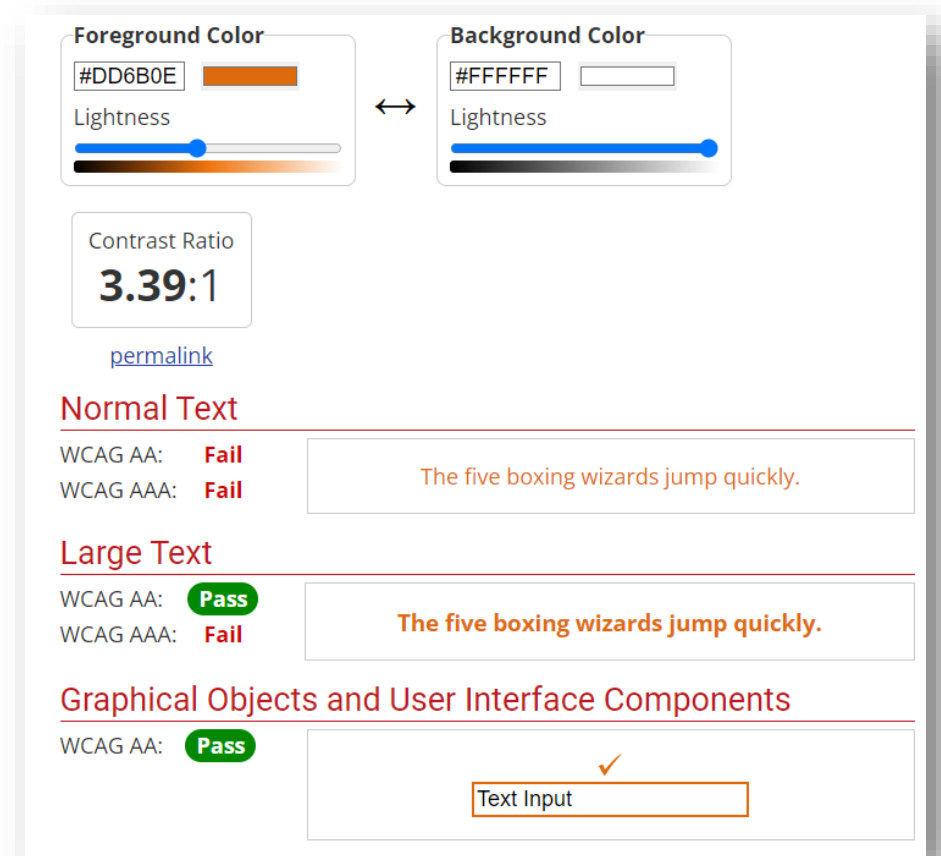
perkinsvision Happy #ValentinesDay from us at Perkins School for the Blind! We LOVE our Perkins community: our teachers, students, corporators, trustees, staff, volunteers, donors, and everyone else who helps make our community great! ❤️🥰❤️

Image description: A young boy with glasses rides on a seesaw while smiling. The woman next to him holds on to him and smiles. Pink and white hearts are scattered on the photo with the text "We love our Perkins community."

6w

Accessible Design

- Avoid using only color to convey information
- Use color contrast checkers
- If primary and secondary brand colors are not accessible, can you use monochromatic or analogous colors?
- Large font sizes to improve readability
- Choose a typeface and font that emphasizes clarity and legibility
- Maintain a line length that promotes comfortable reading



Imagery Guide



Imagery Guidelines

- Reject images that exploit suffering, perpetuate stereotypes, or reinforce white saviorism.
- Be intentional about using imagery that shows BIPOC folks serving community, helping others.
- Reconsider your assumptions of who is always the helper and who is being helped.

White saviour
portrayal



Stereotypical poverty
portrayal



Imagery Guidelines

- Avoid using emotionally-charged imagery as a shortcut to creating a sense of urgency, or to expressing an authentic viewpoint.
- Move away from using stock images, especially stock images perpetuating white saviorism.
- Real photos help donors visually connect to the stories in the fundraising appeal.

Neutral/ positive
portrayal



Photos: [Blue State Decolonising fundraising report](#)

Language Guide



Language Guidelines

Community-Centric Language

- Underscore the value in strengthening community.
- Center the importance of a collective community working together to address issues.
- Use “we” language more than “you” — the “we” that includes the donor as part of the community doing this work.
- Avoid othering the people an organization serves.

People-First Language

- People-first language doesn't reduce people to their disability, their illness, their socioeconomic status, etc.
- [Sierra Club's Equity Language Guide](#)

Ethical Story Telling

- **DON'T resort to tokenism and saviorism**, which appear in storytelling when we share stories of trauma and adversity for the financial benefit of the nonprofit.
- **DON'T reduce people to their problems**. Even the most well-intentioned efforts to convey the urgency and severity of need can reinforces false and harmful stereotypes.
- **DO asset frame**, a term that describes highlighting an individual's strengths, agency, personal empowerment, and advocacy for their own life paths.

More on ethical story telling

Three important tenants in ethical storytelling (there are more than three):

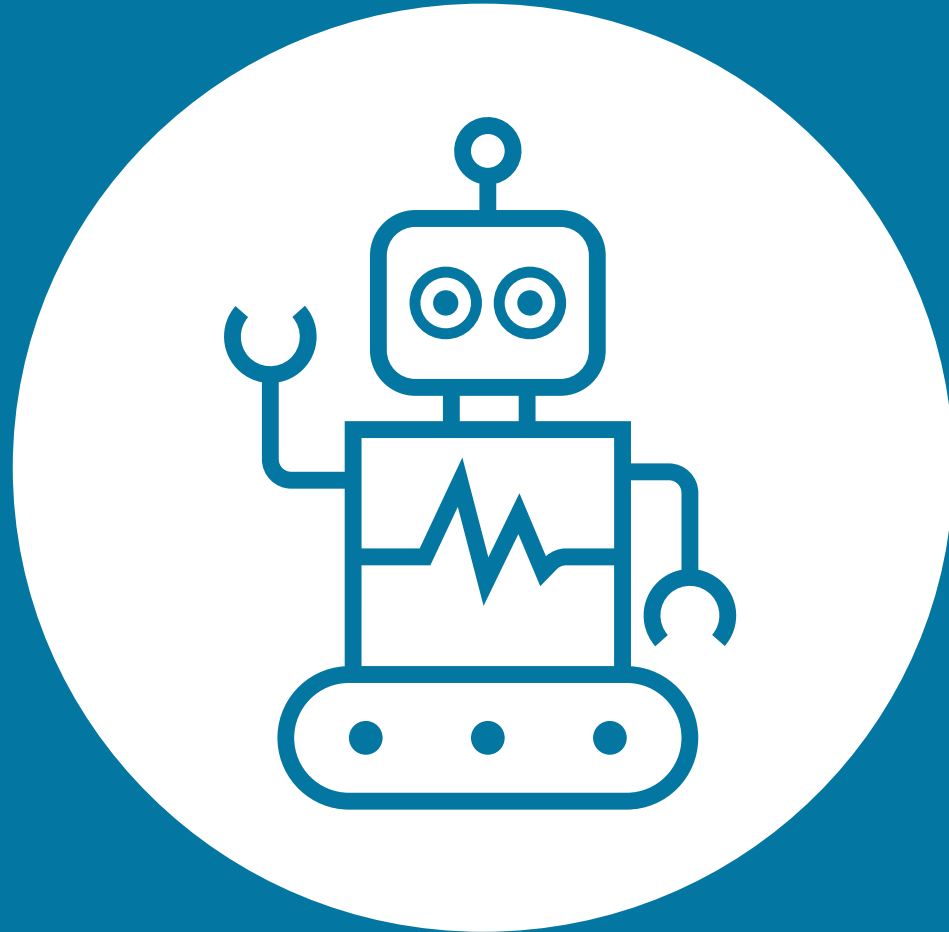
1. Avoid “case example syndrome.”
2. Represent your organization as a partner in a person or community’s success, not as the only means to an end or savior.
3. Ensure others can see themselves in the story.

When the story is finished, stop and ask yourself ...

**“If this were about me,
would I want my story shared in this way?”**



Ethical Use of AI



Use of AI in Ethical Creative

AI is already being used to varying degrees across our sector to save precious time and resources. AI can help us write case statements, appeals, blog posts, and even generate design ideas.

- AI is not good or bad
- Need to apply the same standards and guidelines as we do in other areas of ethical creative.
- Carefully consider how different uses of AI help or hinder your organization's ability to live its values — then articulate that and share it with your org.

Evaluating AI

- Do we have processes in place to check our prompts and our outputs to ensure we are not exacerbating stereotypes, societal biases, and white saviorism?
- In addition to our INTENT with AI have we fully considered the IMPACT of AI-generated materials on:
 - Our organization (employees, resources, values)
 - Supporter trust (donors, volunteers, staff)
 - Honoring our communities lived experiences

The impacts of AI are REAL.

Examples of AI-Generated Images



Example: AI Creative Guidelines

IMAGES

- AI will never be used to create images of people.
- AI will not be used to create images when we have viable alternatives.
- AI-created images may be used internally for design comps and illustrating ideas.

COPY

- AI may act as an assistant to copy writers to generate ideas, shorten long-form copy, or draft multiple versions.
- All AI-created copy will be closely reviewed by a staff member, from copy strategy and drafts to variations, proofreading, and fact-checking.

All AI-created assets will be reviewed and evaluated for biases related to race, gender, class, and ability.

We acknowledge that the ethical use of AI transcends creative and fundraising.

You may also want to consider your organization's use of AI for:

- Customer Service
- Hiring
- Modeling data/audiences
- Internal or external email correspondence
- Grant proposals or follow up

Now what?



Next Steps

Ethical Creative

- Talk to leadership about committing to an ethical creative framework. Articulate your commitment with a values statement.
- Ensure your values statement are communicated clearly within your organization.
- Discuss regularly — this is a long-term change not a quick fix.

Ethical AI

- Create a cross-departmental task force to consider ethical and responsible use cases for AI within your organization.
- Develop internal and external guidelines for using AI.

How Non-Profits can make Creative more Ethical

This is the same work we've been doing for years.

Passionate people like us are exceptionally suited to root out corruption, injustice, and inequity and find lasting solutions that benefit all people.

We all have an opportunity and a RESPONSIBILITY to engage in this work.



Questions?





THANK YOU!

Photo credit: AFSC

Resources



Accessibility Resources

Copy:

- [Hemingway Editor](#)
- [Social Media Tips - Perkins](#)

Design:

- [WebAIM Color Contrast Checker](#)
- [Tanaguru Contrast Finder](#)
- [TPGi Color Contrast Checker](#)
- [ACART Contrast Checker](#)
- [Accessible Color Palette](#)
- [Coblis - Color Blindness Simulator](#)
- [A11y Text on Background Check](#)
- [Color Scheme Generator](#)
- [Color Wheel](#)
- [A11y Color Palette](#)
- [UX Collective - Designing for Accessibility](#)

Code:

- [Aces Article - Alt Text](#)
- [UX Collective - Alt Text](#)
- [Tota11y - Khan Academy](#)

General information:

- [a11y Project Accessibility Checklist](#)
- [WAVE Evaluation Tool – WebAIM](#)
- [Google's Accessibility Fundamentals](#)
- [Penn State Accessibility Guidelines](#)

Imagery Resources

[Blue State: How to decolonize your fundraising appeals while getting results](#)

Diverse stock photos:

- [TONL](#)
- [nappy](#)
- [Pocstock](#)
- [Diversity Photos](#)
- [Vice's Gender Spectrum Collection](#)
- [Disabled and Here](#)

Ethical Language Resources

- Sierra Club, [Equity Language Guide](#)
- Big Duck, [Words matter: Creating a language guide to inform your communications](#)
- Nonprofit Quarterly, [5 Ways for Nonprofits to Tell an Ethical Story](#)
- Next Stage Consulting, [Why Asset Framing is so Important](#)
- Blue Avocado, [How to Use Asset Framing to Strengthen Nonprofit Work](#)
- [Sum of Us – A Progressive's Style Guide](#)