

Audience Mapping: The Why, How and What to Look For

WHY AUDIENCE MAPPING?

A strategic communications plan should always include an assessment that identifies your key audiences and gauges their awareness of and support for your reform efforts. This piece is essential for your college- and career-ready communications and outreach plan because:

- You need to be clear about what audiences you are trying to reach and/or mobilize and where they stand on the college- and career-ready agenda in order to develop messages and tactics that will resonate;
- You need information that will help you to prioritize strategies and target resources; and
- You need to establish a baseline for measuring the effectiveness of your communications and engagement strategies.

Audience mapping does not have to be overly elaborate or scientific (like professional polling or focus groups), but it does need to be credible. Those contributing to the mapping must know the key audiences and have a sense, even if key audiences haven't yet taken a position on college- and career-ready policies, of what position they are likely to take based on previous policy debates and experiences. Your audience map will change over time, but from the outset it must represent the views of your campaign's leadership team about which audiences are critical to the success of your agenda.

HOW TO DO AUDIENCE MAPPING

There is no one right way to build an audience map. At a minimum, however, any audience map should:

- **Include groups from inside and outside the education and policy worlds.** While you may not have as keen a sense about the levels of awareness and support among groups closest to the grassroots level, you need to include them if they are needed to help advance your agenda. Additionally, you want to be careful not to lump different audiences together just because they are in the same sector. For example, college faculty may view the college- and career-ready agenda very differently than teachers, even though they are both representatives of the education community.
- **Separately assess awareness and support.** It is important to gauge these factors individually because some groups may be more aware of your efforts than supportive of them and vice versa, which has ramifications for how you structure your communications and outreach strategy.
- **Express awareness and support in quantitative terms.** Rating your audiences according to a numeric scale (a 1-5 scale tends to work best) quickly establishes an order of magnitude for awareness and support and makes a lot of information readily digestible. While a numeric rating cannot capture all of the nuances of what audiences know and feel, you are looking for patterns over precision – namely audience dynamics that may significantly affect your efforts.

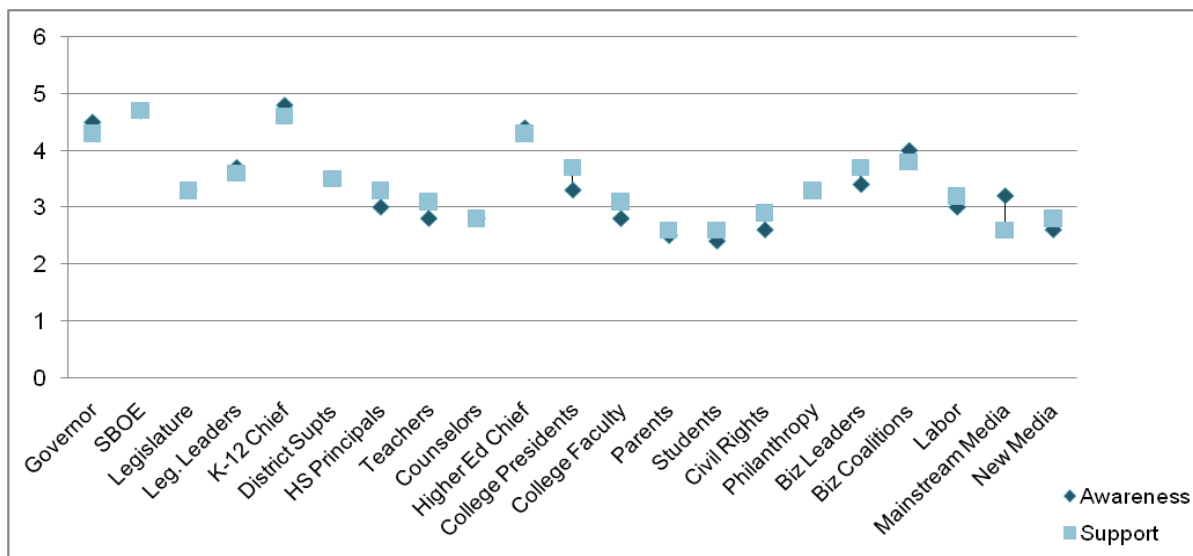
In addition, when completing your audience map you should:

- **Involve a manageable number of knowledgeable people in the mapping process.** If one person completes the initial assessment, you should vet that assessment with people who have keen (preferably first-hand) insights about your target audiences. Alternatively, you can have several key people complete the assessment simultaneously and then reconcile the results. However the assessment is done, your leadership team should generally agree that the final map represents an accurate read of the current environment.

Audience Mapping: The Why, How and What to Look For

- Focus on the average member of a particular audience, rather than the extremes, in assigning awareness and support ratings.** There will always be exceptions to the rule when making judgments about audiences, such as legislators who are strongly opposed to aligning standards and faculty members that strongly favor alignment. The goal in audience mapping is to determine central tendency – what does the *average* member of a particular group know about the college- and career-ready agenda and how do they feel about it? Assigning audience ratings is a lot like scoring at the Olympics – throw out the highest and lowest scores and average the rest.

Once you have gathered and tabulated your data for awareness and support, you will want to merge the results into a single graphic that visually positions your core audiences. This sample figure demonstrates how one could do this:



Note: With permission from CommunicationsWorks LLC

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN AUDIENCE MAPPING

Following are several dynamics you should be on the lookout for as you review your awareness/support data:

- Significant gaps between levels of awareness and support for the same audience (“soft supporters” and “aware skeptics”).** Audiences that are more supportive of your efforts than aware of what they are about can undermine your campaign’s credibility if they speak out without knowing the full story. Similarly, audiences that are more aware of your efforts than inclined to support them pose a challenge because they can be formidable (and vocal) opponents. Your goal in either case is to bring those levels into alignment (or at least closer together).
- Audiences that earn middle ratings on both awareness and support (“fence sitters”).** These audiences pose a risk to your campaign because they could be moved into the supporter or skeptic column simply by who gets to them first, or can be moved to the skeptic column if your state policy agenda collides with local interests and politics. Timing and persistence are the key words for working with this group – engage them early and often.

Audience Mapping: The Why, How and What to Look For

- 3. Wide gaps between policymakers and practitioners (“us and them”).** While elected leaders and educators are not always on the same page with respect to the college- and career-ready agenda, having them on opposite sides of the midpoint in terms of awareness and support is cause for concern. In a situation like this, you should be on the lookout for individuals and groups that can serve as “honest brokers” and help bridge those gaps.
- 4. Low ratings on awareness and/or support for audiences outside the education and policy worlds (“weak cover”).** College- and career-ready reform efforts require cover – and sometimes pressure – from individuals and groups outside the educational and political arenas. If these audiences, such as business or community leaders, are at or below the middle of the scale in terms of awareness and/or support, they will not be in a strong position to speak out about your issues, either to show encouragement or prod key stakeholders into action.
- 5. Audiences that rank highly on both awareness and support (“informed advocates”).** As your strongest assets, these individuals and groups need to be continually cultivated, informed and recognized. One of your goals in working with this group should be to build a base of institutional memory so that your support base remains strong even as individual advocates come and go.

ACHIEVE’S AUDIENCE MAPPING SURVEY INSTRUMENT

For the following table, please rank each audience’s level of awareness of and support for the goals/intents/content of the college- and career-ready agenda in your state on a scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating “not at all aware/supportive” and 5 indicating “very aware/supportive.”

Audience Mapping: The Why, How and What to Look For

AUDIENCE	AWARENESS	SUPPORT
Policymakers		
The Governor		
State Board of Education		
State Legislature (overall)		
Legislative Leadership, including key education and appropriations committee chairs		
K-12 Audiences		
K-12 Superintendent/State Chief		
District Superintendents		
High School Principals		
Teachers		
Guidance/Career Counselors		
Higher Education Audiences		
Higher Education Chief		
College Presidents		
Faculty (2- and 4-year institutions)		
Community Audiences		
Parents		
Students		
Civil Rights Organizations		
Philanthropic Organizations		
Business Audiences		
Business Leaders/Executives		
Business Coalitions		
Labor/Workforce Organizations		
Media		
Mainstream Media (print, radio, broadcast)		
New Media (blogs, Twitter feeds, etc.)		
OTHER:		
OTHER:		