

Health Communications Short Course

October 22, 2025



NORTH CAROLINA INSTITUTE
FOR PUBLIC HEALTH



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Look out for
Beacon Bee to
highlight
important items!

Welcome In!



Icebreaker:

What public health role, function, or service do you think needs more attention/education?

Please note that we are recording today's session to share with anyone that misses it.

Short Course Structure





Today's Objectives

Please keep your camera on as much as possible and engage verbally and through the chat!

What to Expect in This Session:

- Communicate about public health across sectors
- Integrate asset-based framing and storytelling into communication efforts, including data visualization
- Increase public health visibility in news media



What's something you'd love for the public or the community you serve to know about your work?

Mini-Presentations



Bethany Milford (she/her)

Strategic Initiatives Program Manager

Bethany is a Strategic Initiatives Program Manager with the North Carolina Public Health Collaboration. Bethany brings a strong health communications background having worked in health care agency settings, where she focused on translating science into compelling content for communication campaigns, disease awareness initiatives and patient advocacy programs. She also served on the North Carolina Division of Public Health COVID response team, and supported the Division with key initiatives, including the rollout of the AA program and workforce development.



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Why is this important?

Cross-sector partnerships are essential:

- Health and well-being are largely driven by upstream factors.
- Many sectors, including housing, education, business, and health systems, play a role in building healthier communities – from quality education and affordable housing to healthcare access and employment opportunities.



Why is this important?

There are barriers to collaboration:

- Professionals in other sectors may struggle to see the connection between the health of the community and their work – they don't understand the value of collaborating with public health agencies.
- Additionally, public health professionals may lack the training and skills to communicate effectively about the field of public health.

When North Carolinians know public health, they trust public health.

- It's important that we continue framing and showing public health as something people experience and rely on every day across their routine activities.



Bridging the Communication Gap

Strategic framing:

- Knowing both what to *say* and what to *avoid saying* to help people reason productively about a topic.

Ex: Demonstrate familiarity with the sector(s) of interest by avoiding broad generalizations and acknowledging subgroups.

- Instead of talking about the “housing sector”, refer to the specific subgroups that your communication aims to reach.
- This might entail communications targeting housing professionals working on affordability and homelessness vs market-rate developers.

Bridging the Communication Gap

Using clear language for effective communication:

- “Fluency theory” says that the more easily people understand information, the more likely they are to trust it.
- While jargon allows us to communicate quickly within our profession, it is one of the biggest challenges in communicating about public health to non-experts.

EX: Evidence-based: uses facts, data, evidence, scientific studies, and other objective or scientifically derived information; tested; shown to work; proven to work

Original: [The organization] works with multiple clinical and program sites to increase agencies' capacity to provide evidence-based interventions and connect youth to clinic services.

Plain Language: [The organization] helps clinics and community groups provide programs shown to work to prevent teen pregnancies and connect youth to clinic services.



What are some examples of public health jargon? Share in the chat!

Bridging the Communication Gap

Using clear language for effective communication:

Research suggests that the most powerful language will create emotional reactions, be familiar and easy to understand, and evoke visual images in the mind. Use words and phrases that people will retain and repeat:

1. Active verbs

Ex: “A multisectoral approach is necessary” -> “Different organizations need to work together”

2. Familiar phrases

Ex: “public health indicators” -> “public health report card”

3. Vivid words

Ex: “reduce exposure to air pollutants” -> “make sure the air we breathe is clean, fresh, and healthy”

4. Repeatable Sayings

Ex: “antimicrobial resistance” -> “the disease fights back”

Bridging the Communication Gap

Keep it positive:

- A “can-do” attitude and positive outlook can inspire and help professionals in all sectors see themselves as having a role in building healthier communities.
- Use messages highlighting that “If we work together, we can achieve X, Y, and Z.”

Ex:

“If we don’t share insights across sectors, we are limiting the impact of our work.”

Vs

“If we share insights across sectors, we can double the impact of our work.”



Resources

NCDHHS:

- [North Carolinians Trust Public Health](#)

FrameWorks:

- [Public Health Reaching Across Sectors](#)

Region IV Public Health Training Center:

- [An Overview of Public Health Reaching Across Sectors](#) (free ~30-min course!)

De Beaumont Foundation:

- [Communicating about Public Health](#)

PHRASES:

- [Motivating The Public To Support Public health: A Toolkit for Communicating with Non-Experts](#)

CDC:

- [Everyday Words for Public Health Communication](#)



Reflect & Share

What sector could you partner with to strengthen your health communication?

What area or topic bridges you with this sector?





Jeremy McClayton

JS Consulting & Marketing

Telling Your Story - Tips for Going Public

Jeremy is co-founder, political organizer and strategist with JS Consulting and Marketing. Jeremy has more than 14 years of experience specializing in community organizing, union consulting, and more. His passions include baseball, politics, and hiking with his beloved dog.

www.jsconsultingco.com

Why Use the Media for Health Communication?

- **Visibility and credibility**
 - People pay attention to and trust media
 - Can (and often does) guide community, national or international conversation about a particular topic.
 - “News media portrayals, rather than reflecting reality, become reality.” –Wallack et al, News for a Change
- **Influence decision-makers about current events and topics**
 - Seeing an issue covered in the news can move a decision maker to action.
 - Cost effective - lower cost options through social media and engaging news outlets

Earned & Organic Media

Definition

Earned media is the publicity a brand/organization gains organically through non-paid, third-party recognition.

Characteristics

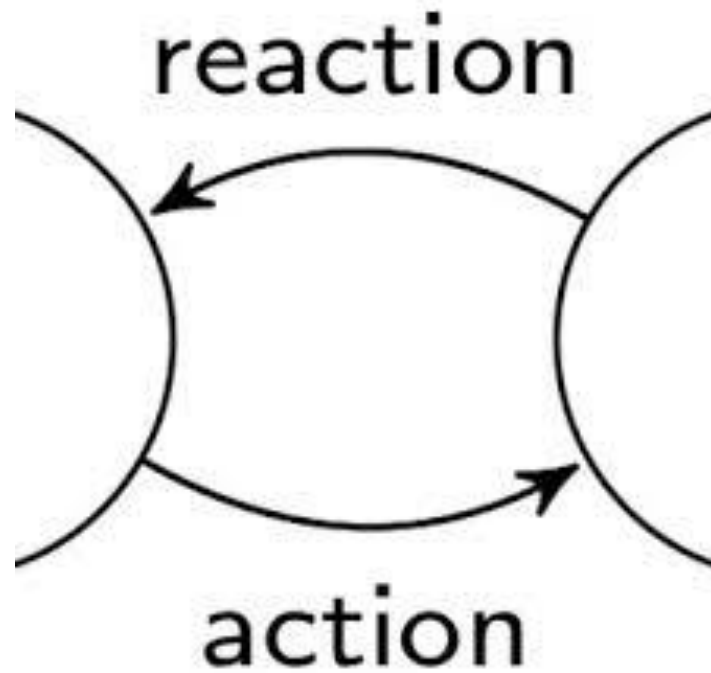
- **Cost:** No direct cost, but requires effort and resources to "earn."
- **Control:** The brand has little to no control over the message.
- **Credibility:** High credibility and trustworthiness because it comes from an independent source.

Examples

- Positive customer/client reviews and testimonials
- Social media shares, mentions, and user-generated content (UGC)
- News articles, interviews, or features in media publications
- Organic mentions from influencers and bloggers

Physics - The Key to Public Relations

- Newton's Third Law - "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction"



CONTROLLING YOUR NARRATIVE

~~“What’s the story you want the constituents you serve in your region to hear? What do you want them to know?”~~

“What’s the story that YOUR AUDIENCE needs to hear for you to get the result you want?”

Framing a Story



- What is framing?
 - Frames are the boundaries around news stories; the angle or spin
 - Decision process a reporter goes through when deciding what information, quotes, and images to use for a story
- Checklist for Framing:
 - Translate individual problem to a social issue
 - Assign a primary responsibility and present a solution
 - Make a practical appeal

Elements of Newsworthiness

- Controversy/conflict
- Broad interest
- Injustice
- Local peg or hook
- Personal angle
- Breakthrough
- Anniversary peg
- Seasonal peg
- Celebrity/influencers
- Visuals

Putting It All Together – An Example

- Minority Business Association

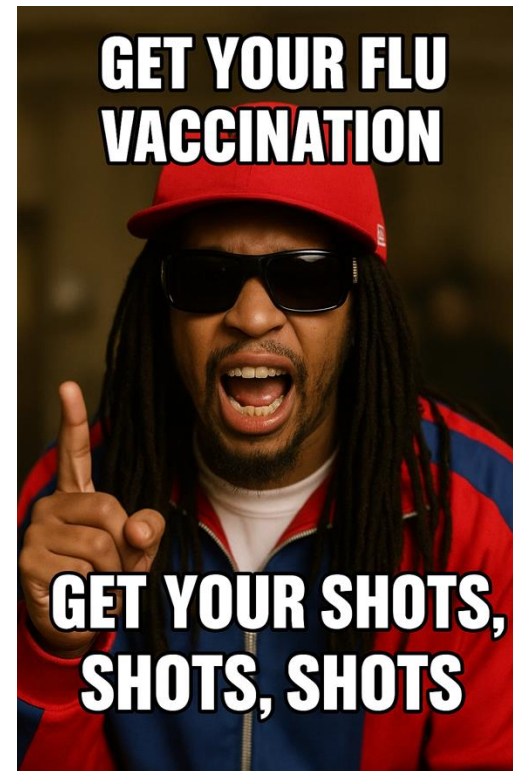
Common Media Kit Elements

- Organization and contact information
- News information about the issue (what makes this newsworthy; what's the “hook”)--including the 5 W's
- Talking points
- Compelling visuals
- Media bites
- Social Math
- Images & Infographics
- Media release - Contains news information, talking points, and media bites
- Links to testimonials, sample blog entries, Op-Eds, etc.
- [Media Advisories](#) - basic structure
- [Media Advisories](#) - Final example, [other example](#), [2800 example](#),
- Media Advisory - [confrontational example](#),
- [other confrontational example](#)

Tips for Working with Journalists

- Respond promptly; most are on a short timeline
- Ask them for some information about their story, outlet, timeline and angle
- Make time to prepare
- Be on time/available for the interview
- Only say things you are comfortable seeing in print, or on air
- If a written piece, request review of your quotes prior to print.
- Follow-up with a thank you; make it easy for them

Understanding Audience's Platform Expectations



News Media Advocacy

ASTHO Media Relations Toolkit



News Media Advocacy



- Connect and build relationships with journalists.
- Make it local.
- Remember to highlight personal stories and structural solutions.
- Use asset-based language.

Q&A with Presenters

Resources & Opportunities to Engage

Resources

- [Media Relations Toolkit For Health Departments](#)
- Arclet (Customizable Health Comms Assets) (<https://app.arclet.com/>)
 - Use coupon NCLAUNCH to create free account!



We will send out a follow-up email message with links to today's materials and the resource list.

Opportunities to Engage



Come back to this space now through October 29

Join a Regional Communications Collaborative

Continue connecting with health communicators in your region, building effective campaigns with Arclet, and creating regional messaging for your communities.

Next Session:

Connection & Collaboration

What is one takeaway as you leave today's session?

Please put it in the chat.

Thank you!

Please share your feedback!

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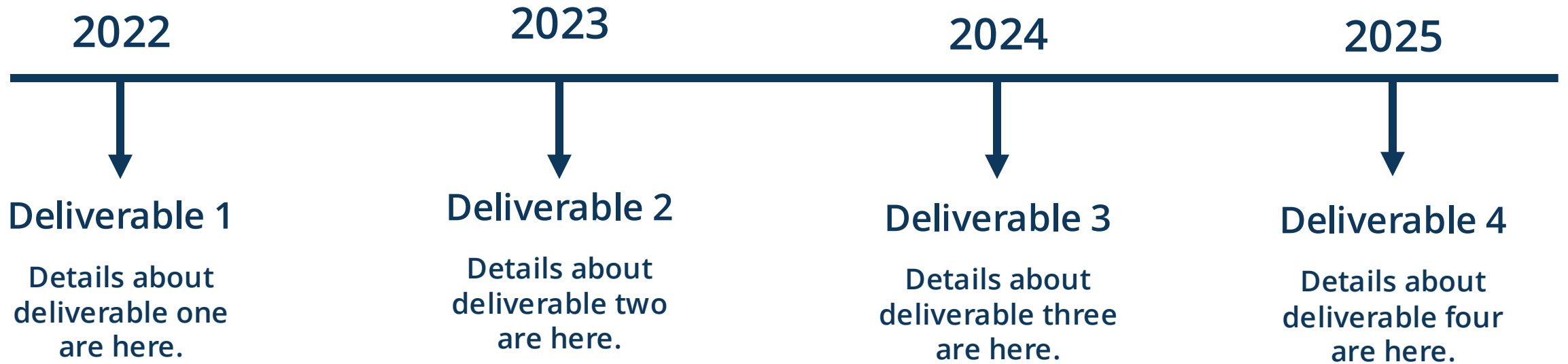




Timeline

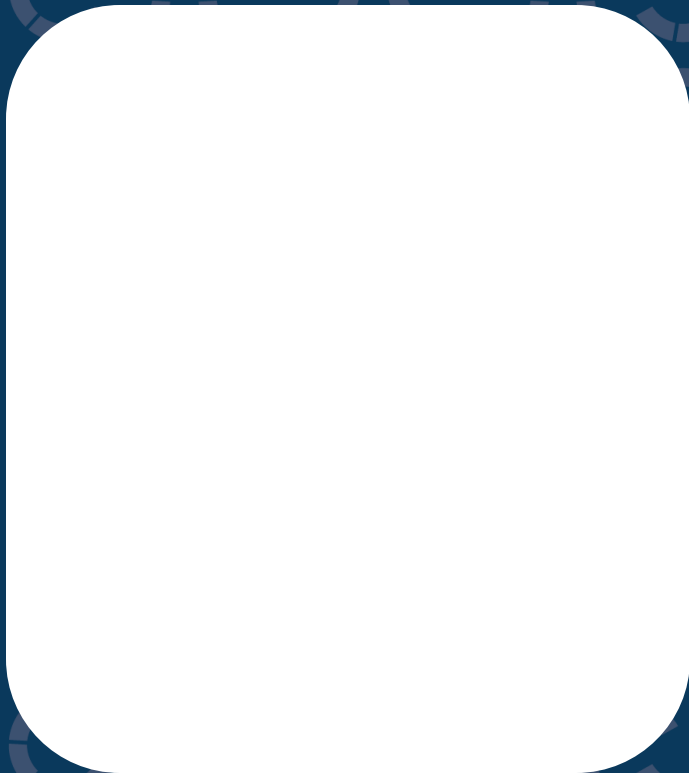


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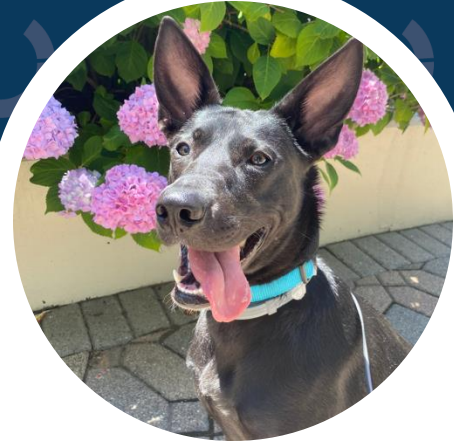








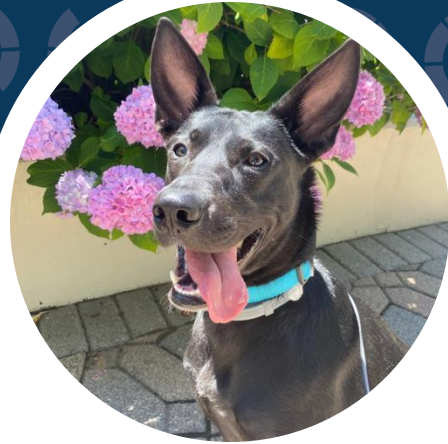
Our Team



MIA MCCLAYTON

Team Mascot

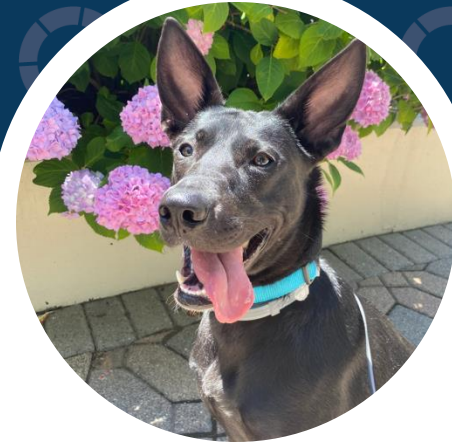
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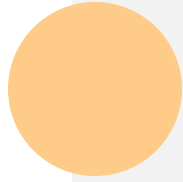
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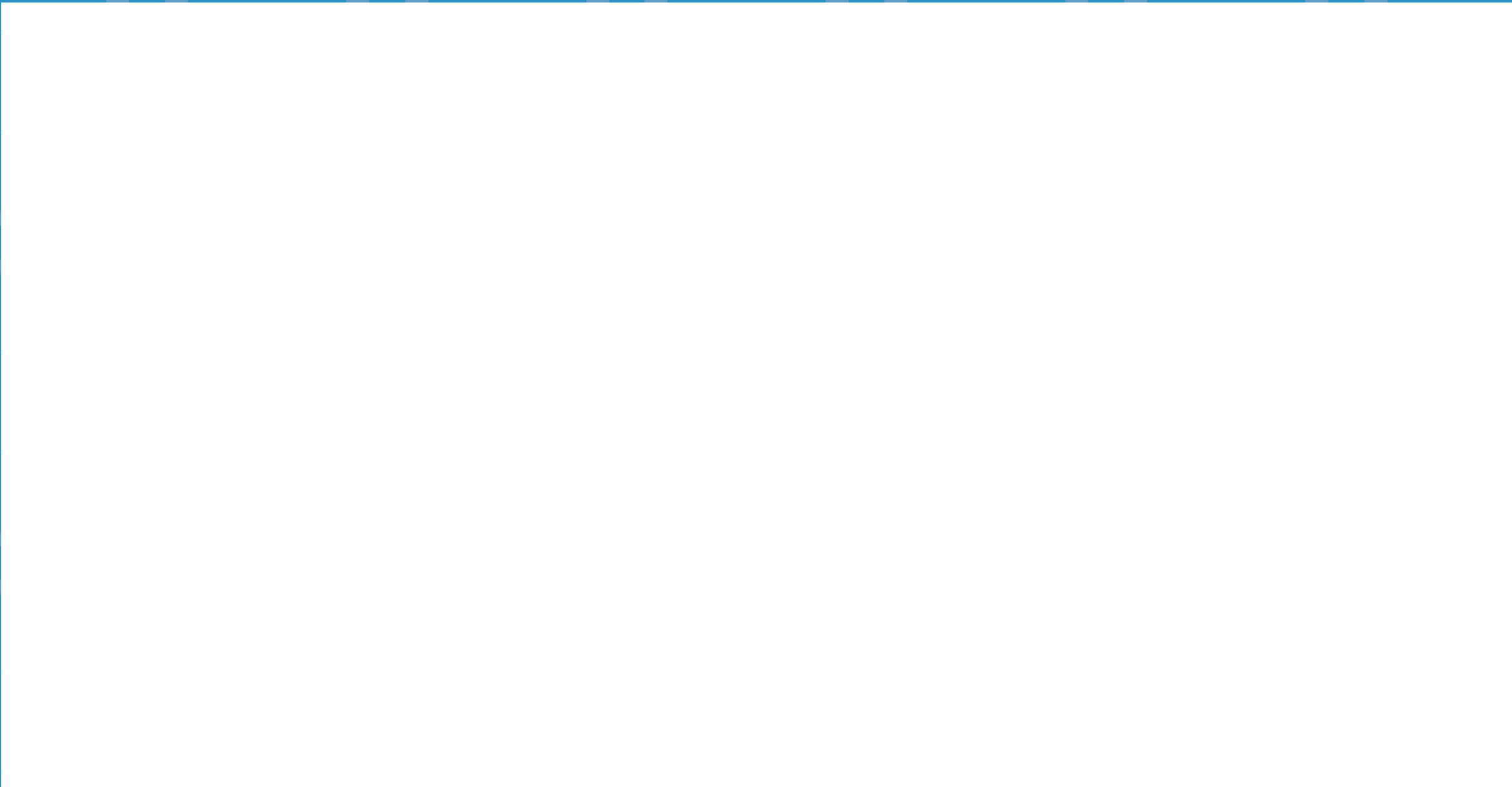
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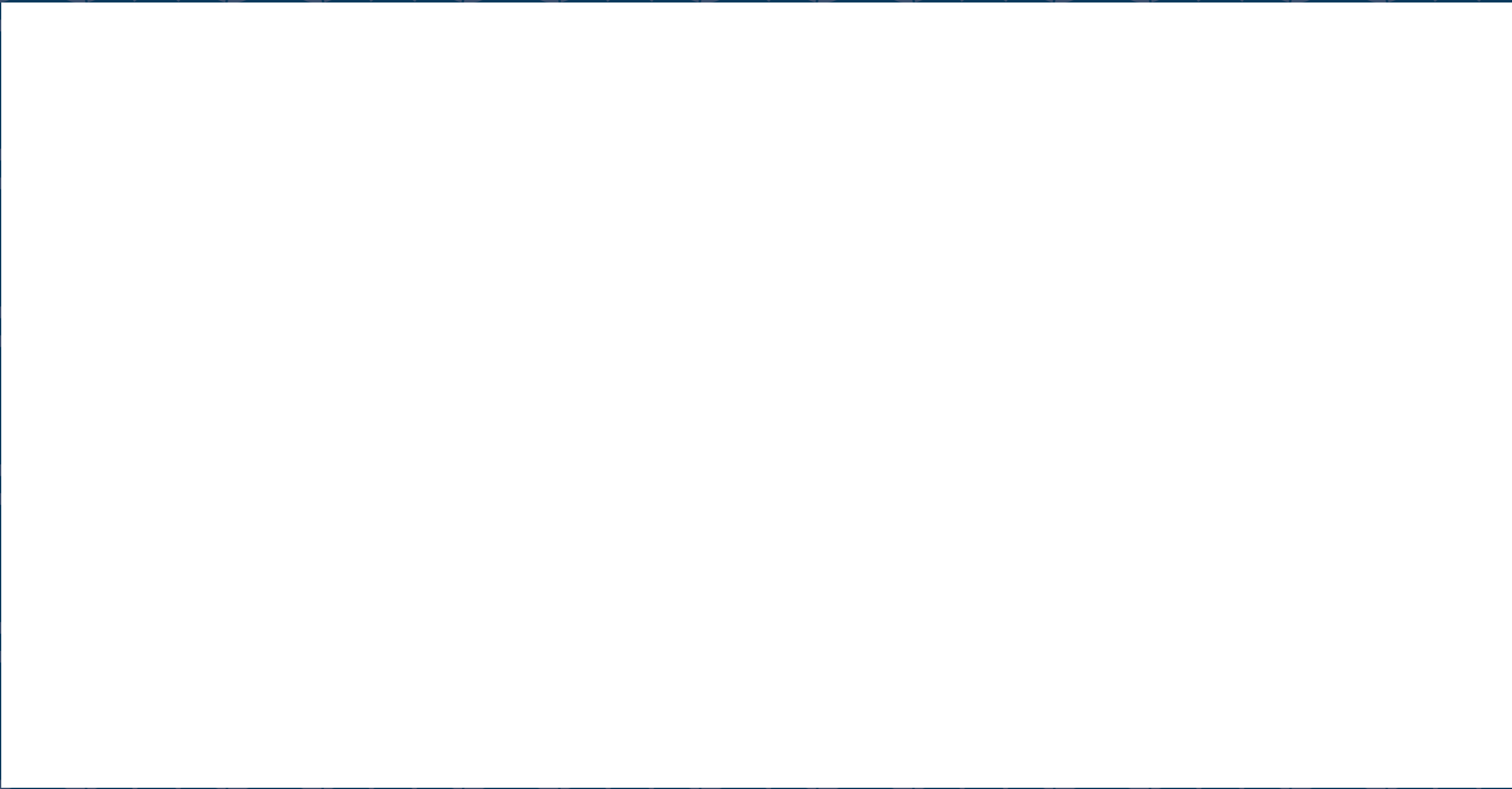




















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