

## Four Tenets of People-Centric Change Communications

Systems development initiatives rise or fall on the awareness, aspirations, attitudes, and aptitudes of people. Yet, too often, organizations treat stakeholder communications as an afterthought, limiting their focus to milestones such as user training and system rollouts.

Here are four tenets used by leaders of systems development efforts — and other major organizational change initiatives — to make strategic communications integral to their success.

### **01 “You have to, it’s mandatory” is not customer satisfaction.**

Yes, a Congressional mandate or Executive Order is important. But it won’t win the effective and lasting engagement of your stakeholders. That starts with a genuine commitment to building partnerships with them, with a focus on common goals.

Two-way exchanges with stakeholder groups are foundational as part of your environmental scan. You’ll want to begin early in the development cycle, building in opportunities to:

- Actively listen to different constituencies and understand their motivations and key concerns
- Pinpoint the set of problems you are setting out to solve together
- Share your vision of the future and why the initiative is vital to your organization’s mission
- Probe for positive emotional drivers (“why my work matters”) as well as potential “hot buttons” and misperceptions
- Identify where goals converge and diverge across constituencies

- Determine baselines along with checkpoints to gauge changes in attitudes and behaviors.

With this foundation, you are equipped to craft strong “what’s in it for me” cases tailored to each set of stakeholders and to develop strategies for keeping stakeholders informed and engaged throughout the initiative. Consider developing an appealing name and brand to encapsulate the vision behind your initiative.

Update stakeholders on progress and achievements, but also share challenges, changes of direction, and lessons learned along the way. One possible strategy is to commission communications advisory groups that keep a finger on the pulse of specific regional units or divisions. Consider including a mix of disciplines and representative end users as well as one or more leadership sponsors. Such advisory groups can be invaluable in “localizing” communications, particularly social media and networking strategies, in gathering metrics, and in soliciting and evaluating survey feedback.

## 02 Plan, execute, evaluate, adjust

Segmenting your stakeholder audiences is essential in effective communications. Identifying all your key stakeholders requires going beyond work process owners and end users, to encompass all the groups critical to the success of your initiative. Consider, for example, industry partners, policy makers, sister agencies or departments, along with senior leadership. Then identify personas and scenarios to help you evaluate each audience. Who needs to know and do what, when and where?

What messages are universal to all audiences, and which are specific to a segment? What channels and influencers are most important for each segment (e.g., social media platforms, industry associations, meetings, NGO outreach, media, publications). Identify potential functional champions as part of your planning

and consider interviewing representative stakeholders as needed. Evaluate crisis scenarios and anticipate ways disinformation might emerge and how to get ahead of it.

Your communications plan should be strategic as well as tactical — aligned with both your technical project plan and culture change plan for the initiative. It should articulate meaningful goals and metrics, define strategies and campaigns with supporting products and tactics, and specify schedules, roles, and responsibilities for implementation. Strategies might include providing training and toolkits for leaders and champions who will be carrying your messages forward. Evaluate on a regular basis using approaches such as social listening, measure against your goals and checkpoints, and adjust your plan as needed.

## 03 Translate, translate, translate.

Software engineers, system developers, and some managers may not be natural communicators, especially in interacting with non-technical audiences. Yet it is important that they hear from and inform stakeholders. Spend the time to ensure your team members understand the impacts of system changes not only on workflows and business processes, but also on the people who make it all happen. Provide them with turnkey tools like short,

engaging videos and infographics along with talking points to keep them on message.

You've crafted those tailored "what's in it for me" cases for each stakeholder group. Keep using them (and strengthening, reinforcing, and demonstrating them) and support your technical staff in translating their information in meaningful ways for audiences such as process owners, policy makers, and end users.

## **04 Don't ask your lawyer to do surgery.**

You would never, right? Then don't settle for communications services from an IT provider. An experienced strategic communications firm will support you with the planning, implementation, and translation needed to build true partnerships with key stakeholders.

Consider a firm that can help you with targeted campaigns and compelling stories and visuals, as well as with organizing meetings, documenting pivotal decision-making processes, and facilitating any policy communications or education needed to achieve lasting behavior changes in support of new workflows.

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## **akoya**

Akoya, a women-owned small business, has provided strategic communications and program support to federal agencies for 22 years. We thrive in the competitive government consulting landscape because of our freakishly high standards, our smart, compassionate staff, and our commitment to our clients' missions.

Our sweet spots are science, technology, energy, and research-backed federal programs that require keen communicators to translate technical topics for various audiences. Communications is our core capability (not an add-on), and our clients say that makes all the difference. Learn more at [akoyaonline.com](https://akoyaonline.com).

You can find us on GSA MAS as Rack-Wildner & Reese Inc., dba akoya. Or contact Genna Cavanaugh at 412-352-0359.



Akoya is a strategic communications firm that equips federal, not-for-profit, and business organizations to engage effectively with the stakeholders and customers who are critical to their mission success. We deliver creative and practical communication plans, along with all the tools for implementation.

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## Capabilities

### Strategic Communications

Marketing communications  
Corporate communications  
Culture change and motivation

### Stakeholder Engagement

Events and education  
Program support  
Peer-to-peer networking and best practices

### Planning

Communication planning  
Facilitation of strategic and program planning

## Sectors

Energy efficiency and renewable energy  
Technology  
Oil and natural gas  
Health care quality improvement  
Health communications  
Organ donation education  
Homeland security  
Cybersecurity  
Federal procurement

## Tools & Skill Sets

Program management  
Technical writing and editing (plain language)  
Graphic design  
Event design, planning, and support  
Video direction and production  
Web strategy and content  
Media relations and training  
Social media  
Presentations and webinars  
Speech writing  
Print collateral

## Clients

### Federal Government

National Aeronautics and Space Administration  
National Energy Technology Laboratory  
Oak Ridge National Laboratory  
Pacific Northwest National Laboratory  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Commerce (NIST)  
U.S. Department of Defense (DHA, Air Force)  
U.S. Department of Education  
U.S. Department of Energy (Lighting R&D, EERE)  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (CDC, CMS, HRSA)  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Blackburn Center  
Carnegie Mellon University  
DC Cancer Consortium  
Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank  
Groundwater Protection Council  
Jefferson Regional Foundation  
The Midwife Center  
National Petroleum Council  
Women's Law Project

### Commercial

ABB  
Alcoa Research Center  
Development Dimensions International, Inc.  
FHLBank Pittsburgh  
Kraft Heinz Company  
MAYA-Viz (acquired by General Dynamics)  
PPG Industries, Inc.  
Tyson Foods, Inc.  
Westinghouse

### Not-for-Profit

American Petroleum Institute  
Area Agency on Aging (Pittsburgh)

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