



Project Centered Communication Brief Program Description

Communication strategy flounders when it is primarily reactive, responding to present threats and controversies. Failing to build future lasting outcomes into current progressive communication is bad stewardship. It is short sighted and wasteful, squandering the limited resources progressives have to realize the full promise of American life.

Progress Centered Communication is a new paradigm shifting strategy that seeks to win short term gains in immediate public controversies, create more aligned and effective communication capacity, and build support for aspirational reforms that are achievable within about a decade.

This new strategic communication model was developed in Wisconsin in 2014 and launched in 2015.

Progress Centered Communication builds on the most advanced persuasion research and the work of message development practitioners, but puts a stronger focus on developing clear strategic goals needed to disrupt the constraints that hold us back from bridging the gap between our values and current social realities.

The Strategy Deficit

As in the parable of the ant and the grasshopper, from a power building perspective conservatives have been like ants planning for the winter while progressives have too often played the grasshopper frittering away the summer. On issue after issue conservatives have played both the short and the long game since the early 1970s, when a core of their leaders

took a step back and developed plans to reverse the New Deal and the Great Society. Progressives must become more like ants to achieve lasting change.

There is a growing consensus that one of the fundamental reasons progressives have been unable to build public movements capable of inspiring our society to address our most pressing problems is the conservative advantage in strategic communication.

Many progressives have tended to focus on the right's infrastructure for generating public communication, the delivery system of Fox News, conservative talk radio, and their network of lavishly funded think tanks and advocacy groups. Although this infrastructure is important, it was preceded by a conservative alignment on long term objectives and a communication strategy to shift American values to the right.

Relying on the practical knowledge generated in the fields of advertising and public relations, conservatives created a highly sophisticated and aligned communication system for shifting public values to the far right, and away from social responsibility, empathy, and stewardship. In so doing conservatives have imprisoned American democracy in a conventional wisdom which limits our sense of possibility and rationalizes social immorality on a planetary scale. Progressives win some battles, and have achieved some major civil rights advances, but overall we are losing the war for lack of a unified strategy.

Progress Centered Communication

To meet this challenge, progressives must develop a response more profound than merely increased communications capacity and talking points for fragmented issue areas and short term tactical objectives.

Progress Centered Communication is a paradigm shifting approach which puts a focus on establishing clear long term goals for fundamental reform that can be reached in about a decade, and works backwards from these goals "reverse engineering" realistic strategies for achieving lasting change. What distinguishes Progress Centered Communication from other models is its emphasis on long term strategic planning. We believe that true strategic communication is impossible without a concrete vision: an actionable consensus on what lasting changes in the world are sought.

Progress Centered Communication begins the process of constructing an aligned communication system, grounded in a sophisticated understanding of public persuasion, capable of fundamentally shifting common sense across a range of core issue areas.

A fundamental premise is that progressives cannot win unless we fundamentally change the context which prevents progressive American values from being achieved in the world: the suffocating conventional wisdom which limits our collective sense of what is possible in our democracy. Conventional communication accepts and often reinforces the constraints of the

present context. Progress Centered Communication seeks to make tangible progress towards transformation of the overarching context which controls what is and is not possible.

The Communication Transformation Process

Unlike conventional communication, Progress Centered Communication operates at three levels, meeting present challenges, developing capacity, and building the public values needed to achieve lasting social change.

Creating an aligned progressive communication system will take many years, but improvements in alignment in key issue areas can pay immediate dividends. One of our key assumptions is that this creation must begin within issue areas, but ultimately must break down the artificial barriers between issues if it is to have the capacity to shift public values. Ultimately the goal is to create a new alignment for progressive organizing and advocacy moving forward. In order to break this audacious task before us down to achievable parts, we will initially pursue a two-track approach.

Track 1 of the Progress Centered Communication process in 2015 is creating the initial building blocks for an aligned communication system. It begins with a deep strategic planning process that will develop ten year communication plans, in 3-4 key issues, and will engage the leading organizations and thinkers in each area. Planning processes on health care and racial equity are being launched in the summer of 2015, with others to follow in the fall. The leading issue area candidates for the fall round are democracy issues, urban ecology (including its relation to climate change), and economic inequality.

Track 2 provides basic communication skills to existing organizations and activists still operating in the conventional communication context, while also providing a basic introduction to advanced communication concepts which will prepare more organizations and leaders to engage in a Track 1 planning process. In addition to trainings, Track 2 includes the new Progress Points Message Blog, which provides commentary and analysis on strategic communication topics. The message blog, which launched in April, can be accessed [HERE](#).

About the Project

The Wisconsin Strategic Values Project, which is leading the effort to implement Progress Centered Communication, is a partnership of [Citizen Action of Wisconsin](#), [High Ground Institute](#), and [Wisconsin Voices](#).

The Progress Centered Communication concept was created by Robert Kraig, Executive Director of Citizen Action of Wisconsin. Robert holds a PhD in Rhetoric (University of Wisconsin-Madison) and is a published academic author on persuasion theory and American public discourse. An in-depth theoretical overview of Progress Centered Communication can be accessed [HERE](#).