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**Want Impact? Do Your Research.**

We all want to do exciting work, create inspiring communication and build strategies that will shift thinking, move needles, open new doors, and ultimately improve lives. It's why we do what we do—so why aren't we doing our research?

We understand; research may not be seen as exciting! It may not provide the same glow as a public policy victory, changing public opinion, building new community movements, or finding out your collaborative ensured 1,000 more children now have a high-quality education. But research is exactly what's needed to make all those things happen and to achieve the success you seek. Without research, it is more difficult to develop a clear rationale, justification or support for your goals, strategies, tactics, communication or messaging. It's also the key to maximizing outcomes especially, and most critically, when you have limited dollars to spend.

Think of the critical decisions that your organization, collaborative, or campaign might make about its future direction. Should you trust that future to assumptions about issues, audiences and challenges? Wouldn't you rather have objective data to help you make the most informed choice? While there may be some value in "gut" feelings, they also can be dead wrong.

Further, without research and data, it's harder to justify your plans or actions to key supporters. Concrete evidence can help persuade someone who is on the fence, or directly counter a narrative that's based on something other than fact. Research also can help you get into the minds of those you wish to draw to your cause, determining what messages will resonate most, which will be most effective in achieving your short and long-term goals, and what vehicles and messengers will receive the warmest reception.

Consider this example: An organization that wanted to encourage families to sign up for early childhood programs decided to create a marketing campaign via social media to take advantage of the cost-effective nature of this communication vehicle. The organization planned and launched a strategy on Facebook targeting young parents in their region. But instead of increased uptake, they received radio silence. Why? Research to investigate the problem

**What Does It All Mean?**

Want to create messages that cut through jargon and test well with target audiences? Check our ACS Glossaries to learn what confusing terms of the trade really mean and how to choose better options to test with target audiences.

ACS' Glossaries for [Workforce Development](#), [Working with the Media](#), [Coalition Building](#), [Federal Budget and Appropriation Terms](#) and [Key Advocacy Terms](#) are available online. Glossaries for early childhood education, K-12, Medicaid, and health and human services fields will be available soon. Check our website regularly by clicking here: [www.advocacyandcommunication.org](http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org)

Want to banish jargon across the board? Download ACS' "[Tips and Steps to Give Jargon the Boot](#)" tool.

[www.advocacyandcommunication.org](http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org)

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## New Clients & Expanded Projects

ACS is excited to welcome new clients and expanded projects in the second half of 2017:

- [Care Alliance Health Center](#)
- [Columbus City Council](#)
- [Emerging Practitioners In Philanthropy](#)
- [Enterprise Community Partners](#) on behalf of [Housing First Initiative](#)
- [Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg](#)
- [Franklin County Department of Job & Family Services](#)
- [J. Marion Sims Foundation](#)
- [Maryland Workforce Association](#)
- North Carolina Workforce Development Boards ([Centralina](#), [CharlotteWorks](#), & [Gaston County](#))
- [Smart Start & the North Carolina Partnership for Children](#)

showed that parents in the region mostly relied on local television stations and neighborhood based printed newspapers (particularly those in their native language) as reliable sources of information about trustworthy early education providers. An investment to gather information upfront could have saved the organization time and money, and moved it closer to its goals.

## Different Goals Require a Different Kind of Research

The goal you hope to accomplish should dictate the kind of research you conduct. You may opt for quantitative research that delivers hard numbers, or qualitative research that helps paint a picture of the mood or mindset of a community. Depending on what you need to learn, any or all of the following could be used to inform strategy development, message creation, or advocacy:

- Publication scans: Review of published studies and information about your issue.
- Best practice review: A look at best practices and lessons learned from efforts across the nation or globe that set out to achieve goals similar to yours.
- Surveys/Polls: A set of fixed questions circulated to target audiences through phone, paper or electronic means.
- Focus groups: A small group that discusses an issue in detail and can “deep dive” into key questions.
- Interviews: One-on-one conversations with key influencers, such as major stakeholders or opinion leaders.
- Data review: A scan of (or deep dive into) data that has been collected and is relevant to your issue.
- Language/Message testing: Presentation of messages to representatives of target audiences to gauge their reactions.

Research itself doesn't have to be expensive. The amount invested can range from the cost of staff time to comb the internet or make targeted phone calls, to hundreds of thousands of dollars to conduct comprehensive research into an issue and/or an audience. Regardless of the cost, gaining knowledge through research can make a huge difference in expenses and investments down the road. The key is to ask, how much can or should I spend learning about this issue in order to protect my investment in it?

## Research Successes

Many Advocacy & Communication Solutions, LLC (ACS) clients understand the value of research and have tapped into our expertise to boost their own effectiveness and minimize spending mishaps. Below are a few examples.

- [The City of Little Rock](#), Arkansas combined best-practice research and community outreach through focus groups and surveys to ensure its new [Master Plan for Children, Youth and Families](#) addressed both the vision that residents wanted for their community and the hurdles they faced in achieving that vision. While city leaders could have simply written a plan themselves, they chose to move slowly, thoughtfully and intentionally through a research phase designed and implemented by ACS to ensure what they produced is effective for years to come.



- In Arizona, [First Things First](#) (FTF) has prioritized conducting regular research to ensure their messages are effective with their key audiences to help continue to build ongoing public awareness of and support for early childhood-related issues. ACS has helped FTF build communication and training collateral based on this messaging work.
- The [J. Marion Sims Foundation](#) in South Carolina used community surveys, best practice research, focus groups and interviews to inform its strategic direction that will guide the foundation's work for the next several years. ACS also helped the foundation's trustees and staff prepare and conduct focus groups, ask key questions, and actively listen to community members in an open and respectful manner—ultimately positioning the foundation as a strategic partner to help transform their community.
- In North Carolina, ACS is helping three regional workforce development boards ([Centralina](#), [CharlotteWorks](#), and [Gaston County](#)) cut through industry jargon and develop messaging that is concise and easily understood. The boards will test new messages with trusted partners to ensure the messages effectively convey who they are, what they do, and why they matter in their region. Messages that work will help the boards better communicate about the value of their work and position them as a go-to resource for workforce development in their region.
- Building upon years of grassroots outreach [Franklin County Department of Job & Family Services](#) (FCDJFS) in Central Ohio embarked upon its first [paid media](#) effort related to helping child care providers and parents in the region better understand the importance of quality child care. FCDJFS hired ACS to help plan and implement the quantitative and qualitative research via focus groups and telephone surveys with parents, and home- and center-based child care providers. This research helped to shape and inform the messages that will now help FCDJFS meet the 2020 state mandate for all child care providers to be rated by Ohio's Step Up to Quality rating system.

### Where We've Been

ACS has conducted several communication and advocacy training sessions during the past several months. These include the following:

- Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO): Communication Training (May 2017)
- National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE): Communication Webinar (August 2017)
- Maryland Workforce Director's Association: Advocacy Training (October 2017)

You want to put your best effort forward when it comes to achieving your mission and changing lives for the better. That means understanding the lay of the land, the possibilities that are out there, what resonates with your target audiences, and what moves people to action or better understanding. By conducting research you gain that knowledge—and what will make you more effective in everything you do. ■

### Connect with Us!

To contact with our team, call toll-free at 1-877-372-0166, visit our website, or find us on [LinkedIn](#).

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