

# Engaging stakeholders more important than ever

**W**e live and work in a fast-paced communication world that continues to change. Those communication changes have had a dramatic impact on the way businesses operate. It's no longer an option to engage with your stakeholders — it's a necessity.

Whether the focus is on how your company operates, development of a new product, reinventing an old product or launching a new project, engaging with your stakeholders is vital. There's no doubt that businesses and organizations thrive when they actively and effectively engage their stakeholders. And in this digital age, there are many more tools for engagement.

As you consider your next round of stakeholder engagement, consider the following key points:

**•Get to know your stakeholders and stakeholder groups**

Dictionary.com defines stakeholder as: "A person or group that has an investment, share, or interest in something, as a business or industry."

Using that definition, it should be relatively easy to identify the internal and external stakeholders for your business or organization. It's also important to look a bit more carefully at those individuals or groups to determine their interest level and how influential they are. That can play a key role in setting up the



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stakeholder groups and how you interact with them.

Anyone who's ever been involved with a

major public construction project knows that those who have property nearby and those who will be affected by the project have high interest and can be very influential.

**•Define your purpose**

Having a clear vision of where you want to go and what you want to achieve helps to make the stakeholder engagement process more meaningful and effective. Are you looking for input on the design of a public project? Is the focus on a new product and how it will be accepted? Do you want to hear from your customers on ways to improve your delivery of products or services?

Having a clearly defined purpose let's stakeholders know what you are looking for and how they can help. They become invested in the effort.

**•Develop your approach**

Once you've identified the stakeholders and stakeholder groups and established a clear purpose, it's time to look at your approach, including a review of the available engagement tools. Will you rely on more traditional engagement tools like group meetings and paper surveys? Can you accomplish your purpose through digital means, such as online surveys, Wikis or other social media interactions?

Whatever your approach, it's important to spell out the frequency of interaction and include deadlines so that the engagement

process progresses toward a conclusion.

**•Listen with an open mind**

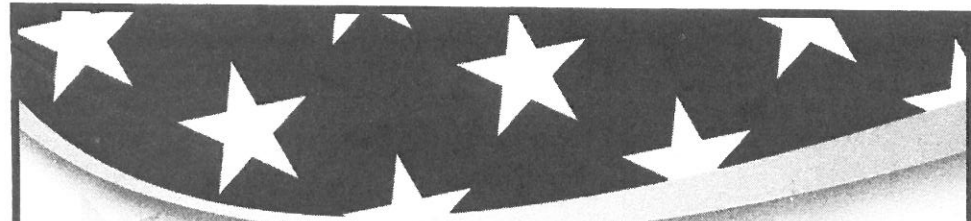
If you're going to take the time to reach out to your stakeholders and ask them for their input, be sure that it counts for something. Be sure you're heading into the process with an open mind. Too many times we're told "we want to hear what you have to say," only to realize that those who are asking only want you to support what they are offering.

**•Communicate**

It's all about engagement. If you don't communicate, you'll lose that engagement. It's not only important to communicate to the stakeholders throughout the engagement process, but you also want to leave the door open for interaction with your stakeholders so they feel free to ask questions along the way or provide additional feedback. In today's communication world, with so many communication tools, it's also important to provide that communication in the way the stakeholders prefer.


For businesses today it is necessary to stay engaged with your stakeholders, but it doesn't have to be difficult. Work it into your overall strategy and plan ahead to interact with those who are crucial to your ongoing success.

Scott Stein is vice president of client services at Leonard & Finco Public Relations.



## MISSION STATEMENT

The major function of Rolling Thunder®, Inc. is to publicize POW-MIA issues: To educate the public that many American prisoners of war were left behind after all previous wars and to help correct the past and to protect future veterans from being left behind should they become prisoners of war-missing in action.

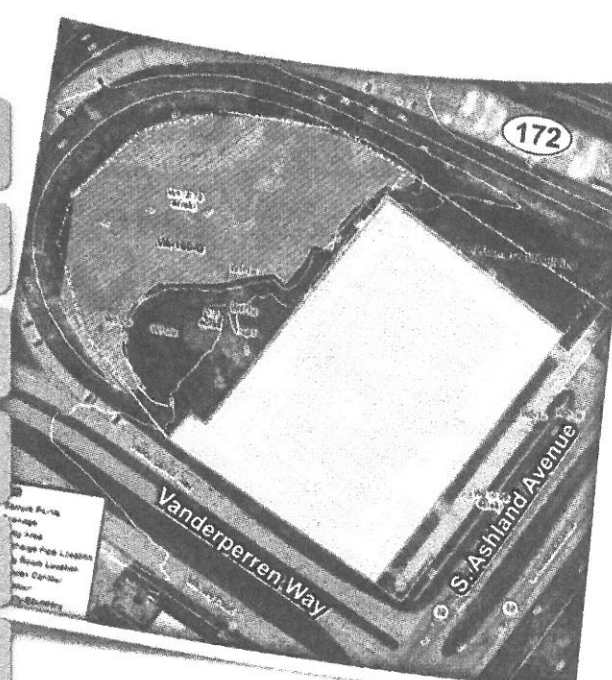


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