

# Communications Issues

Issue 27

*A Community Service of Harley House Consultants Inc.*



## Evidence-based, engaged and transparent communications

### Introduction

The mandate letters to Ministers from Prime Minister Trudeau start with the statement, “*We have promised Canadians a government that will bring real change – in both what we do and how we do it.*” The release of the mandate letters is in itself a great example of real change. This single act sets a precedent for how federal government communications should be executed.



The challenge is for federal government communicators to be able to rise to the occasion and deliver effective strategic communications advice and support in this new environment. It is our assessment at Harley House, that the best way to do this is through evidence-based, engaged and transparent communications.

### Evidence-based

Prime Minister Trudeau says that he expects the work of the government will be... “informed by performance measurement, evidence, and feedback from Canadians.” He expects Ministers to track and report on progress towards government commitments; assess the effectiveness of work performed; and align the governments resources with priorities, in order to get the results the government wants and Canadians deserve.

In support of your Minister and your department or agency, communicators must help clarify the environment that the organization is operating in and measuring the impact of programs and services. This public environmental analysis helps us understand, manage and improve what our organizations do by objectively collecting credible and reliable data.

You must also collect and analyze data and report on the impact/effect of your communications efforts, relative to what was intended or should have been achieved so that you can make course corrections and continually improve to your communications efforts.

### Engaged

Effective communications involves both active listening and responsive dissemination of information. This two-way flow of communications is acknowledged by the frequent use of the words collaboration and engagement in the mandate letters:

- We made a commitment to Canadians to pursue our goals with a renewed sense of collaboration.
- It is my expectation that you will engage constructively and thoughtfully (with Canadians, stakeholders, and the public service)
- close collaboration with your colleagues; meaningful engagement (a verity of internal and external stakeholders)
- Your professionalism and engagement with them (the media) is essential.

Ongoing, systematic and pragmatic consultation is a great way to effectively collaborate and engage with all stakeholders, whether they are internal, external or special interest stakeholders, the media or elected officials. Not only does ongoing consultation help you keep a finger on the pulse of what is happening out there, it also provides evidence-based data for tracking, prioritizing and evaluating.

*Making Communicators Better Managers—Making Managers Better Communicators*



## 2. Evidence-based, engaged and transparent communications

Meaningful public consultations are also the best way to give Canadians faith that their government is willing to listen.

### Transparent

According to the mandate letters, the government is committed to a higher level of openness and transparency. *“It is time to shine more light on government to ensure it remains focused on the people it serves. Government and its information should be open by default. If we want Canadians to trust their government, we need a government that trusts Canadians.”*



As communicators, you will play a critical role in ensuring this openness and transparency by:

- Reflecting the issues, concerns and priorities of stakeholders;
- Producing information that stakeholders need in order to understand what is going on at the time that they need it;
- Developing communications that are consistent in terms of content and process; and
- Building messages that are linked to overall government priorities.

### In Conclusion

Recent conversations with federal government heads of communications have revealed a real concern about the ability of communications shops to think strategically.

The muscles have grown weak through a lack of use under the previous administration. The consultative approach to communications has been missing as there has been a centrally driven approach to crafting messages and communications outputs.

As professional, non-partisan public sector communicators, it is critical that you provide communications that is evidenced-based, engaged and transparent.

As the Prime Minister has stated, *“Our ability, as a government, to successfully implement our platform depends on our ability to thoughtfully consider the professional, non-partisan advice of public servants.”* Let's make sure that as communicators; we are prepared to step up to the plate and deliver.

*(Dale Harley is the President of Harley House Consultants Inc. Over the past 35 years he has consulted with virtually every federal government department and agency. He has also provided strategic communications advice to many provincial and municipal governments, and various leading private sector organizations.)*

“At Harley House Consultants Inc. we believe that effective communications involves meaningful, constructive and thoughtful engagement with internal and external stakeholders. You have to be strategically positioned to provide timely, complete, honest, open and sincere information about the policies, programs and services of the Government of Canada.”

For more information about how to improve the effectiveness of your consultation and communications strategies,

- Go to [www.harleyhouse.com](http://www.harleyhouse.com) ,
- Contact Dale Harley at [dale@harleyhouse.com](mailto:dale@harleyhouse.com) or 613-882-5684.
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