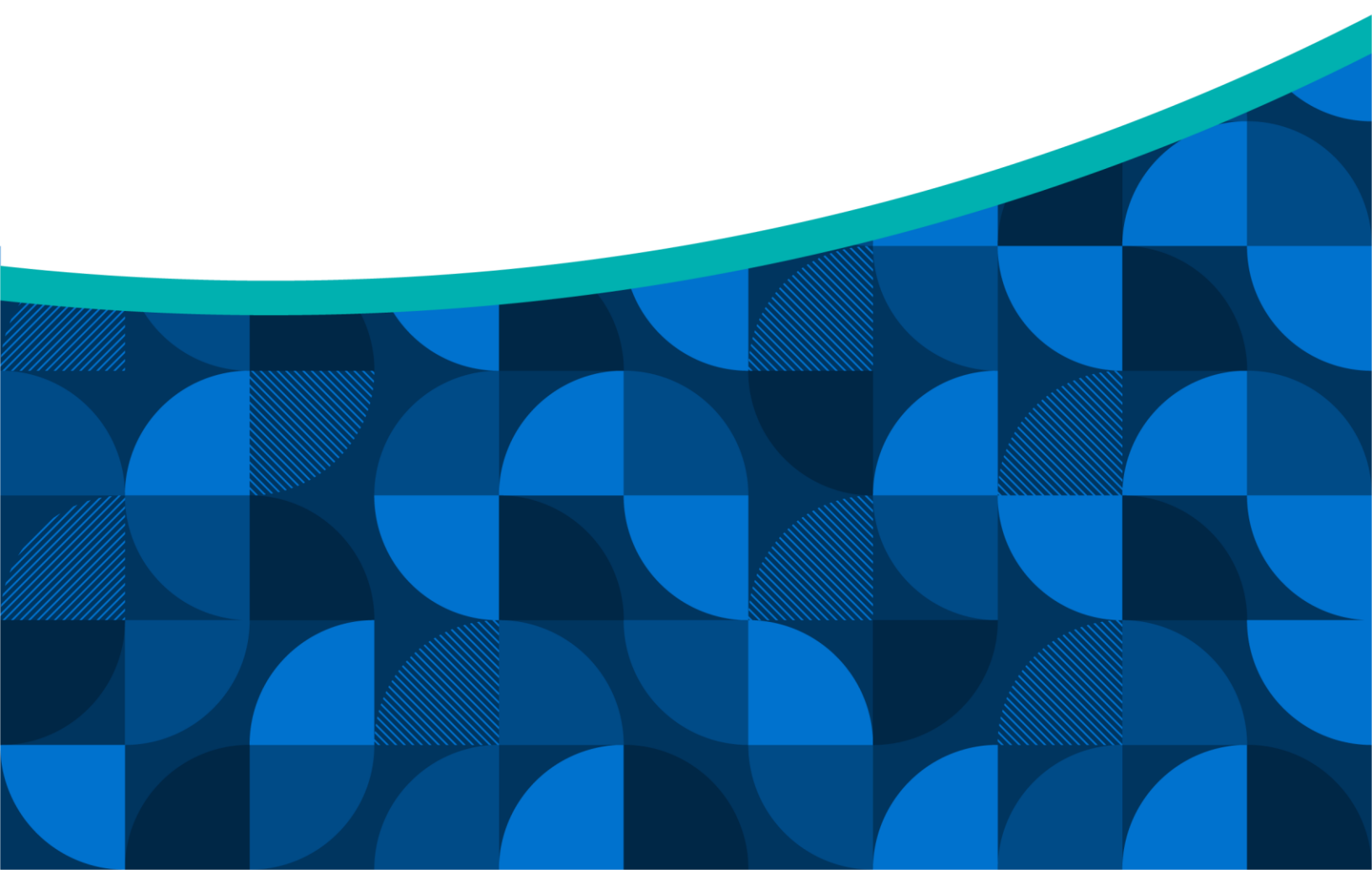




TOOLKIT

# 10 Tools to Communicate Decisions Transparently

Remove Barriers to Faculty and Staff Inclusion when Communicating a New Policy or Initiative



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# Transparency Has an Outsize Impact on Inclusion

Leaders know faculty and staff need transparent communication when it comes to announcing decisions, surfacing themes in employee feedback, and highlighting campus successes. Despite leaders' best efforts to explain what decisions they make and why, faculty and staff are asking for more transparency and accountability in engagement and climate surveys.



Typically, leaders think of communicating a decision as a one-step process. However, leaders tend to exclude groups of faculty and staff when they overlook steps or approach them out of order. In this toolkit, EAB has broken the inclusive communication process down into four steps that must be followed in order. When you are preparing to update your institution about a decision or ongoing initiative, follow the steps outlined in the graphic below to overcome barriers to faculty and staff inclusion.

Transparent communication eliminates barriers to inclusion by keeping all faculty and staff informed about institutional decision-making and policy updates. Use this toolkit to identify how and when to consult campus stakeholders while making policy decisions, generate statements and communications that are tied to actions and resource-sharing, and share information equitably among employees with a diverse set of needs.



Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

# How to Use This Toolkit

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## Resource in Brief

Use this toolkit when you communicate to faculty and staff about an institutional decision, policy, or initiative.

The toolkit is designed to ensure that you center faculty and staff needs, share information equitably across units and roles, and overcome inclusion barriers. The tools are grouped into three sections: one section on developing an inclusive communication plan, one section on generating statements and communications that are tied to action and resource-sharing, and one section on choosing communications channels that boost understanding for a diverse group of employees.

### 3 Ways to Use This Toolkit:

- Create a process for announcing a new policy or procedure
- Set and communicate expectations for an ongoing initiative
- Select multiple means of communication to share announcements to all employees

### ▶ Who Should Use the Toolkit:

- Cabinets
- Deans
- Chairs
- Unit leaders
- Communicators (public relations, marketing, university relations, internal communications)

### ▶ When to Use the Toolkit:

- Introducing a new policy or procedure (e.g., a grade transparency tool, bias reporting system, training requirements, adopting a new LMS)
- Updating a policy or procedure (e.g., announcing updates to tenure and promotion guidelines, faculty re-titling, a new benefits package)
- Introducing a new program or initiative (e.g., inclusive pedagogy, cluster hiring, QEP)
- Announcing results from employee surveys

### ▶ When Not to Use the Toolkit:

- Responding to campus, local, or national flashpoints
- Press releases
- Generating reports on employee survey data



# Build an Inclusive Communications Plan

9 Steps to Systematize Input and Feedback Gathering

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SECTION

1

Tools in this section:

- 1: Gather Input
- 2: Share Expectations and Takeaways
- 3: Evaluate Outcomes and Determine Next Steps

# Successful Implementation Hinges on Communication

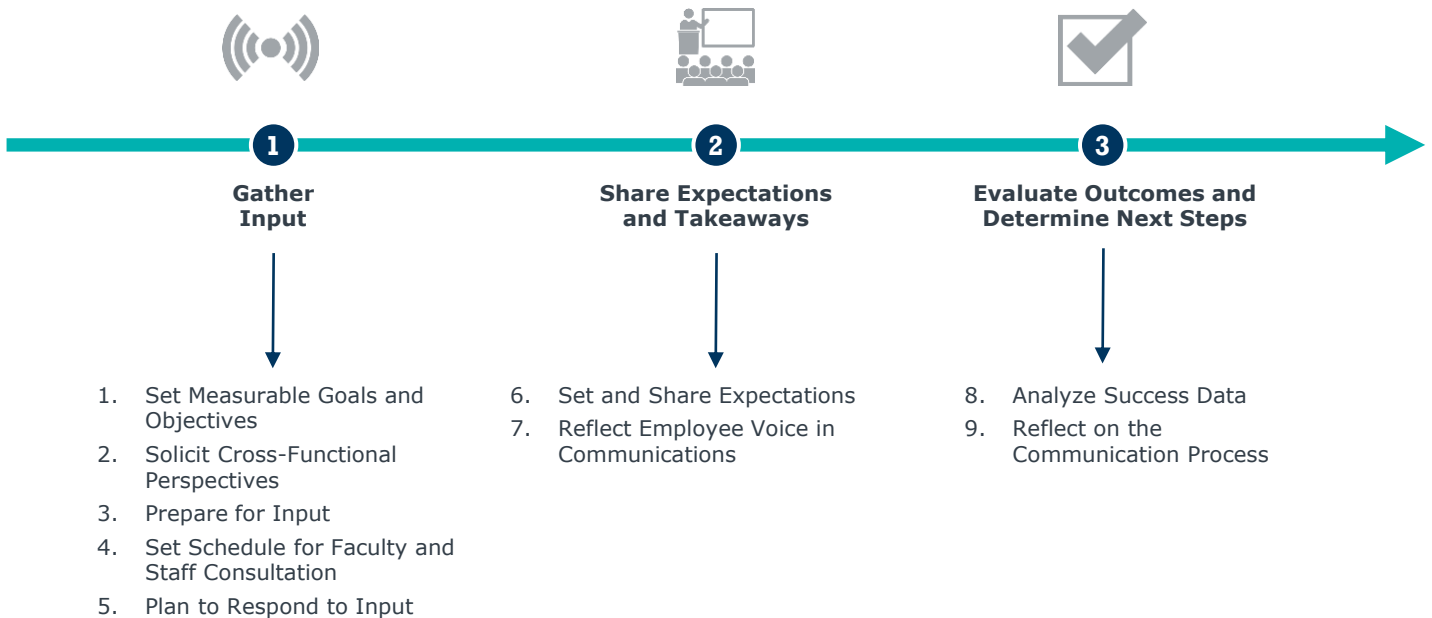
If leaders want their initiatives to be successful, they need to communicate with faculty and staff through a series of “go/no-go” points, such as when a committee or senate votes on an initiative. These moments indicate whether faculty, staff, and leaders believe the expected outcomes are worth the effort. If employees fail to see their voices and best interests reflected in those outcomes, institutions risk falling behind on initiatives that move the needle on inclusion. For example, one provost EAB spoke with had to wait several years to relaunch a failed initiative to expand tenure to extension faculty. He attributed the initial failure to messaging from leadership that implied the expansion would dilute tenure for full-time faculty. Had leaders more effectively centered faculty needs in their initial communication, they could have saved years of deferred progress. Instead, leaders had to wait for faculty to emotionally recover and regain trust before they could relaunch the initiative. The only thing the provost’s team changed in the relaunch was how they communicated about the purpose, but this time they got a positive vote from the faculty.

Use this section of the toolkit to develop an inclusive communication plan to navigate an initiative’s “go/no-go” points. You will identify how and when to consult campus stakeholders, align communications with actionable next steps, and reflect employee voice in internal communications.

## How to Use This Section

Before using this section, make sure you have clearly identified the policy, initiative, or decision you are hoping to communicate. Then, follow the 9-step process outlined in the graphic below to develop a plan for how and when to source input from campus stakeholders and evaluate successful communication. Once you have created your plan, move to Section 2 to craft inclusive messages.

## Tools in this Section:



Source: EAB interviews and analysis.



# Tool 1: Gather Input

Use this tool when preparing to launch an initiative or policy. The steps in this tool will help you determine which faculty and staff you will consult on the initiative, what input mechanisms you will use, and how you will analyze and respond to their input.

**How to Use This Tool:** Respond to the following questions for the decision, policy, initiative, or update you are planning to communicate.

## 1 — Set Measurable Goals and Objectives

What does successful communication look like for this initiative? How will you know if you communicated well? Determine what quantitative data and qualitative data to collect and write your choices in the space below. *Check all that apply.*

### Quantitative Data

- Event attendance
- Email open and click-through rates
- Website page view and click-through rates
- Social media likes, comments, follows, views
- Other (list below):

### Qualitative Data

- What will verbal feedback sound like if we have communicated successfully?
- What will written feedback look like if we have communicated successfully?

## 2 — Solicit Cross-Functional Perspectives

Below is a list of groups on campus whose perspectives are often needed to inform leaders' decisions or initiatives. Identify which groups you will ask for input on this decision. *Check all that apply and add other institution roles as needed.*

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Academic departments                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Unit leaders and managers         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staff units                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Institutional leadership          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employee Resource Group leaders                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Communications specialist         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> shift staff | <input type="checkbox"/> DEIJ office                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty Senate                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Talent/Human Resources            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staff Senate                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Other administrators (list below) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unions  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deans and department chairs                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (list below):               |

## 3 — Prepare for Input

All decisions should incorporate opportunities for feedback. What input mechanisms will you use to receive feedback and invite conversations on this initiative at each stage of the decision process, from announcing it and voting on it? *Circle yes or no.*

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| a. Do you have a centralized email address or suggestion box to receive feedback?  | Yes / No |
| b. Can employees submit input anonymously?   | Yes / No |
| c. Do you offer opportunities for employees to share feedback verbally?  | Yes / No |
| d. Are your feedback mechanisms compatible with accessibility standards (e.g., voice-to-text, in employees' native language, accessible on a web browser)? | Yes / No |

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

# Gather Input (cont.)

## 4 — Set Schedule for Faculty and Staff Consultation

How will you consult faculty and staff constituencies on this policy, decision, or initiative? Will you have regularly-occurring meetings, or will you ask for input on a one-off basis as needed? For each campus constituency you plan to gather input from, pick at least 2 channels to gather input. Then, fill in the boxes below to identify what, when, and how you'll ask for their input. *See Appendix for additional templates.*

Sample Input Tools	Frequency
Department brainstorming session	Pre-launch
Benefits committee reviews updates to benefits package	Monthly update
Centralized email address	Ongoing
Initiative-specific suggestion box	Ongoing
Pulse surveys	As needed

Campus Group: \_\_\_\_\_

	PRE-LAUNCH	MONTHLY UPDATE	ONGOING	AS NEEDED
INPUT TOOL				
CHANNEL				

*Institutional Examples:*



**Northwestern University**

See how Northwestern University collects ongoing feedback on their [Inclusive Language Guide](#).

**W**

**UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON**

See how the University of Washington's DO-IT Center collects ongoing feedback on their [Universal Design guidelines and checklist for STEM faculty](#).

### Our Approach

Staff and faculty across the University have contributed to the creation of this guide, which is a living document. As society and language evolve, this guide will continue to be revisited and revised. It is an opportunity for our community to continue to learn together and commit to the practice of using respectful and welcoming language.

On a broader level, there are various efforts and units advancing inclusive work, [please reference this page as a starting point to learn more and get involved](#).

All users are encouraged to offer new perspectives and encouraged to ask questions, offer suggestions and note omissions.

GIVE FEEDBACK

### Checklist Updates and Additional Resources

This checklist was adapted with permission from other checklists within the *Center for Universal Design in Education*.<sup>3</sup> To increase its usefulness, please send suggestions for updates to [doit@uw.edu](mailto:doit@uw.edu).

Source: Northwestern University, [Inclusive Language Guide](#), 2023; University of Washington, [Equal Access: Making STEM Departments More Accessible to and Inclusive of Faculty with Disabilities](#), 2021; EAB interviews and analysis.

# Gather Input (cont.)

## 5 Plan to Respond to Input

How will you organize and respond to input you collect? For example, if you have a suggestion box, who is responsible for reading and responding to suggestions? In the space below, outline the roles responsible, modes of communication, and timeline for responding to input.

A. Who is responsible for reading, organizing, and responding to input?

B. How will they respond to input?

C. When will they respond to input?

### Institutional Examples:



See how University of North Dakota publishes feedback and responses through their [Staff Senate Suggestion Box](#).



See how Ohio University used a suggestion box to source ideas and feedback in their Affordability & Efficiency initiative.

### Question from September 16th, 2021

I'd love to attend a "Coffee with Kathy" event but by the time the announcement comes out, I always have something else on my calendar. Any option for both a) putting out the date(s) earlier and b) altering the day of the week time?

### Response from Paula Cox, Staff Senate Vice President

The Engagement committee works with Kathy Armacost on the dates for this event, and we put the date out as early as we can get it. We are looking at doing some different days during the week, but have to work with Kathy's schedule as well. If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact Paula Cox at [paula.cox@und.edu](mailto:paula.cox@und.edu)

### COMMENTS

Do a cost/benefit analysis on Advancement. We have heard a lot about how much money has been raised by the Campaign, but we don't seem to be as public about how much that costs us. Report data on how much we are spending to raise money, i.e. how many cents does it cost to raise each dollar?

### RESPONSE

This is a reasonable suggestion and one we will look into in the near future. Advancement activities are in many ways a long-term strategy and are not always easily quantifiable: many investments in time and resources today are spent cultivating prospects that may not show promise for one or more years out. However, it is reasonable that we look at all funds and benchmark against other institutions where we can.

Source: University of North Dakota, [Suggestion Box](#), 2023; Ohio University, [Affordability and Efficiency Suggestion Box Responses](#), 2021; EAB interviews and analysis.

## Tool 2: Share Expectations and Takeaways

The steps in this tool inform faculty and staff about opportunities to share their input.

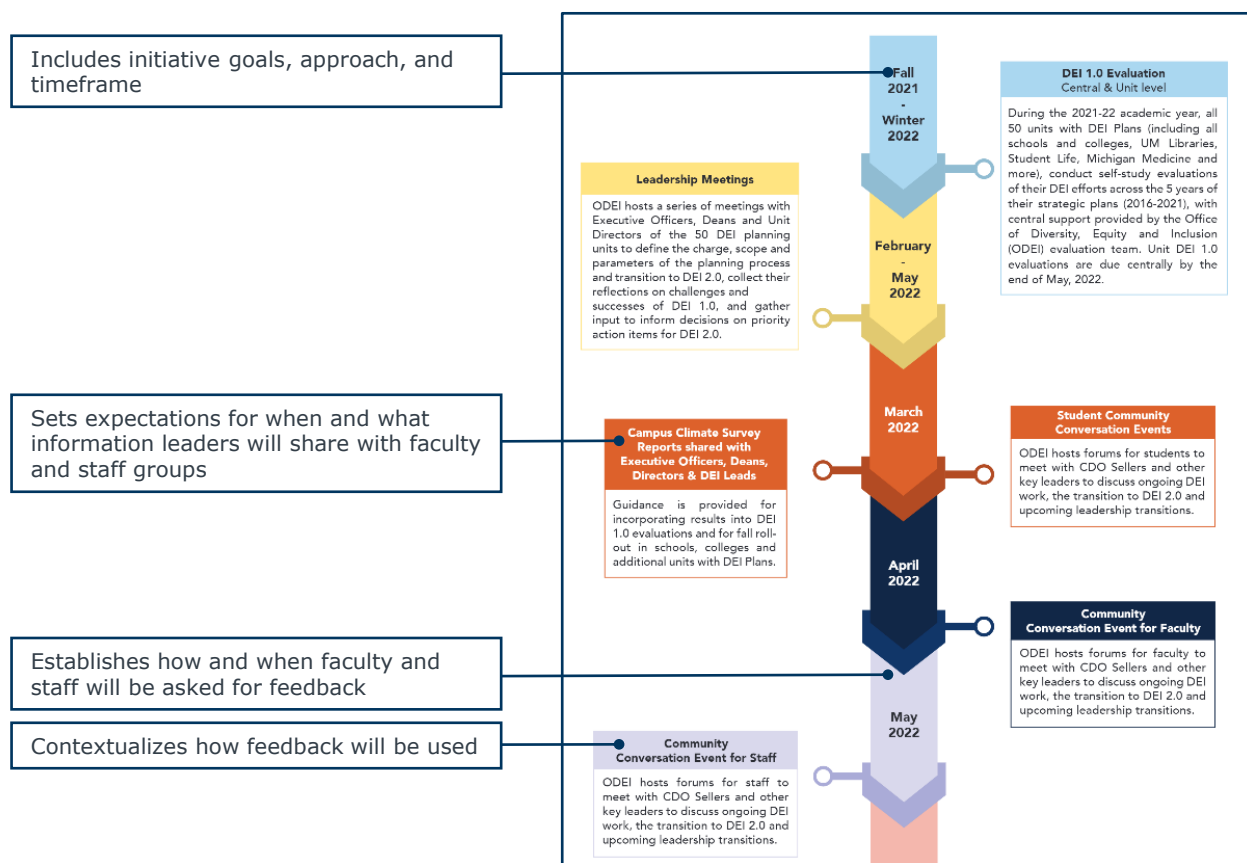
**How to Use This Tool:** Use step 6 before you gather input. Use step 7 after you have made your decision. Share the timeline and statement you create with faculty and staff.

### 6 — Set and Share Expectations

Faculty and staff need to know how and when to expect communication from leaders so that they know you are making progress on the initiative. Create a timeline to share with faculty and staff to let them know who you will ask for input, when you will ask for input, and how you will ask for input.

#### Institutional Example

See how the University of Michigan set a timeline and expectations for faculty and staff to participate in and receive updates on their [DEI 2.0 Strategic Plan transition process](#).



#### Phrases that Bring Clarity:

- “There is a decision to make.”
- The decision we are making is \_\_\_\_\_.”

Source: University of Michigan, [DEI 2.0 Transition](#), 2021; EAB interviews and analysis.

## Share Expectations and Takeaways (cont.)

### 7 — Reflect Faculty and Staff Voice in Communications

Faculty and staff feel over-surveyed when they keep offering their perspectives, expertise, and feedback, but policy announcements do not close that feedback loop (or even prolong it).

In the space below, fill in the template to share how you are incorporating their feedback.

"In \_\_\_\_\_ **(1)** \_\_\_\_\_ we heard you suggest \_\_\_\_\_ **(2)** \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ **(3)** \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ **(4)** \_\_\_\_\_. We looked into all three options. \_\_\_\_\_ **(5)** \_\_\_\_\_ are not feasible because \_\_\_\_\_ **(6)** \_\_\_\_\_. Our path forward is \_\_\_\_\_ **(7)** \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_ **(8)** \_\_\_\_\_."

1. What listening tools did you use to collect input from faculty and staff?

2-4. What suggestions did faculty and staff make during those input sessions? Be sure to highlight common suggestions or themes.

5. Which suggestions from answers 2-4 were not feasible?

6. Why were they not feasible?

7-8. What decision have you made? Why is it the best choice for your institution? *For more detailed guidance on how to communicate about this decision, use the What, Why, How Framework in Section 2.*

## Tool 3: Evaluate Outcomes and Determine Next Steps

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After you have communicated your decision, evaluate the communications process and success data. Use this tool to reflect on how your communication fostered trust and engagement in all communities within your institution, unit or department.

**How to Use This Tool:** Respond to each prompt in the space below.

### 8 — Analyze Success Data

Evaluate the success metrics you established in Step 1. Was your communication about this initiative successful? How do you know?

### 9 — Reflect on the Communication Process

A. Where did we need the most help?

B. What worked well about our communication?

C. What did not work well?

D. Which aspects of communicating the initiative were most challenging? The development, the consultation, or the evaluation?

E. How will you adjust your communications approach to make your work more effective in the future?



# Develop Your Message

---

SECTION

2

Tools in this section:

- 4: Statement Decision & Implementation Guide
- 5: Guiding Questions to Contextualize Messaging
- 6: Inclusive Language Guide

# Share the Full Context to Foster Psychological Safety

Transparent communication eliminates barriers to inclusion by keeping all faculty and staff in the loop about institutional decision-making and policy and procedure updates. Use the tools in this section when crafting institution- and unit-wide messages that promote transparency and foster a psychologically safe workplace.

## What is Psychological Safety?

Psychological safety is the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes. A psychologically safe workplace is one where people are comfortable expressing and being themselves. Its three pillars are that people feel free to: contribute ideas, share information, and report mistakes.

## How Can Leaders Foster Psychological Safety through Communications?

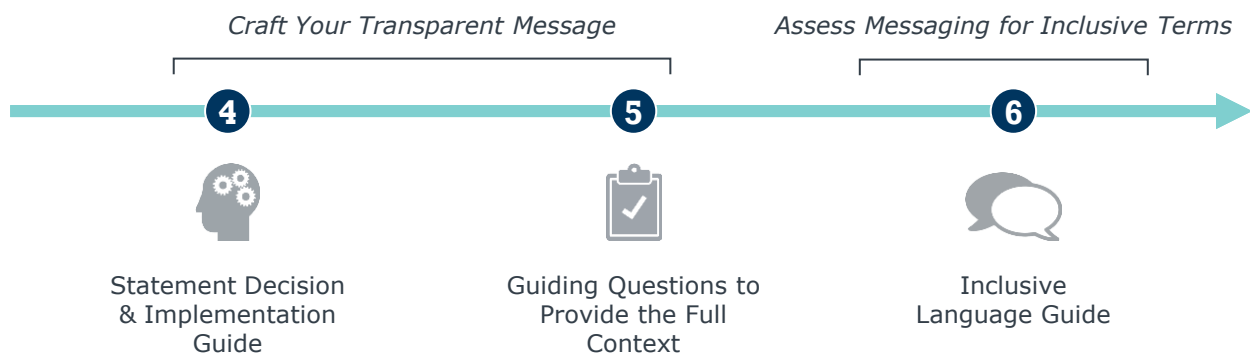
Faculty and staff depend on cabinet and department leaders to provide the information they need to do their jobs effectively. When leaders fail to provide sufficient information through front channel communication forums like town halls, newsletters, and campus-wide emails, employees are forced to rely upon back channels (e.g., hallway conversations, shared meals). Without clear and explicit front channel communication, many faculty and staff, particularly new and junior employees, are excluded from the decision-making process. Since the pandemic, back channels have become even more inaccessible for new employees who may not know the institution's "unwritten rules," thereby reinforcing institutional power and privilege and exacerbating historical patterns of exclusion.

Leaders and communicators can make matters worse if they use exclusionary and biased language. When communication is vague or biased, it's difficult for faculty and staff to know what is expected of them or to feel safe contributing their ideas. When leaders center the communities they are supporting and provide the whole context, faculty and staff can see how they and their work are valued by the institution, promoting a sense of belonging.

## How to Use This Section

Once you have a plan to communicate with campus stakeholders (see Section 1), use the tools in this section to write transparent campus communications that get everyone up to speed. Once you have written your communication, move to Section 3 to select the forums through which you will share this message.

## Tools in this Section:



Source: Center for Creative Leadership, [What is Psychological Safety at Work? How Can Leaders Build Psychologically Safe Workplaces?](#), 2020; EAB interviews and analysis.



# Tool 4: Statement Decision & Implementation Guide

## Guidance from the University of Minnesota



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

See how the [University of Minnesota](#) guides unit and department leaders to what to consider when crafting a DEIJ statement.

### How to Use This Section:

Before you start writing a statement, use this Decision Guide to determine if a statement is the best format for your communication. If you decide to create a statement, follow the Implementation Guide, below.

### When to Write a Statement:

Statements can be appropriate when you need to communicate your organization's broad commitment to DEIJ work or in response to an event. Sometimes, it could be more beneficial to amplify other statements or voices instead of writing your own.

## 1 Decision Guide

As a leader, begin by considering your role in the issue at hand. If it is a topic or issue that directly affects your areas of oversight or expertise, consider connecting with institutional leaders on a unified approach to the topic, offering assistance as needed.

- Do we need to communicate a broader commitment to DEIJ?
- Are we responding to a local, national, or campus event?
- What are the potential impacts of not making a statement? (Remember that no response can also be viewed as a response.)
- Who is impacted by the issue? Have they been consulted? How do they feel about the potential of you making a statement?
- Does this issue affect the institution more broadly? If so, have appropriate representatives been consulted?
- What are others at the university doing? Have others who may be closer to the issue, or more senior at the institution (e.g., the Chancellor, Provost, or President) issued a statement and can we amplify their voice instead?

## 2 Implementation Guide

A. What are the goals of the communication?

B. Who are the audiences?

# Statement Decision & Implementation Guide (cont.)

## 2 Implementation Guide (cont.)

C. Have we made statements in the past? What did they say? Will we continue to make statements for similar situations in the future?

D. What should the statement say and why? Consider framing, ties to action, and language.

E. How will the communication be shared (e.g., in person or during a live conversation, in writing, posted online or distributed via email or other means)? What access considerations should be made?

F. Does the statement align with other communications?

G. If there is pushback, how will we respond?

## Tool 5: Guiding Questions to Provide the Full Context

Most leaders think they are being transparent because they state what decisions are being made and the rationale for those decisions. That is a good start, but leaders are still losing faculty and staff trust because leaders typically fail to communicate how decisions are made to faculty and staff.

Leaders need to contextualize all their messages by including what, why, and how decisions were made so that employees across institutional levels have what they need to do their best work. When employees know the full context, they understand what next steps to take and the urgency of those steps.

### How to Use This Tool:

Use the What, Why, How framework to ensure your communications provide the full context and promote equitable information sharing across the institution.

“

“Whether it is good news, difficult news, or key progress against strategic aims, internal communications need to help leaders create a sense of where we are going.”

*Caroline Boyd  
Internal Communications Officer  
University of Salford*

”

### Communicating Contextualized Messages

#### 1. What: The Result

- What policy, process, or state is changing?
- What does this mean for your audience?
- Whose work does this impact immediately? Further down the road?

#### 2. Why: The Motivation

- What are the goals and objectives of the decision, goal, change, message?
- Why are we doing it?
- How does it align with your institution’s mission, vision, and values?
- Why is it a better path forward?

#### 3. How: The Process

- How was the decision made?
- Who was involved in the decision-making process?
- What tools and forums did you use to solicit input on the decision, goal, change, message?
- How did that input inform the decision, goal, change, message?

## Tool 6: Inclusive Language Guide

### Avoid these Language Mistakes When Talking About Identity

When writing to campus stakeholders, you must consider how to frame your priorities and commitments. Many communications use generic and deficit-based language to articulate their priorities. This inattention to language compromises faculty and staff's psychological safety and can raise doubts about the institution's commitment to progress. To center the needs of the most directly impacted individuals and to create a shared understanding of institutional priorities, campus leaders and communicators should avoid the following common mistakes made when talking about identity.

**✘ Do Not Use Euphemisms When Discussing Target Populations**

**✔ Be Explicit About Who You Are Trying to Serve, While Recognizing Intersectionality**

Most DEIJ messages include goals related to supporting “underserved”, “underrepresented”, “marginalized”, or “minoritized” communities on campus. While there are implied definitions of these terms, it is important to consider how they vary for each institution. Leaders should unpack these terms to provide greater specificity into the populations they hope to serve and support through their communication. Without this foundational work, it is challenging to develop targeted solutions and to accurately assess progress and the impact of proposed action steps.

Further, it is important to recognize how different social identities impact one another. An intersectional DEIJ approach recognizes that social identities do not exist in isolation and instead are interconnected and impact one another. When applying an intersectional lens to DEIJ strategies, institutions acknowledge how systems of oppression affect one another. For example, they consider how race and gender intersect to shape the experiences of women of color or recognize how class and ability status impact the needs of disabled low-income individuals. This perspective will help institutional leaders develop solutions that account for the holistic experience of their community members.

#### *Institutional Examples*



See how [University of Wisconsin, Superior](#) explicitly states their institutional definition of underrepresented minorities and underserved populations in their DEI plan (p. 6).

“For the purposes of this plan, it’s also important that the campus community understand the demographics in which the plan prioritizes:

Underrepresented Minority Students at UW-Superior

- Native American/American Indian
- African American
- Hispanic/Latino
- Southeast Asian of Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong or Laotian descent who entered the U.S. after 12/31/1975
- Two or more races (either alone or as two or more race/ethnicities)



See how [University of Alberta's EDI Strategic Plan](#) incorporates an intersectional lens to their work.

#### *Intersectionality*

An intersectional approach to equity, diversity, and inclusivity begins from the understanding that the different vectors of social diversity, (race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, nationality, religion, language, age, etc.) do not exist separately or in isolation from each other. Instead, the various vectors of social diversity are interwoven and affect each other. Intersectionality focuses on how multiple, interwoven vectors shape social belonging, cultural representations, social and political institutions, as well as the material conditions of our lives in ways that are not reducible to any singular vector or social category.

Source: University of Wisconsin-Superior, [Strategic Plan for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#), 2017; University of Alberta, [Strategic Plan for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity](#), 2019; EAB interviews and analysis.

## Inclusive Language Guide (cont.)

---

### Avoid These Language Mistakes When Talking About Identity

 **Avoid Using a Deficit-Based Approach in Your DEI Plan**

 **Use Asset-Based Language Throughout Your Document**

When drafting communications involving identity, institutional leaders should refrain from using a deficit-based approach which places the onus for current disparities on marginalized communities. This runs the risk of reinforcing stereotypes. Instead, communications should focus on how institutional processes, policies, or strategies contributed to or exacerbated entrenched inequities. This asset-based approach centers institutional responsibility over perceived deficits. For example, instead of pointing out that students lack college navigation skills, institutional leaders should consider why their institutions are hard to navigate in the first place and work to rectify that.

This approach is essential in ensuring that institutions take responsibility for their actions and recognize their role in dismantling systems of oppression. It also ensures that action steps and strategies are addressing systemic and structural issues that perpetuate inequities on campus.



#### **Deficit-Based Language**

Focuses on rectifying a perceived shortcoming of a person or community and assumes that they need to be “fixed” to succeed. Examples include *achievement gap, at-risk, learning loss, underprepared*.



#### **Asset-Based Language**

Asset-based language emphasizes that institutional structures and systems must change to better serve historically marginalized communities—not the other way around. Examples include *equity gap, education debt, opportunity gap*.

# Inclusive Language Guides in Practice

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*Institutional Examples:*



"The more we understand language, descriptors and their meanings, the more intentional we can be in choosing words that include rather than exclude; acknowledge, accept and honor differences; and are considerate and welcoming to the growing diversity of our communities."

*University of North Carolina – Charlotte,  
[Inclusive Language Guide](#)*



"This guide serves as a resource for all members of the Northwestern community, especially those in roles of University communicators. Its goal is to encourage educated choices on the use of language that is inclusive and free of bias. Our language —whether written, spoken or visual —should be historically accurate, relevant, empowering and respectful."

*Northwestern University,  
[Inclusive Language Guide](#)*



"The words people use to describe others are often unintentionally but unquestionably based on implicit cultural biases. They can be insensitive to cultural differences or exclusionary or offensive to a group of people (based on their ability/disability, race or ethnicity, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation, etc.). This guide is intended to promote greater intentionality and accuracy of language in print and online communications, as well as contribute to an overall climate of inclusion."

*SUNY-Geneseo,  
[Inclusive Language Guide](#)*



## Need More Guidance on Inclusive Language?

*Consult Other Expert Style Guides*

- [American Psychological Association Guidelines](#)
- [Associated Press Style Guide](#)
- [Conscious Style Guide](#)
- [Diversity Style Guide](#)
- [GLAAD Style Guide](#)
- [Seramont Glossary of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Terms](#)



# Select Appropriate Communication Channels

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SECTION

3

Tools in This Section:

- 7. Clarify Audience and Communication Goals
- 8. Communication Channels List
- 9: 13 High-Impact Communication Practices

## Multimodal Communication Reduces Inclusion Barriers

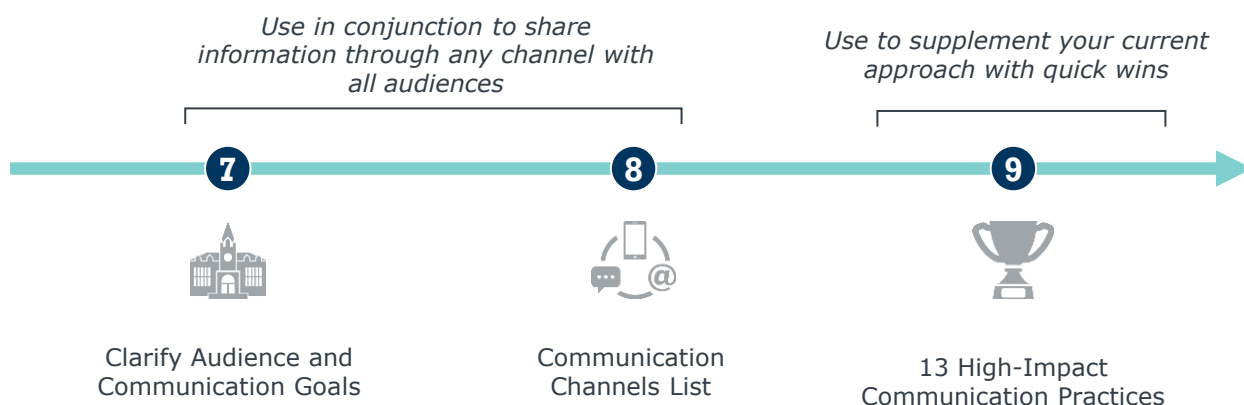
Higher ed leaders tend to over-rely on a small set of communication channels to distribute unit- and institution-wide updates on policies, strategic planning, and campus events. Town halls, senate meetings, and once-per-semester forums fail to reach 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> shift workers, working parents and caregivers, and English language-learning employees. Web announcements require faculty and staff to have web access and to know when and how to seek out that information, and high daily rates of emails mean important memos can get buried in an inbox. How can higher ed leaders overcome these barriers to inclusion and promote equitable information sharing?

EAB recommends using multiple channels to communicate messages with faculty and staff. Choose 2-3 communications channels for each policy update, initiative launch, and announcement you want to share with faculty and staff. As you consider which channels are appropriate, keep the audience's needs in mind and select channels whose advantages and downsides complement one another. For example, if you are hosting a live town hall to announce a grade transparency tool, use a virtual or asynchronous Q&A session as your secondary communication channel.

### How to Use This Section

After creating a plan to get input from campus stakeholders (*see Section 1*) and developing an inclusive message (*see Section 2*), use the provided resources to decide what channels to use to share your message with faculty and staff. Use Tools 7 and 8 together to share information through any communication channel with all audiences. Then, consult Tool 9 to supplement your current communication approach with quick wins.

### Tools in this Section:





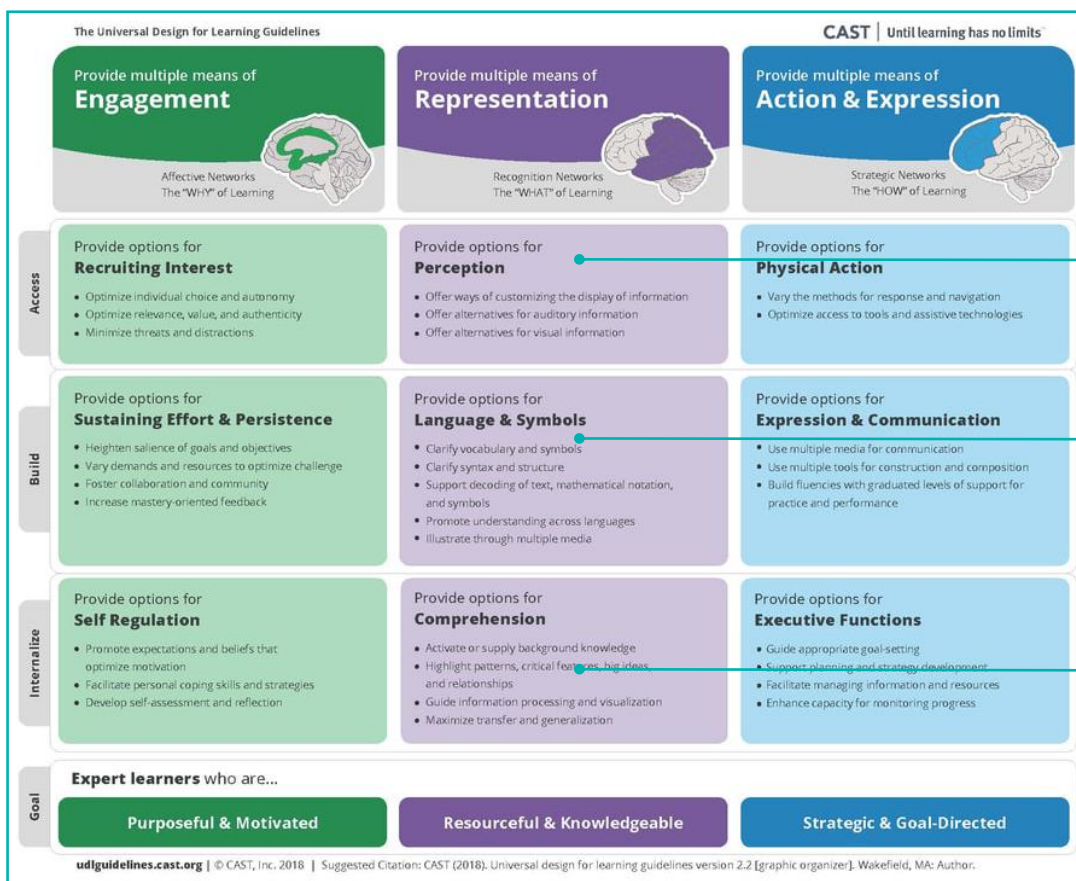
# Universal Design Optimizes Information Sharing

Faculty and staff vary in the ways they perceive and comprehend information. Leaders should use multiple means of communication to increase accessibility and to promote equitable information sharing to all employees. Multiple means are a tenet of the universal design for learning philosophy developed by CAST. The benefits of implementing universal design features in your communication extend campus-wide—practices like adding captions to videos support employees with disabilities, neurodiverse employees, and English language learners. Multiple means of communication can mean using multiple channels (e.g., publishing climate survey findings in a report and in a video overview) as well as multimodal communication (e.g., hosting a senate meeting on Zoom and enabling live captions).

## What is Universal Design for Learning?

“Universal design for learning (UDL) is an approach to curriculum design that helps teachers customize curriculum to serve learners, regardless of ability, disability, age, gender, or cultural and linguistic background. UDL provides a blueprint for designing strategies, materials, assessments, and tools to reach and teach students with diverse needs.” –[American Institute of Research](#)

The table below presents the universal design for learning guidelines created by CAST. First, use multiple means of engagement to stimulate interest among employees with different motivating factors (e.g., mission alignment, student success). Then, pick multiple means of representation to make sure all employees have equitable access to information. Finally, provide multiple means of action and expression to offer flexibility and support multiple ways of getting work done.



Employees can choose which communication channel best promotes their understanding

Consider language accessibility. Offer translation tools, captions, and transcripts.

Employees can quickly get up to speed and seek out more information as needed. Include feedback structures and an executive summary in meeting minutes.

Source: CAST, [Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2](#), 2018; EAB interviews and analysis.

# Tool 7: Clarify Audience and Communication Goals

**How to Use This Tool:** After you have developed the message you want to send (see Section 2), work through the following items to determine which communication channels suit your audience's needs. Fill in the boxes for each section. Use this tool in conjunction with Tool 8.

## 1 — Brainstorm Goals and Key Messages

What have you been working on? What do you want the community to know about that work? Pick 2-3 key points to share with faculty and staff.

## 2 — Identify Your Audiences

Select the campus stakeholder groups you are targeting with your communication.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Academic departments                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Staff Senate                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staff units                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Unions                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employee Resource Groups                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Deans and department chairs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> shift staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Unit leaders and managers   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty Senate                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:                      |

## 3 — Determine Engagement Strategy

How do you want to gather input from your campus stakeholders on this policy or initiative? Is the message you are sending best suited by a single announcement or ongoing conversations?

**Frequency:**

- Weekly
- Monthly
- 1-2x per semester
- Annually

**Examples:**

- Department- or college-wide newsletter
- Coffee chats with small staff groups
- Town hall with faculty senate
- Strategic planning updates

## 4 — Choose Communications Channels

Use Tool 8 on the following pages to select the 2-3 channels you'll use to share your decision or policy update with faculty and staff. Remember to choose channels whose advantages and downsides complement one another. Write the communication tools you'll use in the space below:

## Tool 8: Communication Channels List



University of  
**Salford**  
MANCHESTER

Communications experts at the University of Salford developed this tool to help leaders determine which communications channels best suit their audiences’ needs. They recommend using multiple channels to promote employee understanding and reinforce leaders’ messages. This recommendation aligns with UDL best practice (see page 6) because it offers all employees access to key information and the flexibility to choose what best suits their individual needs.

**How to Use This Tool:** Use the chart below to consider some of the advantages and disadvantages of common communication channels available at your institution. Choose 2-3 methods that whose advantages and disadvantages complement one another. For example, if your primary communication method is in person, then make sure your secondary communication method is accessible virtually and asynchronously.

Communication Channel	Advantages	Potential Downsides	Implementation Considerations
<b>Team meetings/Face-to-face</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can make communication personal and relevant to the team involved</li> <li>• Opportunity for discussion, feedback, questioning, and ideas</li> <li>• Facilitator can hold a lively and interactive session</li> <li>• Can help build understanding and engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time commitment for both manager and audience</li> <li>• Beware of content overload: other channels are more effective for information delivery</li> <li>• Scheduling may exclude 2<sup>nd</sup> &amp; 3<sup>rd</sup> shift staff, parents and caregivers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train facilitators</li> <li>• Schedule during the workday accommodate parents and caregivers</li> <li>• Support neurodivergent employees by hosting virtual meetings and providing support materials</li> </ul>
<b>Email</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can reach mass audiences quickly</li> <li>• Cost effective, simple to use</li> <li>• Consistent and controlled message</li> <li>• Reaches the recipient directly</li> <li>• Good for information, awareness, or instruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not everyone may have access</li> <li>• Impersonal and open to misinterpretation</li> <li>• Can result quickly in information overload</li> <li>• Cannot always tell if messages have been read</li> <li>• Does not generate dialogue or discussion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who has access to the distribution lists</li> <li>• Who needs computer access on campus to access email</li> <li>• Use the subject box clearly to get across your key message</li> <li>• Use headings and bullet points to break up text</li> </ul>
<b>University Website</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reaches a wide audience, so good for university-wide and external audiences</li> <li>• Professionally written</li> <li>• Can be visually appealing</li> <li>• Ideal for “good news” stories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colleagues without PCs may not have access</li> <li>• Relies on people seeking out information</li> <li>• Not suitable for long information pieces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headlines, images, captions, and graphics are fair, responsible, accurate in their depiction of people from historically marginalized groups</li> <li>• Link to resources where employees can get more information</li> </ul>

Source: University of Salford, [Internal Communications Toolkit: Practical communication and engagement for leaders](#), 2021.

## Communication Channels List (cont.)

Communication Channel	Advantages	Potential Downsides	Implementation Considerations
<b>Multimedia/Video bulletins</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative and entertaining</li> <li>• Can show real people 'talking heads' to bring messages to life</li> <li>• Consistent, controlled message</li> <li>• Can incorporate institutional branding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takes time and planning</li> <li>• Could have cost implications</li> <li>• Colleagues without PCs may not have access</li> <li>• May not be accessible for employees with disabilities, English language learners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider using 'real people' to talk about their experiences and not just senior leaders</li> <li>• Could use it as part of a briefing session to stimulate discussion, feedback</li> <li>• Keep it short</li> </ul>
<b>Plasma screens and Screensavers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative and entertaining</li> <li>• Consistent message, professionally managed by IT</li> <li>• Reach a wide audience</li> <li>• Visually appealing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only in a few locations</li> <li>• Needs time to arrange design</li> <li>• Not everyone has access to a PC/screen</li> <li>• Can only give a brief message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep it simple as people will only catch the message for a few seconds</li> <li>• Needs planning in with IT, other campus departments</li> </ul>
<b>University Magazine</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reaches everyone in the institution</li> <li>• Well-respected &amp; visually appealing</li> <li>• Can address feedback</li> <li>• Can be read online</li> <li>• Editorial Board ensures content addresses real issues</li> <li>• Good at reinforcing messages which may already have been conveyed by other means</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long lead times, so needs planning in advance</li> <li>• Information can date quickly</li> <li>• Challenge to make it relevant to all audiences</li> <li>• No opportunity to check messages have been understood by the audience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit potential articles in advance</li> <li>• Keep internal communications aware of upcoming events</li> </ul>
<b>Bulletin Boards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual and may catch the eye</li> <li>• Good for instructions and information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information can date quickly</li> <li>• Challenge to make it relevant to all audiences</li> <li>• No opportunity to check messages have been understood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have someone to "own" the bulletin board</li> <li>• Keep Internal Communications aware of upcoming events</li> </ul>

## Communication Channels List (cont.)

Communication Channel	Advantages	Potential Downsides	Implementation Considerations
<b>Text Messaging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good for crisis communication</li> <li>• Can update senior managers on important news while on leave</li> <li>• Good for reaching remote workers</li> <li>• Can direct people to further sources of info</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be seen as intrusive</li> <li>• Has cost implications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure you have mobile contact details for all your senior team</li> </ul>
<b>Large-scale events (Town Halls, Forums)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity for senior leaders to engage with large audiences face to face</li> <li>• Flexible and responsive</li> <li>• Can include Q&amp;A session, break out groups to involve people</li> <li>• Great opportunity to get feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agenda you set may not be what the audience wants</li> <li>• May be expensive</li> <li>• Time consuming for organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve colleagues in setting the agenda and format</li> <li>• Involve Events and Marketing teams early on in planning process</li> </ul>

## Tool 9: 13 High-Impact Communication Practices

### Tactics to Supplement Your Current Communications Strategy

Each tactic is rated on how many employees it may impact and how resource-intensive it is. Impact is measured on a four-point scale and resource intensity is measured on a two-point scale of Low and Medium. Use this resource to prioritize communication quick wins that are right for your institution.

Tactic		Scale of Impact (number of people)	Resource Intensity
1	Offer a virtual option for all live meetings and events (senate meetings, town halls, annual forums) with over 10 people		Low
2	Add an executive summary with key discussion points to senate and committee meeting minutes		Low
3	Turn on live captioning during virtual meetings to support faculty and staff with disabilities, neurodivergent, and English language learners		Low
4	Share institutional news and updates in regular supervisor-direct report check ins		Low
5	Record virtual meetings and make recordings available to employees via your institution's Intranet		Low
6	Publish meeting agendas ahead of time so the audience can prepare questions		Low
7	Solicit questions and input ahead of town halls and president or provost Q&A sessions		Low
8	Solicit audience feedback on what went well and what can be improved in future communication		Low
9	Set aside work hours for 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> shift to review emails, participate in surveys, and catch up on institutional announcements		Low
10	Distribute meeting and event transcripts after the fact		Low
11	Host at least two town halls on a single initiative at different times to accommodate shift schedules		Medium
12	Host multilingual office hours for English language learners when running employee surveys		Medium
13	Create and distribute email and event marketing templates to department and unit leaders		Medium



# Review Your Communication

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SECTION

4

Tools in This Section:  
10: Self-Editing Checklist

## Tool 10: Self-Editing Checklist

In a world of instant communication, leaders often sacrifice thoroughness for timeliness and end up replicating historical patterns of exclusion. The checklist below identifies inclusive communication must-haves so that leaders can craft timely responses while ensuring the content is sufficiently useful and provides the full context.

**How to Use This Tool:** Before you send out an update or decision for an ongoing policy or initiative, check that your communication is transparent, centers your audiences' needs, and establishes clear next steps.



### Contextualized Communication

- I explained what decision was made.
- I explained why the decision was made.
- I explained how the decision was made.



### Multi-Modal Communication

- I used at least 2-3 different forums to communicate my message.
- I incorporated accessibility tools (e.g., captions for videos, text-to-voice compatible document formats) in my messaging.
- My message can be translated to other languages, as needed.



### Inclusive Language & Imagery

- I used asset-based language throughout the message.
- I centered the needs of the group I am writing about.
- I eliminated biased language and euphemisms.
- I gathered a diverse array of perspectives for input on the message.
- I reviewed all images, headlines, captions, and graphics for responsible and accurate depictions of people from historically excluded groups.



### Feedback and Follow-Ups

- I included opportunities for the audience to find out more information or resources.
- I explicitly stated how employees can share input and feedback (i.e., forms, contact information).
- I indicated how and when we will respond to input and feedback.
- I shared follow-up tools and resources that unit leaders, deans, department chairs, and supervisors can share with their units.





# Appendix

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- Faculty and Staff Consultation Schedule Template

# Faculty and Staff Consultation Schedule Template

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Campus Group: \_\_\_\_\_

	PRE-LAUNCH	MONTHLY UPDATE	ONGOING	AS NEEDED
INPUT TOOL				
CHANNEL				

---

Campus Group: \_\_\_\_\_

	PRE-LAUNCH	MONTHLY UPDATE	ONGOING	AS NEEDED
INPUT TOOL				
CHANNEL				

---

Campus Group: \_\_\_\_\_

	PRE-LAUNCH	MONTHLY UPDATE	ONGOING	AS NEEDED
INPUT TOOL				
CHANNEL				

# Faculty and Staff Consultation Schedule Template (cont.)

Campus Group: \_\_\_\_\_

	PRE-LAUNCH	MONTHLY UPDATE	ONGOING	AS NEEDED
INPUT TOOL				
CHANNEL				

Campus Group: \_\_\_\_\_

	PRE-LAUNCH	MONTHLY UPDATE	ONGOING	AS NEEDED
INPUT TOOL				
CHANNEL				

Campus Group: \_\_\_\_\_

	PRE-LAUNCH	MONTHLY UPDATE	ONGOING	AS NEEDED
INPUT TOOL				
CHANNEL				



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At EAB, our mission is to make education smarter and our communities stronger. We work with thousands of institutions to drive transformative change through data-driven insights and best-in-class capabilities. From kindergarten to college to career, EAB partners with leaders and practitioners to accelerate progress and drive results across five major areas: enrollment, student success, institutional strategy, data analytics, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We work with each partner differently, tailoring our portfolio of research, technology, and marketing and enrollment solutions to meet the unique needs of every leadership team, as well as the students and employees they serve. Learn more at [eab.com](https://eab.com).