Communicating Your Research Impact to Multiple Audiences

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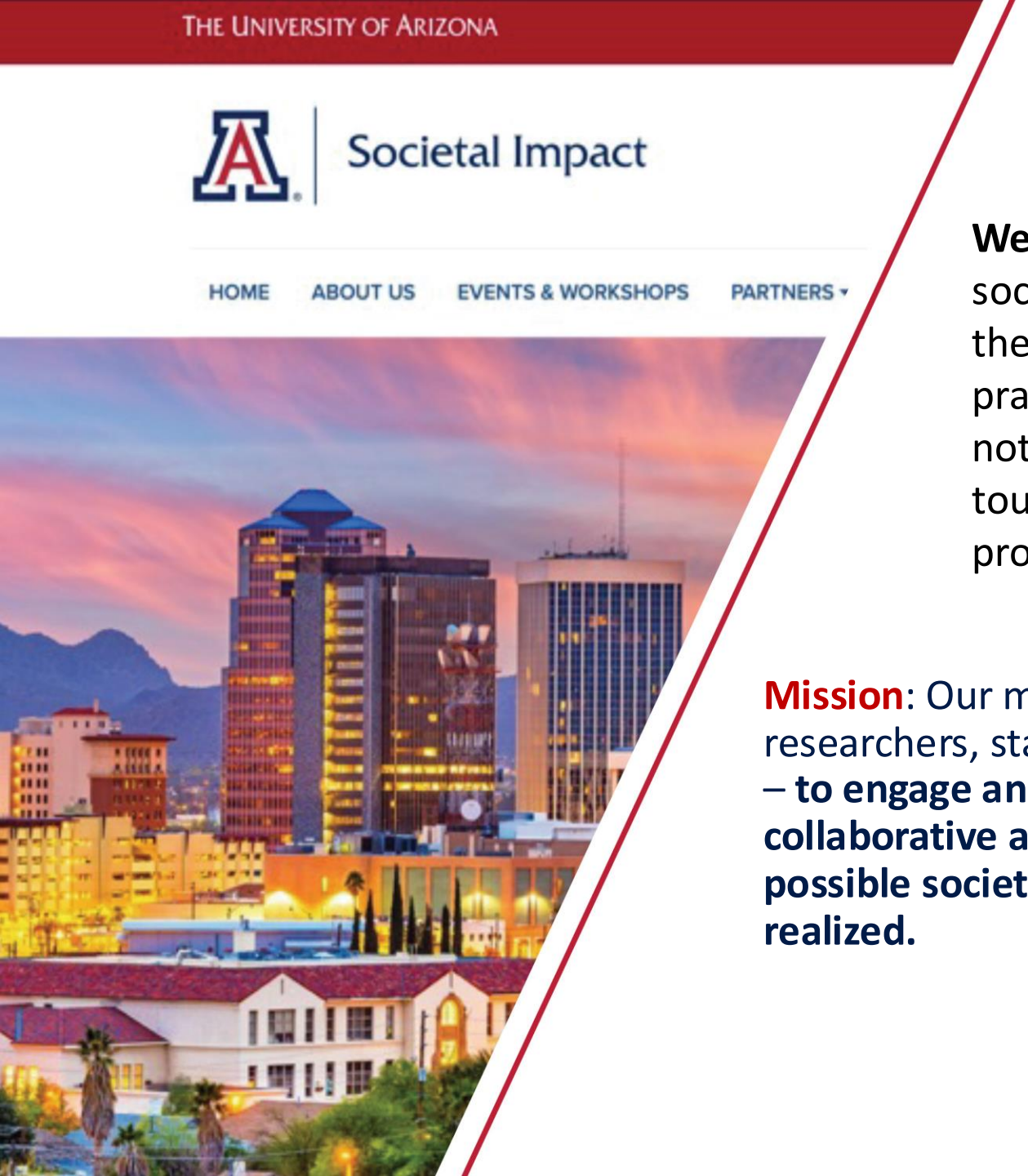
Pathways to Impact

January 22, 2026

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
RESEARCH & PARTNERSHIPS
Societal Impact



We believe research impacts the shape of society and society impacts the shape of research. We work to translate the curiosity and expertise of researchers into policies, practices, and programs to benefit society, measuring reach not only in traditional academic metrics, but in lives touched and improved. Through every step of the research process, we help center real people and their real lives.

Mission: Our mission is to work with University of Arizona faculty, researchers, staff and students – and in partnership with our communities – **to engage and prepare the next generation of researchers, promote collaborative and community-engaged research, and ensure the greatest possible societal impact of the University of Arizona's research is realized.**

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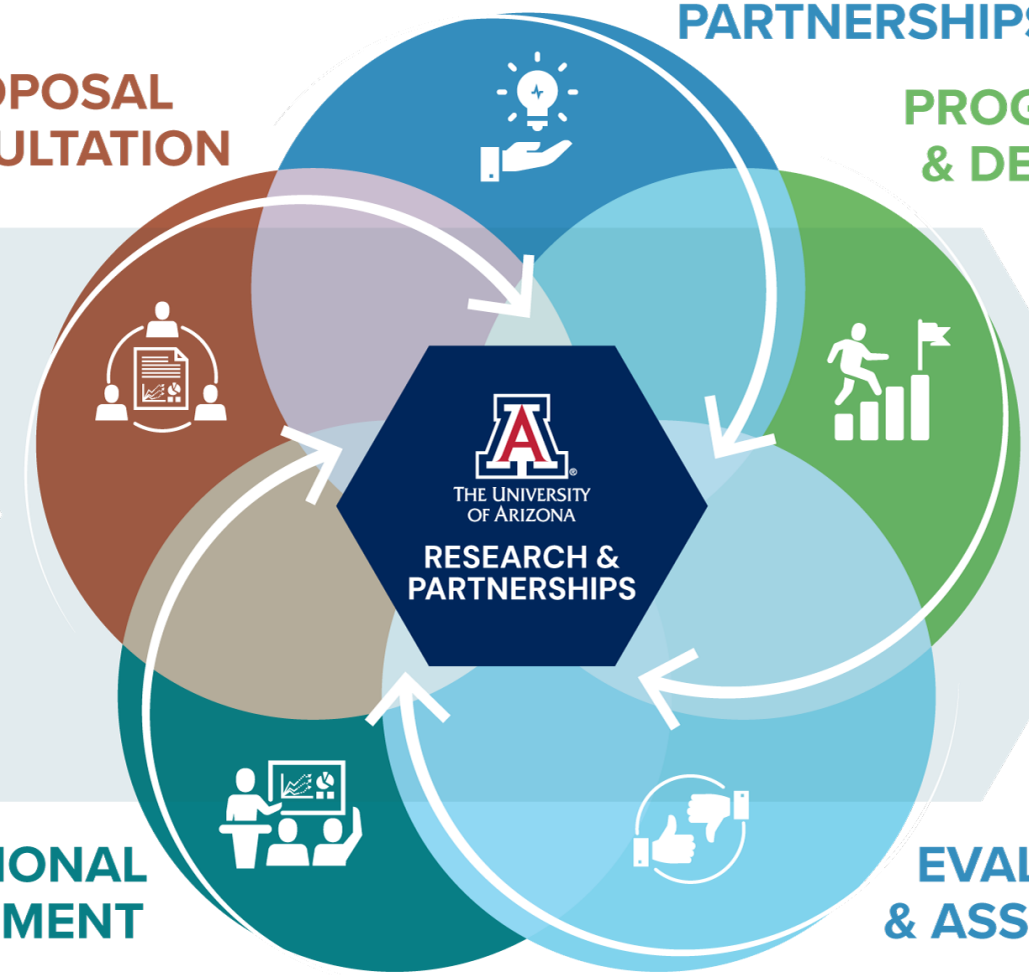


IMPACTS

- Scientific Discovery
- Public Trust & Engagement
- Education & Career Pathways
- Infrastructure & Capacity Building
- Evidence-Informed Policy
- New Technologies & Tools

Land Grant Acknowledgment

We respectfully acknowledge the University of Arizona is on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. Today, Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes, with Tucson being home to the O'odham and the Yaqui. Committed to diversity and inclusion, the University strives to build sustainable relationships with sovereign Native Nations and Indigenous communities through education offerings, partnerships, and community service.

Today's Agenda

- Science as Storytelling
- Communicating with Multiple Audiences
- Connecting to Motivated Audiences: What the Research says
- Resources

Science as Storytelling

Who am I?

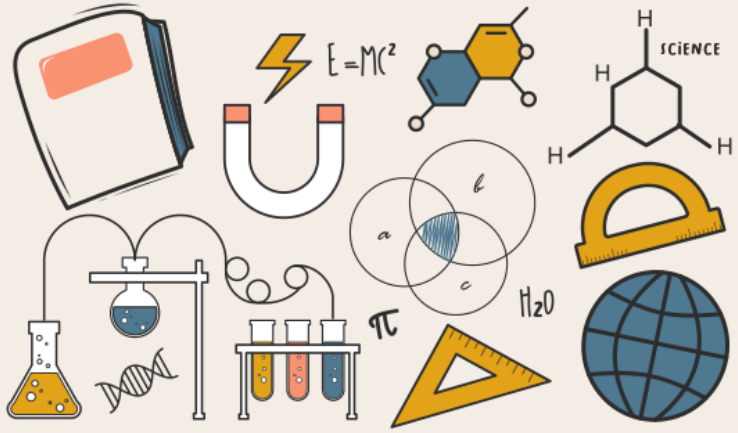
Dr. Josh T. L. Anderson
Assistant Professor in the School of Journalism

Director of the Science Communication for Social Good (SCSG) Vertically Integrated Project (VIP)

SCSG is a student research collaborative dedicated to research into science communication from a social scientific perspective

https://journalism.arizona.edu/science-communication

Think Back:
When was the first time you felt your passion for science spark?



Think Back:
When was the first time you felt your passion for science spark?

For me: watching Planet Earth as a kid

Finding the Story

Central point: Focus on communicating about the element that audiences will find meaningful.

My experience: Studying scientist and journalist perceptions of one another.

Highlights:

- Journalists (and their audiences) care more about the implications of findings than the finer process details
- Talk about methods to the point that you are seen as transparent, avoid field-specific methodological debates
- Especially emphasize actionable solutions to social problems

Putting Hope in Your Story

Findings from an online survey of science branding elements from Newman and Beets (2023).

"Hope" is the first word that came to mind for each of the fields measured (Science, Astronomy, Engineering, Psychology, Biology, and Chemistry).

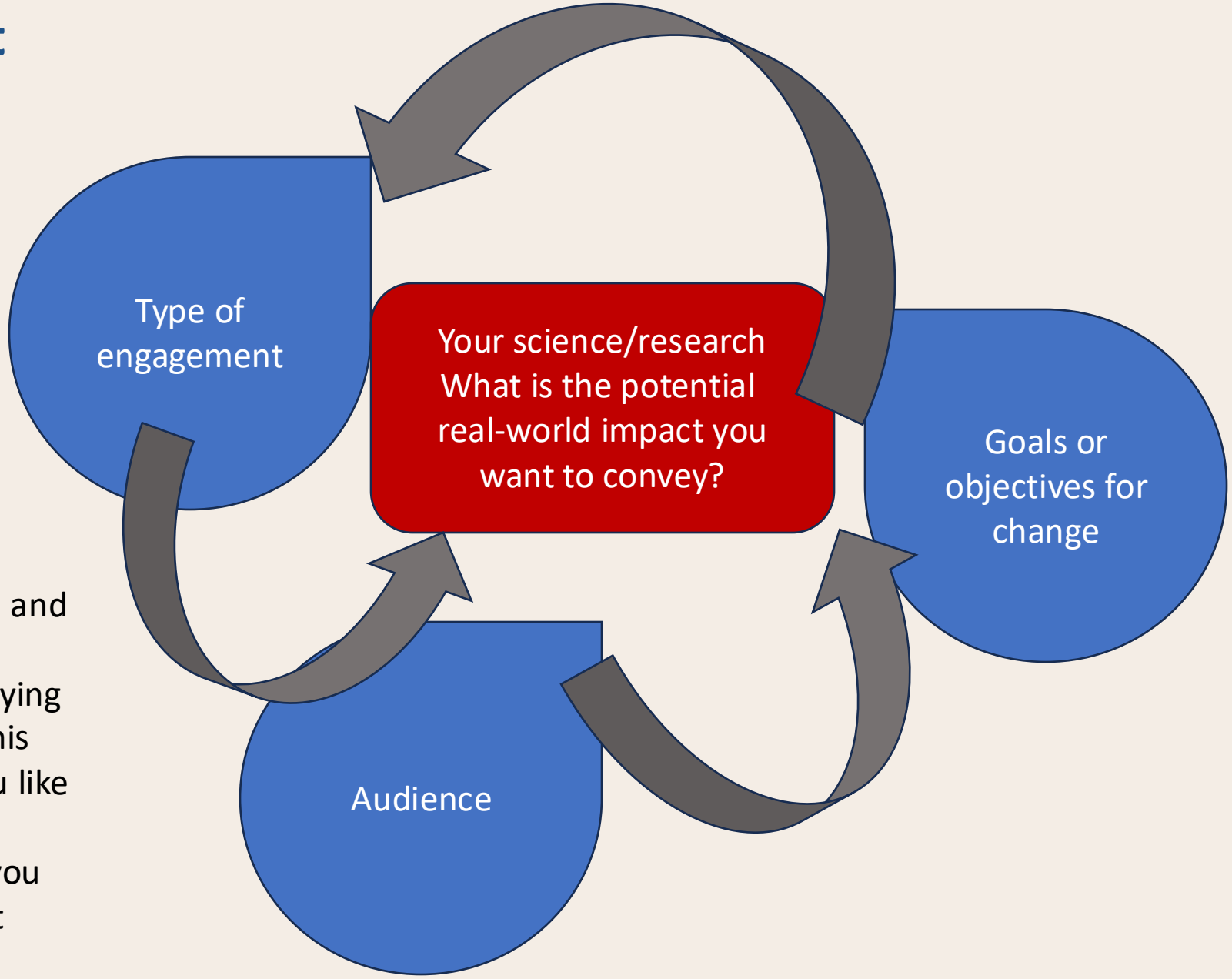
This was followed by "joy" and then "caution" for all fields except chemistry (where these were reversed).

Science, across fields, is largely seen as something that makes people hopeful for the future.

Communicating to Different Audiences, for Different Purposes

Public science communication ≠ Scientific communication with disciplinary experts

- Understand the big picture impact your science/research can have on the world and communicate it with a purpose
- What aspects of your science are you trying to convey to this specific audience, in this specific venue? What change would you like to inspire from this communication?
- In advance, decide on 3-5 main points you want the audience to take away. Keep it simple and reinforce those points.



What is the activity or venue where you will communicate with a public audience?

Is it a one-direction communication, or a dialogue happening in real time? A social media post where you could continue the interaction? Is it an op-ed or museum exhibit that is put out into the world without opportunity to respond individually?

Your science/research
What is the potential real-world impact you want to convey?

A variety of ways you may engage with the public:

- Museum exhibits
- Summer camps
- K12 classrooms
- Social media posts
- Podcasts
- Public talks
- Science tourism
- Other non-academic publications
- City and other local government meetings
- Public hearings with decision makers
- Individual meeting with decision makers
- Public events with decisions makers
- Neighborhood meetings
- Grassroots organizations for change

Type of Engagement

Communicating to Stakeholders & Influencers

Your science/research
What is the potential real-world impact you want to convey?

Who are Influencers?

Anyone who needs to know about the project, will be a champion for the project or a decision maker for change.

1. City officials
2. School leaders
3. Clergy
4. Community leaders
5. Family members
6. Community organizations/nonprofits
7. Business and industry members
8. Chambers of Commerce
9. City/County offices (One Stop)
10. Families and elders
11. Local and state legislators

Who are Stakeholders?

Anyone benefitting from the project - directly from research findings, from other project activities, or from your personal knowledge & experiences.

1. Students
2. Families
3. Interest groups
4. Industry
5. General public
6. Community members

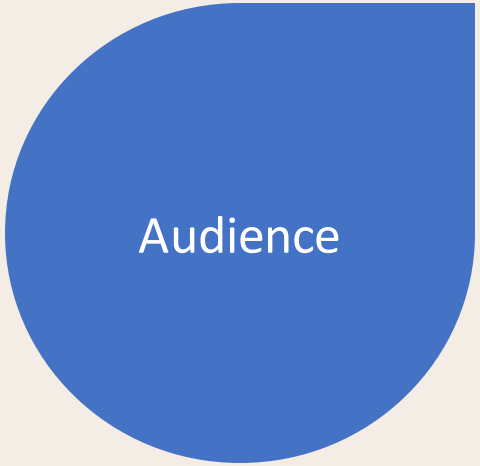
Audience

Connecting with your Audience
Most Important: It Starts with a Relationship

Your science/research
What is the potential real-world impact you want to convey?

Who is your audience?

- Age
- Culture
- Language
- Lived experience
- Their motivations
- Their interests
- Their level of interest & understanding



Many community members want to know:

- Who you are.
- Your motivations.
- Why you chose to work with them.
- You recognize and value their input, knowledge, resources, contributions, traditions.
- You are interested to learn more about them and their communities.
- You are willing to learn from them.
- What happens when the project/grant ends.
- You understand and respect how influence flows within their community.

What type of change are you hoping to make for your specific audience and type of engagement?

Your science/research
What is the potential real-world impact you want to convey?

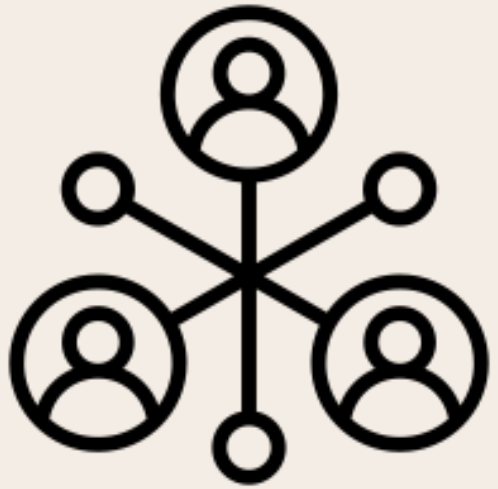
Some examples include:

- Increase interest & awareness
- Inform or convey knowledge
- Change behaviors
- Change attitudes
- Encourage a career direction
- Influence policy
- Influence decision making
- Build relationships
- Improve trust in science
- Promote good work
- Promote events
- Sway public opinion

Goals or objectives for change

What other reasons might you have to communicate your science to various audiences?

Communicating to Stakeholders



Step 1: Be specific in identifying your **stakeholders**.

- Rather than *all undergraduates in biology*, start with a specific group of students.

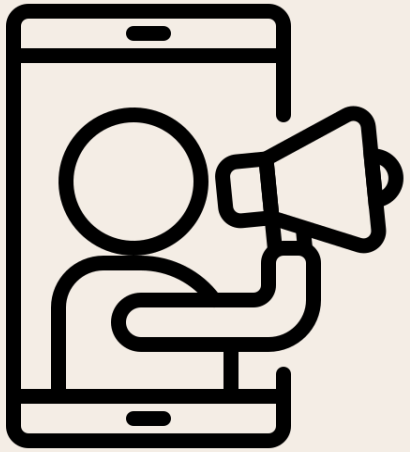
Step 2: Be curious about your stakeholders.

- How do they consume information?
- What are their biggest concerns at this moment?
- What would be their next step forward?
- What would be a realistic stretch goal for them?
- Consult others who are experts, or at least familiar with your stakeholders.

Step 3: Recognize that your stakeholders are experts about themselves and their communities.

- Build early feedback pathways into your project.
- Be agile and adopt stakeholder recommendations.
- If possible, include stakeholders in your planning/implementation team.

Communicating to Influencers



Step 1: Brainstorm all possible project influencers.

- Include influencers from all project partners.
- Include influencers from all project stakeholders.

Step 2: Be curious about your influencers.

- In what ways do they influence your stakeholders, and the larger community?
- How do they consume information?
- What are their biggest concerns at this moment?
- Be specific about how they can champion the project.

Step 3: Understand and respect how influence flows in the stakeholders' communities.

- Communicate often to influencers.
- Be agile and adopt influencer recommendations.
- If possible, include influencers in your planning/implementation team.

Keys to Effective Communication – building public trust in science

- Competition for attention is fierce and human attentive capacity is very limited.
- Find and emphasize immediate relevance to core concerns.
- Understand what motivates your audience.
- Be consistent with and approach from a values perspective. Validating shared values may get you a conversation.
- Find actionable points. Define something that is easy to see on the next step of a journey.
- You can't necessarily teach someone, but you can make some variations in sound and light. Remember that learning is co-productive, so give people the opportunity to co-produce their own learning.

ASTC Association of Science and Technology Centers

New ASTC survey shows gaps between public support for science and understanding of how science is impacted by federal actions

Our findings reveal an urgent need to deepen and clarify the connections between people's everyday lives and interests and public investments in scientific institutions and infrastructure. Members of the public continue to value and rely on science: 72% of respondents agree or strongly agree that "science benefits people like me" and 89% say that federal government investment in STEM education is "important" or "very important" for future economic prosperity.

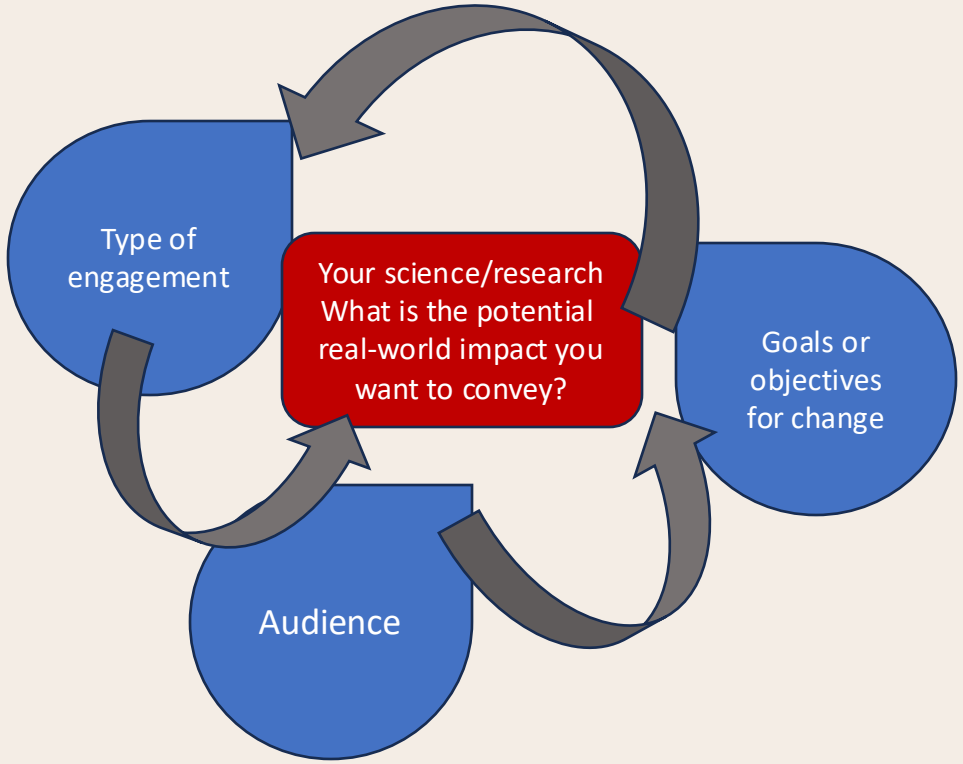
The findings suggest several opportunities to clarify the connections between science, science policy, and people's priorities and experiences:

- Increase public awareness of the impact of recent federal actions on their interests (including their current everyday lives and their economic future)
- Close gaps in public understanding of how science and technology are impacted by federal policy
- Strengthen and expand the opportunity for the public to engage with the scientific community

Working with Legislators and other Policy or Decision Makers

"At a time like this, all voices matter, in whatever way you want to engage"

Engagement and relationship building at the state and local level is critical! They need scientific input from trusted and credible sources. Their time is limited, so engaging with their staff is critical to get in the door.



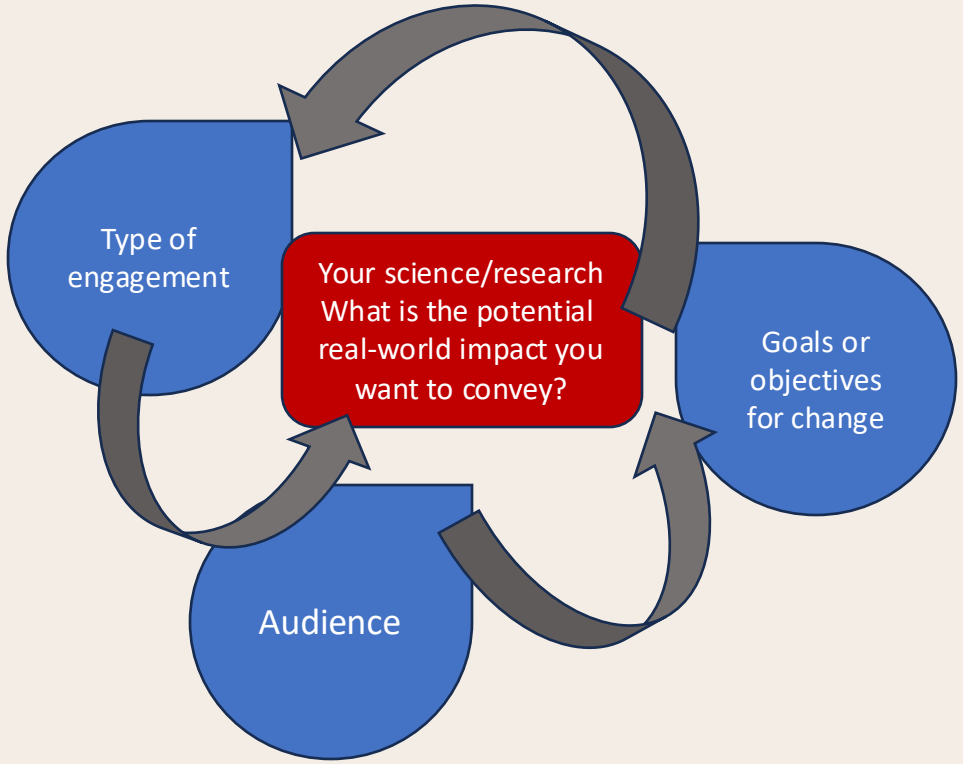
How to approach:

- Although there is an information deficit, they don't want to 'be educated'. One-way exchanges don't lead to change, dialogue does.
- Don't be afraid to get away from the science at first and build a relationship. Go to events where the legislator may be, town halls, etc.
- Make the science relevant locally and personally. Think about economic impact, education and workforce, public and environmental health value.
- Focus on the societal implications - what does the law maker care about? Align your message with mutual interests.
- Get past the headlines about the lawmaker to understand what issues they may prioritize. Read their newsletters, their bio, understand 'who they are'. E.g., if they are interested in fishing and hunting, they may care about land conservation.
- Frame the message around impact and the broader community benefit.
- Avoid jargon and buzzwords - scientific OR political. While data makes the story credible, the story is what appeals to logic and emotions.

Working with legislators and other policy or decision makers

Getting Started

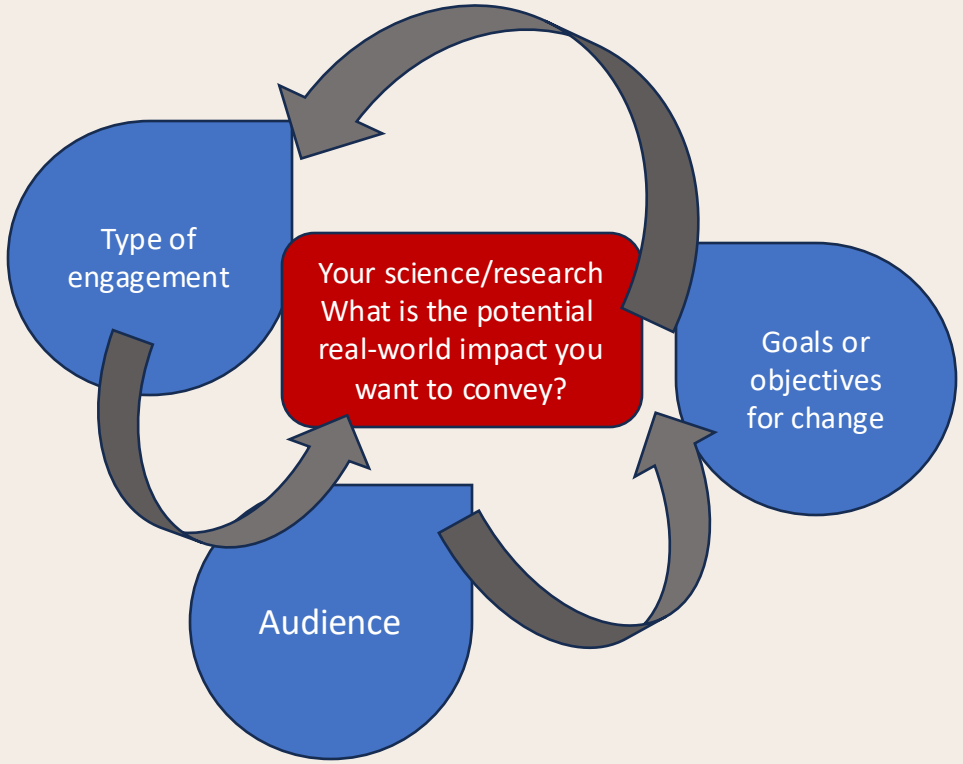
- Differentiate between your actions as a citizen/constituent and a UA employee. Depending on the type of contact, you will approach it and inform differently.



- At the **state & local level,** go to town halls and to district offices. For town halls, draft a question in advance about a locally relevant issue. Get to know staffers and have conversations. Have your business card ready.
- Ask for a meeting. For local policy makers, this could be anywhere - their office, a local coffee shop, their place of business.
- Invite them for a visit or tour of facilities. This is a good way to share research and showcase a facility. Make sure your university leadership (Government Relations Office, your department) knows about the visit. Be prepared for a longer conversation.
- Look for opportunities where science can inform policy decisions (e.g. AI data centers.) You could be asked to testify if you have relevant disciplinary expertise
- School Boards are another potential target for your expertise and advocacy.
- Practice your message and prepare for questions. Use pictures and graphics.

Working with local media to promote an event or discovery

- "Facts tell, stories sell": Pick 2-3 points and build a story around it.
- Find a 'character' for your story, for example, one person telling 'their story' vs a project director declaring 'we do this for many people'.
- Also find the spokesperson, someone who is confidant on camera. Do this BEFORE reaching out.



- Find a news 'peg'. You want action, so narrow your focus and craft your pitch.
- Target local media – what are the 'morning shows' or other locally produced media that highlight community news stories & events.
- Consider if there is a timing element. For example, if is this to promote a same day event, make it a morning show.
- Build lasting relationships to turn into multiple stories as your work evolves.
- Most media coverage is now pushed to YouTube rather than the news station's website, so reshare all coverage on your own media channels afterwards for multiple purposes.
- Utilize interns and student workers who are likely more familiar with social media.

Resources

National Academies of Science, Engineering & Math: COLLOQUIUM | DECEMBER 2023
Reimagining Science Communication in the COVID Era and Beyond

COMPASS amplifies the impact of science and knowledge to improve the well-being of all people and places by developing skilled, strategic communicators, collaborators, and trusted sources of information.

From the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) - UA is an institutional member

- The mission of the **Local Science Engagement Network (LSEN)** is to mobilize scientists and engineers as Advocates through local and state-based networks across the U.S. The goal is for Advocates to engage with their communities, elevating the visibility of and trust in science while building and satisfying the demand for scientific evidence that addresses needs, solves problems, and informs local and state decision-making.
- Working With Congress: A Scientist's Guide to Policy
- Public Engagement
- SciLine: SciLine is an editorially independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit service for journalists and scientists. Our goal is to help get more science into news stories. We connect reporters quickly to scientific experts and validated evidence. And we work with scientists to amplify their expertise and help them give voice to the facts. Our work is fully funded by philanthropies, and everything we do is free.

Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science

SciChronicles Podcast : Welcome to SciChronicles, the podcast where biologists from all walks of life share fascinating stories from their personal and professional journeys.

London School of Economics Blog, Impact: Understanding Impact and practice in academic research. The unethical burden of public engagement and the "alt-output" problem

Connecting with Key Audiences: Thinking like a Social Scientist

- Much science communication research works like any other social science research
- Impacts are often outcome variables and strategies may be explanatory variables
- Thinking about science communication like a social scientist means defining measurable and specific impacts
- In social science research you may find some surprising results

Poll of the Room:
Do you feel like scientists are well-trusted in contemporary society?

Connecting with Key Audiences: Trust in Scientists

- A recent survey-based study2 across 68 different countries challenged assumptions that trust in scientists was low

• Scientists globally enjoy above midpoint of trust (global average is 3.62; midpoint 3)

•U.S. is above global average at 3.86 and countries such as U.K. (3.82), Canada (3.81), and China (3.67)

•Trust in scientists negatively associated with:

- ○being male ($\beta = -0.019$; $p < 0.001$)
- ○conservatism ($\beta = -0.034$; $p < 0.001$)
- ○populism ($\beta = -0.022$; $p < 0.001$)
- ○ social dominance orientation ($\beta = -0.098$; $p < 0.001$)

Connecting with Key Audiences: Evidence on impacts

- Trust
  - Demonstrate trustworthiness, not just competence
  - Especially openness and transparency3
  - And demonstrate alignment of shared goals such as public safety4
- Knowledge
  - Is not the same as agreement5
  - Is aided by removing barriers to learning and efficacy6
- Support for research funding
  - Demonstrate the value of the project to shared social institutions7
  - Separate intention from behavior

Connecting with Key Audiences: Research at the U of A

SCSG is oriented toward applying social science research techniques to study how science issues play out in society

Upcoming project: public perceptions of *in vitro* fertilization (IVF)

How does framing of IVF in a news story on the basis of identity affect perceptions of …

- Support for IVF
- Information seeking about IVF
- Trust in fertility doctors

Follow us to learn about this project and more:
https://journalism.arizona.edu/science-communication

Footnote references:

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Fall 2025

- September 16 — Research & Societal Impact in a Changing Landscape
- October 15 — Building Authentic Partnerships to Maximize Impact
- November 18 — Innovation & Entrepreneurship as Impact
- December 9 — Developing Your Research Impact Identity

Spring 2026

- January 22 — Communicating Your Research Impact to Multiple Audiences
- February 18 — Community Engagement in Research & Innovation
- March 17 — Collaborative Project Management for Multi-Organizational Teams
- April 21 — Evaluating your Societal Impact Outcomes
- May 1 — Assessing Research Impact at the Organizational Level

All seminars via Zoom
12:00 - 1:00pm MST
with extended Q&A until 1:30

Leverage your research to benefit society

Join the office of Societal Impact for our Pathways to Impact webinar series, where we'll dive deeper into defining and refining how your research makes a difference beyond the lab or field. Whether you're just starting out or looking to sharpen your focus, these sessions will help you turn ideas into action and impact.

Thank You

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