

## AUDIOCAST

# Reflections from the Field: Strategic Communications for State System Leaders Navigating Times of Social Conflict

## THE LISTENING GUIDE

### Introduction

This listening guide was developed to support individual and group reflection as you listen to the audiocast *Making the Case: Strategic Communications for State System Leaders Navigating Times of Social Conflict*. It is part of a portfolio of resources that aims to provide state system leaders with practical guidance and vivid approaches to strategic communications in our current context of social and political polarization. The call to action in the audiocast is

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*Effective strategic communications is values-driven and bi-directional.  
It is fueled by deep listening, patient persistence, and authentic relationships.*

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The listening guide is organized to align with the three main sections of the audiocast:

- **Theme 1:** Offering both courageous and compelling language in your strategic communications
- **Theme 2:** Cross-sector collaboration as a strategy for strategic communications
- **Theme 3:** Data and storytelling as a strategy for strategic communications

# Theme 1: Offering both courageous and compelling language in your strategic communications

## Three Big Ideas From Theme 1

**1** Fear is often at the root of the social conflict we see.

**2** Strategic communications is most powerful when it is relatable and humanizes the topic.

**3** Start with perspective taking. Understand the values, hopes, and concerns of your audience.

## Individual Reflection Questions

*What are your insights from this section?*

*What would you like to learn more about?*

## Group Reflection Questions

*What might be the root cause of social conflict in your learning community?  
Why do you think so?*

In this section, Sheila talks about making courageous messages human and relatable. She suggests the following:

*Using language that describes in a human way what you're trying to do or what you're trying to say, I think people can hear the message in a way that they can relate to and that they can understand without kind of turning off the message right away.*

*How might your key messages be courageous, relatable, and human?*

## Theme 2: Cross-sector collaboration as a strategy for strategic communications

### Three Big Ideas From Theme 2

- 1** To truly serve the whole person, take an ecosystem approach.
- 2** Other interest holders can help you carry your message and garner support.
- 3** Center the strengths of young people, families, and communities.

### Individual Reflection Questions

*What are your insights from this section?*

*What would you like to learn more about?*

## Group Reflection Questions

In this section, Maria frames cross-sector collaboration in the science of learning and development. She observes the following:

*The neuroscience also tells us that our brains are extremely resilient and malleable and with the right interventions and supports, every child can learn and have positive academic and life outcomes. And this means that the last few decades of almost exclusive focus on classroom reform, high quality teaching, curriculum testing, all of which are important, but they still have not reduced the disparities among racial and income groups. Thus . . . many of us have come to understand that we really need a whole child approach[,] and schools and education system leaders need to work collaboratively across sectors.*

*How might you engage with the child- and youth-serving agencies and other interest holders to support your whole person approach or priorities? Consider your social and emotional well-being, restorative justice, trauma-informed practices, and/or mental and behavioral health initiatives.*

In this section, Sheila underscores the importance of strengths-based approaches to student, family, and community engagement. She emphasizes the following:

*I think it's critically important in the schools and with the leaders and the district leaders that they really see the community, the families, the community organizations, all as assets that can support the growth and the development of the students in their care.*

*What are the strengths and assets of local communities in your state?  
How might you learn more about them?*

# Theme 3: Data and storytelling as a strategy for strategic communications

## Three Big Ideas From Theme 3

**1** Personal stories that illuminate common ground are powerful.

**2** Avoid jargon.

**3** Find the best messenger in your ecosystem.

## Individual Reflection Questions

*What are your insights from this section?*

*What would you like to learn more about?*

## Group Reflection Questions

*How might you discover the local stories that illustrate your key messages?*

In the closing, Maria suggests the following:

*Don't succumb to the polarization—as hard as it is—the politicization. . . . [F]ind ways to keep your eye on that ball of moving your system, your children[,] forward and not let the negativity dissuade you from the hard work.*

*As a state system leader, how might you persist in promoting the conditions that support the health and well-being of your state's educators, young people, and their families?*

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