



**Summary from Communications Discussion Group  
Monday, 10 September 2018  
3:45 pm – 5:45 pm**

**Discussion Participants:**

Roger McCarthy, United States – Moderator  
Russell Lamb, United Kingdom  
Patrick Hartmann, Germany  
Fola Lasisi, Nigeria  
Jose Albarran, Mexico

Stane Pejovnik, Slovenia  
Mike Shand, South Africa  
Luis, Jauregui, Argentina  
Bruno Revellin-Falcoz, France  
Hugh Bradlow, Australia

**Advance Materials Provided (posted on the CAETS website):**

- Germany
- Canada
- United States
- United Kingdom

**Framing Questions regarding Communicating with the Public:**

- How do engineering academies interact with the public?
  - What are the primary communications channels?
  - What are the primary audiences targeted?
- Are there best practices that can be distilled from CAETS member academies?
  - How do you determine which mechanisms are the most effective for a given audience?
  - Do you maintain and analyze specific metrics?
- What might CAETS do to communicate the value of engineering to society, policy-makers, and other stakeholders?
  - What are the “common” messages that should be communicated globally?
  - What means should be used to communicate those messages?
  - Should we build alliances with other engineering organizations in order to gain broader distribution networks?
- What are the next steps for CAETS?



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**Key Points from Discussion**

There are huge variations across the CAETS membership in:

- Structure
- Target “audience”
- Sophistication in communicating with the “public”

Despite these differences there were some areas of broad agreement:

- Communication, to be effective, has to be developed and maintained across ALL domains
- You must have a dedicated communications team of professional full-time communicators with digital media expertise
  - Members, with a few exceptions (e.g. US NAE), have 3 to 10
- There are relatively few messages common to CAETS members
- CAETS could become an extremely valuable venue/forum for exchange of best practices/studies on common communication challenges, i.e. risks of technologies such as nuclear power, impact of climate change, etc.

CAETS members have very different target audiences

- Some CAETS members are completely independent while others are funded directly by the government
- Funded societies make influence on national technical policy a specific action agenda
  - They make the National Executive leader the “patron” of the Society
  - They work to place their members in key government positions with power
  - None see to feel that any conflict situations had developed that affected their independence
    - At least one observed they got better news coverage when they took a position at odds with the government
    - Another observed that a key to conflict avoidance was concentrating on the technical

Communicate about what? To who? How?

- Strategy and style depend on content, message and the audience
  - Many of our members only have vague qualitative notions
- UK delegates observed that development of the communications strategy **MUST** precede any thought of content and style



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- Australia engaged a PR firm to professionally survey its target audiences
  - This is an excellent example of something that could be shared on a “members only” section of a CAETS website
  - They found they had small brand recognition, and their primary audience was Universities
  - “(Too) Old white men” is the current brand image they seek to change
    - Working on new professional website and acronym
    - New website design will go hot in November
    - CAETS should look at what they can steal shamelessly

### What is the role of CAETS communications?

- Relatively few issues common to all CAETS members, but where there is consensus the message could be strong
- What is the audience?
  - Heavily dependent on the strategy and message
    - The CAETS strategy will be necessarily constrained by who knows what we are and what we do
    - This varies widely because of the different constitution of the CAETS members
  - General consensus that the most important audience IS the CAETS membership itself
    - Particularly successful communications lessons learned
    - Important technical studies of pressing issues
    - You don’t have to agree on anything to use good data in the mission of your own academy
      - Example: EVERYONE faces fracking

### Road forward: What can CAETS do?

- Strong consensus that CAETS could function as a world wide clearing house of experience, data, studies, and lessons learned by the various member Academies
- Ideal vehicle is the new CAETS website, to share materials or links
- The spectrum of common challenges CAETS members face is much larger than the consensus amongst members
  - Every academy faces a GMO issue
    - The different paths academies have taken on this issue have produced radically different outcomes in the face of the same science
  - Every academy faces their national challenges from:
    - Nuclear



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- Fresh Water
- Fracking

Best lessons and practices from CAETS member communications

- Engineer the content for the audience, make it user friendly and target relevant
- Building a technical “fact checking” database for journalists
- Put out “easy to understand” background briefs for journalists on complex current technical issues, e.g. 3D printed organs, quantum computing and sensing
  - You get rewarded by being quoted a lot
- Establish an Academy journalism award for the best “engineering” reporting in your nation
  - The press loves to report awards to themselves
- Have topical seminars on technology
  - The US NAE does online webinars
  - The Germans do them at their academy
    - They have found serving free beer dramatically increased interest and attendance

Fundamental CAETS Member Communication Mission

- Improving the outcomes of the world’s decisions related to science and technology.