

Communicating for Change

Persuade Colleagues to Get On Board

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How Can Change Agents Communicate to Promote Departmental Change?

Change agents can inspire, energize, and generate support for change by proactively influencing colleagues' beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. The critical process for exerting this influence is persuasive communication. Change agents generate dissatisfaction with the status quo, present a clear vision of a change that would improve conditions, align the change with departmental values, build confidence in their department's ability to enact the change, and have their colleagues participate in decisions and shape the change process.

Change agents must also identify and enroll opinion leaders. Face it; some people's opinions are more influential than others. After identifying the individuals whose opinions influence the attitudes and behaviors of other members, effective change agents share their goals and reasons with them and ask them to support change efforts with specific behaviors.

Effective persuasion is a long-term process that involves four distinct and necessary steps. The following is a list of those steps and ideas for applying them to create change that promotes women's participation in computing:

1 Establish your credibility.

Exhibit your knowledge and judgment, and demonstrate that you can be trusted to listen and to be fair. *Explain your vision of change and how to get there.*

- Provide research-based resources. Your faculty can implement existing practices shown in research to effectively increase participation of women in computing.
 - NCWIT Promising Practice sheets overview the research basis and point to resources for several easily-implementable practices, including teaching methods, curricular approaches, outreach mechanisms, faculty mentoring, and more.
 - NCWIT Programs-in-a-Box include everything faculty need for implementing particular practices. Currently available are Outreach-in-a-Box and Faculty Mentoring-in-a-Box, as well as Pair Programming-in-a-Box, coming soon. Roadshow-in-a-Box and Regional Women in Computing Conference-in-a-Box are in the works.
 - NCWIT Programs-in-a-Box include tools for do-it-yourself assessment.
- Point to free support for change efforts. NCWIT provides Talking Points, advocacy tools, and guidebooks for starting conversations and initiatives.

2 Frame your goals in a way that identifies common ground with those you want to persuade. Be willing to compromise.

Consider what matters to your colleagues and identify how the change you propose will provide tangible benefits to them. If no shared advantages are obvious, adjust your position until you find a shared advantage. Before they will commit, people must recognize that a change will have positive outcomes for them.

- Researchers seek more innovative ideas and improved problem solving, and diversity can offer that. *NCWIT Patenting Report and Scott Page's research show that diversity leads to improved innovation and problem solving.*
- Instructors seek better ways of teaching and better students. *Research shows that collaborative learning environments, when implemented well, lead to improved learning and the formation of enduring student support networks. Female high school students earn higher grades than their male counterparts, on the average; about half of all AP Calculus exams are taken by female students. Female students with high mathematics competency, however, are more likely to pursue humanities degrees than majors requiring high math competency (SAT score over 700).*
- Administrators seek increased enrollments and praise from university administration and the public for overcoming underrepresentation of women.

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3 Reinforce your position using vivid language and compelling evidence.

Provide both data and illustrative examples, stories, analogies, and metaphors. Data could include:

- Your present enrollments and graduation rates for women in comparison to men. *If yours is a PhD-granting program, use Taulbee data to show how you compare nationally. Other institutions can use IPEDS data available online from caspar.nsf.gov.*
- Plots of enrollment and graduation rates over time showing the trends for both sexes and your program as a whole. *Recruiting women could slow or reverse the declining numbers most departments have seen in recent years.*
- Describe the loss of specific students who had interest and talent, but left the program for another major.
- Talk about peer institutions that have made changes with positive results.

4 Connect emotionally.

Show your emotional commitment to the change you propose (but do not over do it). Adjust your tone and the intensity of your arguments to your audience's emotional state.

Strategies for Leveraging your Persuasive Messaging

Communicating strategically will help you to effectuate change.

- **Use multiple sources of internal and external information.**
 - Use reports (e.g., Taulbee, BLS, NCWIT Patenting Report).
 - Use oral communications (e.g., speak at faculty meetings, talks by industry partners).
- **Bring attention to your efforts not only within the university (e.g., informing the provost) but by generating a local press release once you have support. This can reify decisions and create external pressure to succeed.**
- **Develop a strategic plan in collaboration with colleagues, especially those most affected by proposed change. The plan should:**
 - Delineate how and when you will implement research-based effective practices for both recruiting and retaining women.
 - Identify organizational constraints and enablers.
 - Include an assessment plan.

The information in this document is considered a supplement to NCWIT's *Gearing Up for Change* and was adapted by Lecia Barker and J. McGrath Cohoon from:

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- Conger, J. A. (1998). The Necessary Art of Persuasion. *Harvard Business Review*. <http://hbr.org/1998/05/the-necessary-art-of-persuasion/ar/1>
- Fernandez, S., Rainey, H.G. (2006) Managing Successful Organizational Change in the Public Sector. *Public Administration Review*. 66(2), p 168-176.



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