



THE FUTURE NEEDS A PUSH

SEPTEMBER 2024

FEATURED

STORYTELLING WITH
PURPOSE

COMMUNICATING
SYSTEMS CHANGE

STRATEGIES FOR
EFFECTIVE
COMMUNICATION

Communicating Impact: Leveraging Storytelling

“Stories make, prop up, and bring down systems. Stories shape how we understand the world, our place in it, and our ability to change it.”

-Ella Saltmarshe, global expert in the fields of narrative and systems change

As a collective of researchers, educators, and allies united for systems change, the STEM PUSH Network understands the power of strategic communications and storytelling in sustaining, scaling, and growing our mission of ensuring opportunity for Black, Latine, and Indigenous students in STEM.

Strategic communications is about sharing the successes, the discoveries, and the milestones of the STEM PUSH Network, but is different from promotion– it’s a way of defining and understanding the work internally as well as a means for greater external impact: compelling communications can build empathy and enthusiasm for the cause, and attract allies and resources.

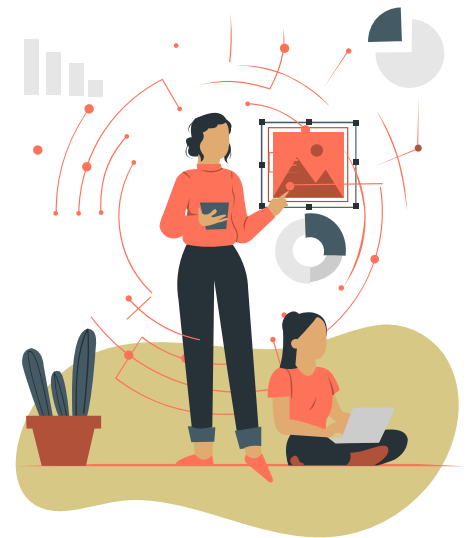
Over the last four years, STEM PUSH has made storytelling and strategic communications a key strategy to move systems change in college admissions.

In this newsletter we’ll highlight our strategies and successes in communicating for impact and we’ll share ideas for storytelling for systems change.

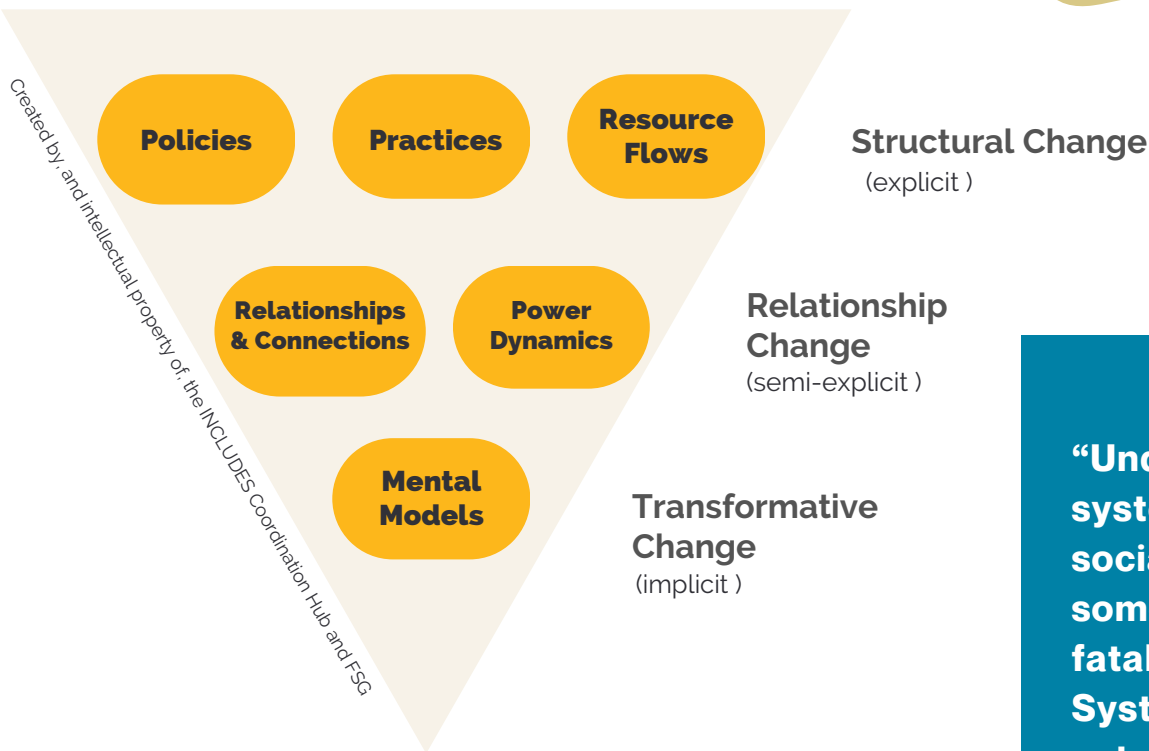


Storytelling with Purpose

Systems change begins with people. It can be accomplished through relational changes, changes in value or ideas, or what individuals or groups think is possible for the future. Change inspires people to think, and to act differently. Stories are the best ways to move people into adopting new thoughts, ideas and behaviors.



Six Conditions of Systems Change



Studies show that as you hear a story unfold, your **brain waves actually start to synchronize** with those of the storyteller.



"Listeners, in turn, may keep thinking about the story and talk to others about it, which **reinforces the memory** and, over time, can drive a **broader change in attitudes.**"

Therefore, stories have the power to **alter broader attitudes and affect behavior** (e.g., systems change).



Renken, E. (2020, April 11). How stories connect and persuade us: Unleashing the brain power of narrative. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/04/11/815573198/how-stories-connect-and-persuade-us-unleashing-the-brain-power-of-narrative>

“Understanding systems is key to social change but sometimes sparks fatalist thinking. Systems are not actors or agents -- people are-- and people can change systems. Building systems into stories are effective when you can show how individuals can change them.”

Nate Kendall - Taylor and Bill Pitkin

FrameWorks Institute. (n.d.). <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/external-article/we-need-to-talk-about-how-we-talk-about-systems-change/>

Communicating for Systems Change

STEM PUSH and its pre-college STEM programs are simultaneously communicating with a number of different audiences at different times. Using the NSF INCLUDES Coordination Hub's framework for systems change, STEM PUSH has worked to identify target audiences most impacted by the Network's systems change work.

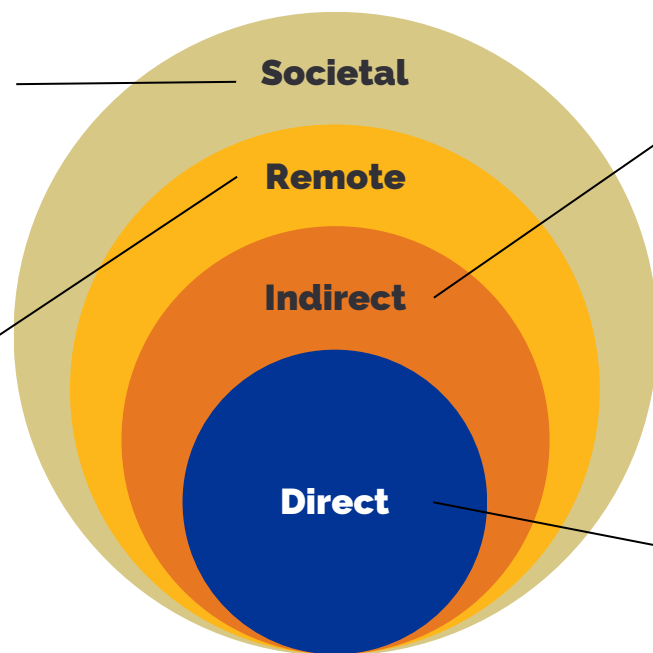
Target Audiences

At the macro level

Legislators / elected officials, University leaders

At a distance but are influenced by or could influence the project

Potential funders
Federal agencies
Professional associations
Potential partners



More distant, but have an existing interest in the project

Other partners
NSF
Participants' family

Directly interact with the project

Participating faculty
Participating students
Administration

Created by, and intellectual property of Equal Measure and NSF INCLUDES Coordination Hub

Why is this important?

Different audiences care about different things. Pre-college STEM programs might communicate the value of their program to students in a way that shows them a pathway into higher education. While the same program might showcase the rigor of the STEM work that students complete during their time within the program, making them an ideal candidate to persist in STEM courses at their college or university.

STEM PUSH is solving a problem within higher education admissions processes. Our programs have been vetted and tested with evidence-based standards giving higher education the peace of mind that those students are well positioned to succeed at their institutions. In a sea full of applicants, STEM PUSH participants can stand out for officers. This supports students in their STEM learning journeys and institutions in recruiting top talent, from all racial and ethnic backgrounds.



Social Media

A powerful tool

Social media is a powerful tool. It's about content, conversations, community, audience connections, and relationships. It is not just a broadcast channel or a sales and marketing tool.

Authenticity, honesty, and open dialogue are key. Social media not only allows you to hear what people say about you but enables you to respond.

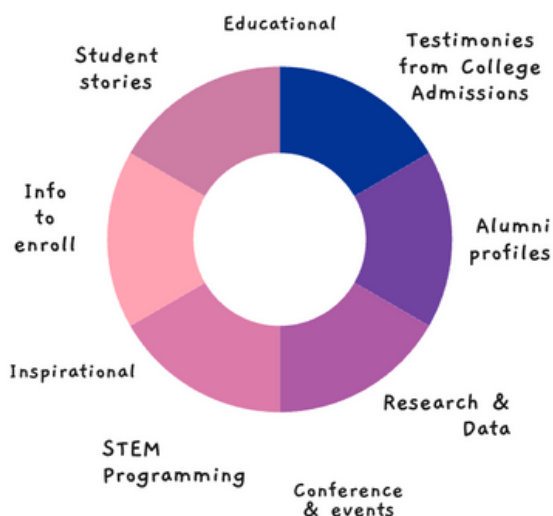


The STEM PUSH Network has worked with the 37 pre-college STEM programs to build storytelling skills and strategic communications capacity, especially with social media. With limited resources and staff, communicating a programs impact can often fall to the bottom of a leaders to-do list. Within the Network, PCSPs are continuously looking for new ways to communicate their impact with the field.

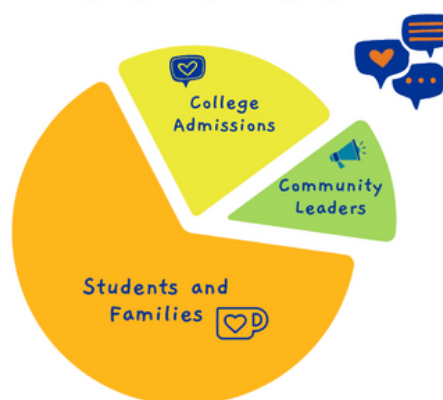
"If a tree falls in the forest, and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?"

Sharing relevant, useful content to showcase the power of pre-college STEM programs and their students has been a focal point of Network conversations and social media trainings.

Ideas for Content



Audience



STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION ON SOCIALS

STEM PUSH has utilized and shared several strategies for effective communication on social media.



Know your audience.

Understand what they care about and what platforms they are using.



Have a clear why.

Communication should provide value. Why are you posting? What value are you providing?



Be authentic.

Be clear about who you are and how you want your audience to engage with you.



Good content matters.

Entice your audience with stunning visuals. Share compelling stories.



Engage in dialogue.

Social media allows you to see what your audience cares about. Engage with comments and responses.



Test and iterate.

Track what content performs well and what content doesn't. Adjust accordingly.



Build community.

Connect with others, follow accounts aligned with your goals, share relevant content from others.





Which paragraph resonates more with you?

Paragraph #1 - STEM is a great way to engage students and launch them on meaningful academic career trajectories. Students who engage in STEM in early grades are more likely to follow a concrete STEM trajectory throughout their schooling and lives.

Paragraph #2: [Issam Abushuban](#), a former student participant of the Gene Team pre-college STEM Program, was introduced to college level research during his summer with Gene Team. While Issam found his time in the program challenging, he credits his experiences with PCR machines, gel electrophoresis, and other lab techniques with his decision to pursue a degree in bioengineering.

It's clear that storytelling is a significant way to share impact with a wide range of audiences.

STEM PUSH will continue to share compelling research and progress in our mission to broaden participation of Black, Latine, and Indigenous students in STEM and create systemic change in higher education admissions. Get new stories and see big milestones (like our recent accreditation) by joining us at www.stempushnetwork.org or following us on LinkedIn, Facebook and X.



The STEM PUSH Network is funded by The National Science Foundation's (NSF) Eddie Bernice Johnson INCLUDES Initiative, a comprehensive national effort to enhance U.S. leadership in discoveries and innovations by focusing on diversity, inclusion and broadening participation in STEM at scale. STEM PUSH is also co-funded by the NSF Innovative Technology Experiences for Students and Teachers (ITEST) program and the Advancing Informal STEM Learning (AISL) program.

