

# RIPPING OFF THE DIGITAL BAND-AID: RETHINKING NONPROFIT COMMUNICATIONS

## Policy Brief: What Civil Society & Nonprofits Can Do

Harvard's [Technology and Social Change Project \(TaSC\)](#) developed six strategies for countering misinformation and hate speech online. They are:

1. Connected Communities: Simply organizing an information campaign to correct or combat disinformation is not an effective strategy as it "undercuts the possibility for communities to collectively learn, counter, and adapt to disinformation." Instead, any response should be grounded in facts about the impact and harms of different disinformation trends.
2. Fact/Fallacy/Fact or "The Truth Sandwich": Disinformation is typically spread in short, memorable, and pithy slogans (think "vaccines cause autism"). To rebuke these statements, you need to interrupt the impulse to remember something so 'sticky' AND replace it with something true. The truth sandwich model does this by replacing the disinformation with a fact or by highlighting the political agenda of the group pushing the lies.
  - a. Example: Replace with fact: "Vaccines don't cause autism. While the myth persists that vaccines cause this condition, doctors across the globe have proven that vaccines do not cause autism and are a benefit the whole of society."
  - b. Example: Highlight the political agenda: "Vaccines don't cause autism. This myth is perpetuated by anti-vaccine activists and does not line up with scientific facts about public health. Doctors across the globe have proven that vaccines do not cause autism and are a benefit the whole society."
3. Prebunking: Mis/disinformation is often predictable. Prebunking is an offensive strategy where you anticipate what false information is likely to be repeated by politicians, pundits, or provocateurs at key events, and prepare a response based on fact-checks.
4. Distributed Debunking: Battling it out with disinformation spreaders online often makes mis/disinformation gain more traction within search and trending algorithms because these technologies cannot tell the difference between truth and lies. When misinformation becomes mainstream and triggered responses from key figures (politicians, newsworthy groups, etc.), then an organized, strategic response is often necessary. Debunks should

include a link to a reputable source and follow the models of the "truth sandwich" or "humor over rumor."

5. Localize the Context: Disinformation is always local and civil society organizations are the best placed to provide context. When debunking misinformation or disinformation, it is important to bear the local community in mind and to share insights with journalists. Knowing and misinformation/disinformation impacts a community, online and offline, is critical information for journalists covering a particular beat.
6. Humor over Rumor: Misinformation tends to trigger emotional reactions and confirmation bias. It thrives in environments that are filled with outrage, fear, and anger, especially when these environments share the same political and/or cultural views (a.k.a. echo chambers). Humor over rumor is a community strategy: humorous rebuttals of misinformation attach themselves to the misinformation so that they are found everywhere the rumor is spreading. In short, by making fact-checks funny, they are more likely to go viral.

Media justice expert [Brandi Collins Dexter discusses two other options](#) for nonprofits:

7. Do Not Retweet: social media platforms are specifically built to incentivize arguing and the polarization of users. The more you retweet or share a "hot take" or hate post, the more it is amplified (or goes "viral")—regardless of whether you are sharing to promote or sharing to argue against. To avoid increasing the virality of disinformation, do not share or retweet; take a screen-shot of the incorrect post, article, or tweet, then caption it with a "truth sandwich" and post.
8. Listen to the Canaries: Research shows that women—particularly, black women—are more likely to raise red flags warning of hateful trends, censorship, mis/disinformation online than any other demographic. Indeed, censored, marginalized, and/or impacted communities are often already responding to the threat or problem, long before external parties turn their attention to the issue. A prime example of this is the movement—spearheaded by black women in the United States—to "out" digital blackface via the hashtag #YourSlipIsShowing. Helping to promote grassroots efforts to protect an impacted community is often the best way to raise awareness and to neutralize the impact of mis/disinformation from the ground up.