

Changing the Story

***A Reflection on Communications Hubs
supported by Oak Foundation***

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Glossary

These descriptions seek to assist understanding of terms used in the context of this report, and are not definitive

Anxious Middle	A 'middle' population segment which is not fixedly for or against a particular issue, and though 'persuadable' or 'movable', can be described as anxious or skeptical -often on economic or cultural grounds.
Base	The strongest and most passionate supporters of a particular cause or issue. They are the least likely to change their view.
Communications Capacity Building	Providing resources to a NGO or a sector that meet more than a specific need, but that also seek to invest in structures and tools that the NGO or sector can deploy over the long term.
Cognitive Research	The study of mental processes and how they may be related to behaviour. Used in the context of messaging to examine how reason and emotion can impact values and opinions.
Comprehensive Immigration Reform	An effort in the US to provide legal status and a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. The legislative proposals often involved a compromise between providing a path to citizenship and increased border reinforcement.
Dissemination	The act of sharing and promoting a set of messages and arguments, usually through tools like campaigns, media engagement and social media channels
Fiscal Sponsor	An organization that provides its non-profit status to a project. Financial processing and other services are often provided.
Frame	An architecture for communicating messages in a way that connects the messages together and ensures they are all driving towards a common purpose. Usually informed by polling research.
Hub	A structure to provide communications messaging, guidance, capacity or coordination on an issue, in a way that is designed to support multiple organizations.
Incubator Project	A project, comprising one or more staff people, that is housed at, and supported by, a larger organization, usually with the intent that the project will become independent after a few years.
Longitudinal Surveys	A research design that involves repeated observations of public attitudes over long periods of time, often many decades.
Message	A deliberate set of words and sentences to communicate on a topic. Should be created thoughtfully and designed to be used consistently.
Myth-busting	A focused attempt to disprove a story or statistic that is being used in a dishonest or manipulative way. Usually conducted through media channels.
Narrative	A way of talking about an issue in such a way as to reflect an overarching set of aims or values. Can be deployed for story-telling.
Rapid response	Also known as crisis response. The ability to engage with the media very quickly after an unexpected event or news story. Usually involves both preparation for a certain type of event and a clear plan for who should respond and how.
Talking Points	A set of messages collected together, usually for use by multiple people.

Introduction & Context

This Strategic Reflection & Assessment on Oak Foundation’s International Human Rights (IHR) Programme’s communications funding was conducted with the goal of learning lessons that can be applied to communications grant-making by Oak and other funders going forward.

Rather than a distinct portfolio, the communications funding within the IHR programme has been an **area of interest** and experimentation, reflecting an understanding that to change public attitudes and public policy will require communications tools and approaches.

Oak’s communications area of interest is diverse in terms of approaches, tools and (somewhat) in geography and it spans 2011 to 2017¹ years that have included significant political and social change. This Reflection & Assessment started with a mapping exercise to identify common approaches and tools and clusters of similar grants. In so doing, it was clear that while IHR has supported a variety of communications tools (including photography, oral history and documentary film) the key approach within this area of interest was the support of **communications hubs** (representing 33 percent of communications funds). This Reflection & Assessment therefore focuses on the hubs, with recommendations both for hubs working on immigration and human rights, and hubs in other sectors.

What is a Hub?

*A structure to provide **communications messaging, guidance, capacity or coordination** on an issue, in a way that is designed to support **multiple organizations**.*

The context for this grant making was a **climate of negative public opinion around immigration and human rights** and media coverage that was largely hostile to these issues. This was exacerbated by political developments within this time period including Brexit, Trump and rise of the far right in Europe. But even before those developments, the sector was seen to be “losing the debate” to an effective opposition. This climate made progressive policy change on these issues extremely challenging.

However, there was seen to be opportunity in the analysis that active hostility, while virulent, was a minority viewpoint and that there was a broad section of the population, roughly 50 percent, and sometimes defined as **the “anxious middle”** or “persuadable

¹ Some related work was funded before 2011, e.g. Opportunity Agenda, but this survey covers the 2011 to 2017 period.

middle” where perspectives were informed by a lack of knowledge and understanding or an exposure to only one point of view (the hostile one).

While this analysis presented a possible strategy, the human rights and immigration sectors faced significant obstacles:

- Anti-immigrant groups had a clear message and communications resources, while the response by the pro-immigrant sector tended to be reactive - trapped in responding to the frames set by opponents.
- Pro-immigrant NGOs were engaging in a debate driven by values, emotion and culture with legal and technical arguments.
- What proactive communications work was being done mainly targeted elites and those already convinced.
- There was very little message testing as to whether and how responses would resonate, especially with the ‘persuadable’ middle-ground of public opinion.
- Finally, the analysis that led to much of this grant-making flagged the absence of coordinated messaging as a critical challenge, in sharp contrast to the opposition’s overarching narrative frame (e.g. “Keep America Safe”²) and their ability to create a media “echo chamber” effect - a repeating “cascade” articulation of consistent messages by multiple, diverse sources.

Certainly, there was an awareness that **these challenges were driven by the limited capacity of immigration and refugee groups**. This included both a lack of communications staff and a lack of experience around communications engagement. Further, there were limited resources for polling and message testing, meaning counterproductive messages were unknowingly being put out.

Meanwhile, there were **models that provided inspiration** for a different approach. Other progressive sectors had been able to advance their issues, for example the “Time To Change” campaign on mental health in the UK or the marriage equality movement in the US. Within the immigration and human rights sectors, other geographies provided encouragement too over the timespan of this work, for example the US was seen as a source of ideas for the UK, and the work in both the US and UK by groups in the EU.

The grants in this area of interest attempted to respond to these challenges, learn from these other models and saw **hubs as a way to quickly and effectively implement** improved messaging and increased capacity. The idea was that instead of funding each organization in the sector to build its own communications capacity (including research, message development and distribution), a hub would allow for economies of scale and to quickly propel broader positive public attitudinal change in a way one organization

² A simple message that combined stability (“Keep”), patriotism (America), and security (“safe”) and connected across several issues including counter-terrorism measures and harsher immigration controls.

likely couldn't do alone. It was also hoped that a hub would help the field to work together more effectively.

Over the course of this time period the hub model evolved, rather than being fully mapped out from the beginning, as Oak - and other funders - responded to need and changing dynamics. Some hubs focused on the strategic approach and **content** (e.g. trying to reach new audiences and to do so with new frames and messages), others focused on **dissemination** through advancing communications tactics and particular tools and technologies, and some looked to combine content development and dissemination.

This report seeks to review these various approaches to assess, where possible, their respective **impact**, and to draw out **complementarities and contrasts**, and potential for **development of the hub model** within the human rights and immigration sectors and potential **replication in other issue areas**.

Note: Quotes from reports are cited. Quotes from interviews are not sourced where interviewees did not want to be on the record in order to speak frankly.

Executive Summary

The communications hubs in the human rights and immigration space emerged from a climate of negative public opinion around these issues and a sense that the sector had limited communications capacity to respond. Message development and discipline and communications capacity has been used in other sectors to effect and the hubs were seen as a way to quickly and effectively implement capacity for NGOs and to do so with economies of scale and hopefully greater sector integration and cohesion.

The initial public opinion research work informed the development of new messages that led with values, were culturally attuned, provided solutions and humanized migrants.

Hubs then provided the capacity to disseminate these messages through a variety of structures. The hubs were usually incubated at neutral organizations or another communications hub. In some cases they then became independent organizations with varying degrees of public profile. In most cases research and dissemination were kept separate.

Given sector dynamics, there was there was often a desire for the hubs to be neutral and behind-the-scenes and where the goal was capacity building for the field this made some sense. But where the goal was driving a particular policy change and an advocacy campaign with integrated messaging was needed to shift an issue, the hubs often needed to become more of a public voice for the movement.

Key components for hub success have been:

- **Sector alignment.** The hub should be a manifestation of a desire for collective impact, not a tool to create it. If there is not that level of alignment, funders may want to consider an alternative approach like placing a big bet on improving communications capacity in one existing organization or creating a new communications-focused organization, but not a hub.
- **A positive galvanizing goal.** In the US, the goal of passing Comprehensive Immigration Reform provided a vehicle for coordination and collaboration, even if success has been elusive.
- **Communications is valued and prioritized.** Funders should ensure that program and leadership at sector organizations are on-board and engaged with the hub. Funders may want to more explicitly tie engagement with a communications strategy into other funding and make it a requirement.

Recommended approaches for ongoing success are:

- **Research:** Hubs need to keep doing polling research, particularly in a volatile political environment, and to have a structure in place for more comparative, longitudinal studies.
- **Messaging:** a messaging strategy that appeals to either just the base (those who are solidly political liberal) or just the “anxious middle” will likely be too limiting. The sector needs a range of actors speaking to and connecting with different audiences. It is hard for one organization to play all of those roles and yet, of course, there needs to be coordination. That is where the hub can play a crucial role.
- **Structure:** Communications is expensive, resource and time intensive. Funders should see what exists already as building a new structure takes time and resources. In considering existing organizations, favor a communications group – that will likely allow for a quick start, deliver the most value add for communications skills and mitigate some of the inter-sector dynamics that could be present if an advocacy or service organization from the sector is selected.
- **Staffing:** The organizations selected – or created – should be staffed with experts in strategic communications. However, the staff should have connections to advocates and the issues, or aligned issues.
- **Planning:** With more experience of the hub model there should now be the ability to have business plans and strategies and measurement in place from the beginning, and less need to evolve as the work develops. However, in a dynamic moment with volatile politics funders should not be too set into one model
- **Positioning:** Be clear as to whether the hub is designed to *belong to the sector* or *to be independent for the benefit of the sector* and set expectations accordingly.
- **Evolution:** A further growth of the hub model could be towards a “hub and spoke” approach that would invest in communications in states (US), countries (EU) and regions (UK) where there is both need and potential.

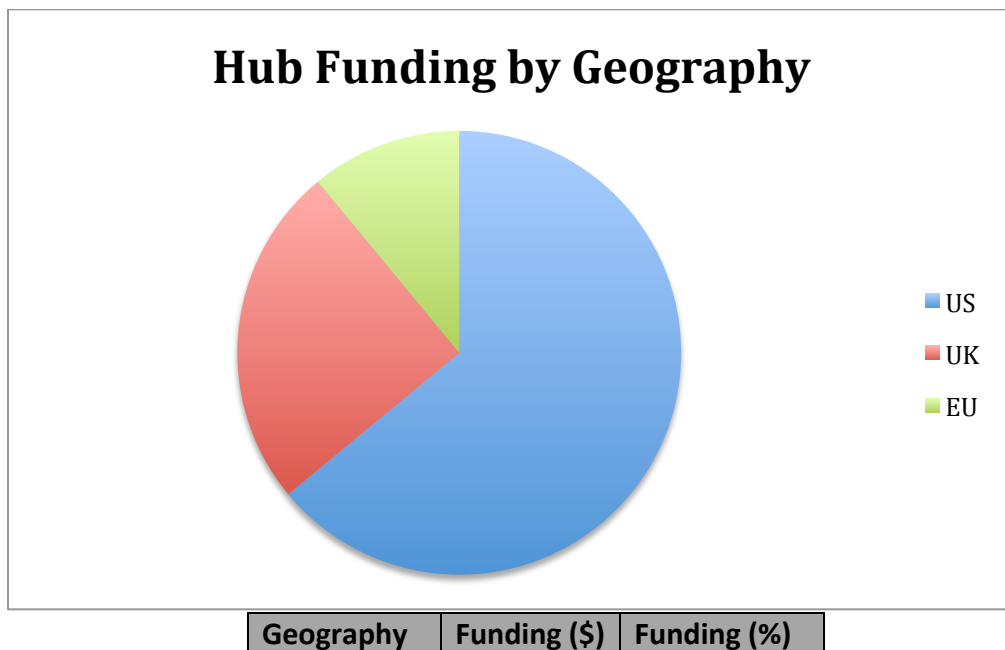
Lack of capacity and cultural suspicion of communications can lead to a layering of communications capacity and creating hubs “on top” of the sector. That may sometimes be necessary, but it is advisable to do as much work as possible to mitigate by investing in communications capacity in the NGOs too, as the hubs will be most effective if there are receptors to their services at NGOs. That’s why capacity building and narrative change need to go hand-in-hand. Ideally, the capacity building will be directed broadly across the sector and directed from a communications-agency style hub.

Mapping the Hubs

Over the period 2011-2017 Oak invested \$15,459,902 in communications within IHR and \$5,225,000 (33 percent) in hubs.³

Thematically, the grants examined fall into two broad topic areas: Human Rights⁴ and Immigration. There was overlap between these areas of work given, for example, the human rights violations perpetrated on migrants, refugees and immigrants. Further, as the messaging work funded by these grants showed, public opinion on these topics was connected. For example, attitudes towards immigration influenced UK public opinion on the Human Rights Act. And some grantees worked on both issues, for example Opportunity Agenda in the US. This Strategic Reflection looks at grants in both areas but leans more towards the immigration hubs given there were more Oak resources directed there (3 percent of hub funds were for human rights only, the rest were for immigration, or for both issues).

The work tended to be geographically constrained to either a specific country (US or UK) or a political geography (EU). This match to political boundaries is not surprising given that the ultimate goals of this work was usually policy change by government or legislatures. Most of the hubs operated at a national or federal level but there were some deliberate attempts to build regional capacity.



³ The total figure refers to support to all grantees that did some form of communications work. However, the amount of communications-related work in the grant varied significantly.

⁴ Oak's 'human rights' focus (as distinct from Immigration) focus, in the context of this study, mainly engaged counter-terrorism and detention, the defense of the UK Human Rights Act and wider legitimacy of human rights in policy making.

US	\$3,350,000	64%
UK	\$1,295,000	25%
EU	\$580,000	11%

The following hubs were the focus of this Strategic Reflection:

Hub	Geog	Topic Area	Approach	Oak Funding
British Future	UK	Immigration	Began as a non-profit communications agency & hub to support the sector on messaging, but evolved into a think-tank	\$730,000
IMiX	UK	Immigration	Established as a neutral communications agency to support migration sector. Included funding for six networked communications posts at CSOs who worked with IMiX 20% of their time.	\$480,000
Equally Ours (funded through Thomas Paine Initiative)	UK	Human Rights	TPI focused on new narratives and public information campaigns on human rights. EO is a hub in the agency model that sought to develop professional communications capacity and creative campaigning with willing organizations	\$165,000
European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM): Sub-Fund on Communicating on Migration in a Changing Environment	EU	Immigration	Behind the scenes content support for EU-wide CSOs. Funding for a Strategic Communications Advisor to work directly with 5 mainly Brussels-based pan-European CSOs.	\$535,000 ⁵

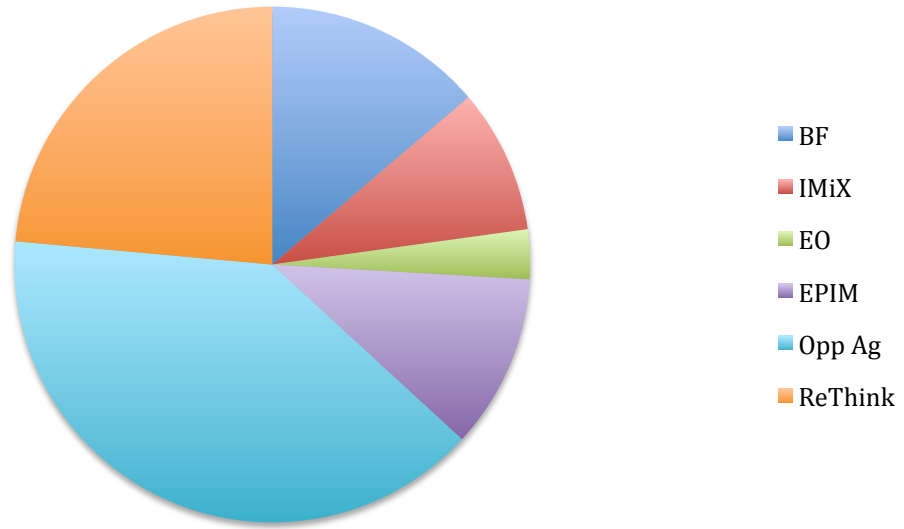
⁵ Oak granted \$1.07million total to EPIM: \$535,000 restricted to a Detention Sub-Fund, and \$535,000 unrestricted across the Communications and other sub-funds

Opportunity Agenda	US	Immigration & Human Rights	A “social justice communication lab” focused on developing frames and messages that it shares with the sector in an open-source way	\$2,100,000
ReThink Media (funded through Proteus Security & Rights Collaborative)	US	Human Rights	A non-profit strategic media agency focused on strengthening the media capacity, infrastructure and communications competencies of the sector. Area of expertise is influencing the Washington debate and winning the news cycle.	\$1,250,000
Four Freedoms Fund: Strategic Communications Initiative	US	Immigration & Human Rights	Behind the scenes focus on grants for capacity building support and sector coordination (creation of “table” for comms staffers at Washington NGOs & establishment of a research Repository)	\$1,500,000 ⁶
America’s Voice ⁷	US	Immigration	Takes a campaign approach using communications tools and is a visible voice for the sector.	

⁶ 16 funders currently contribute to FFF. Oak’s main funding focus has been FFF’s Response to Harsh Enforcement Initiative and so this funding is not counted as hub funding. However, IHR has been closely following the work of FFFs Strategic Communications Initiative, including the recent development of a research hub, called the Repository

⁷ America’s Voice was not directly funded by Oak but is a core part of the US immigration communications ecosystem and its Executive Director, Frank Sharry, was a consultant to some of the UK and EU hubs.

Oak Funding for Hubs



Hubs & Messaging

By **messaging** we mean deliberate language and words used in a consistent way to persuade or motivate audiences. Across the hubs, there was a broadly similar diagnosis of the messaging challenges and an aligned set of principles for how the sector could improve its messaging work, outlined below. However, not all advocates agreed with this diagnosis and the recommended alternative approaches, which caused some tensions between the more pragmatic communications professionals running the hubs and the leadership of the organizations they were seeking to support and/or asking to carry these messages.

Challenges with Prior Messaging

The existing messaging was seen as problematic for several reasons:

- It was focused on **numbers and facts**, often in ways that were too technical and nuanced to connect with the general public. Related to this was a sense that:
 - The facts approach could be received as patronizing and condescending
 - “Myth-busting” or “fact-checking” could be counter-productive as many in the “anxious middle” had grown distrustful of any “facts” in this space
 - False information was repeated and given more exposure in doing the “myth-busting”
- **Rights-based arguments** were not received well by the “anxious middle” who saw “rights” as meaning special treatment for migrants, or even terrorists (in the case of the Human Rights Act). Further, these rights-based arguments were often presented in very legalistic language, referencing international charters and specific clauses of various laws.
- **Economic arguments:** Some NGOs were making the “economic case for migration.” While perhaps intellectually sound, as the FrameWorks Institute wrote: “advocates have to be wary of pushing the economic argument because it quickly evokes ‘zero-sum’ thinking, in which the pie is not perceived to be expanding and inter-group competition becomes a real threat.”⁸ Or as British Future suggested regarding the anxious middle, “They don’t buy the market-based arguments that immigration is good for the economy as it doesn’t seem to be helping them.”⁹
- **Crisis:** Framing around the immigration system being in crisis triggered negative cognitive responses and played into the hands of opponents of immigration who

⁸ FrameWorks Institute, *Framing Immigration Reform: A FrameWorks Message Memo* (2010)

⁹ British Future, *How To Talk About Immigration* (2014)

were pushing a message of immigration being “out of control.”

In addition to the challenges with the existing messaging, there was also a lack of credible messengers who could connect to audiences that needed to be persuaded.

An Alternative Approach

Research into public opinion was key to developing alternative messaging. This research was conducted through polling and focus groups and also sought to integrate cognitive and social science research. For example, Equally Ours in UK looked to engage audiences at an instinctive, emotional level, reflecting an extensive body of learning from behavioural science. The following four principles emerged from this research:

1. Lead with values

It was seen as important to connect immigration and human rights to broadly shared values, not just the values of the activists. In the US these values included freedom of religion and non-discrimination. Lake Research advised: “Invoke a shared, unifying, and aspirational value statement to engage with Americans’ hopes and deeper values, not their fears. The most persuasive messages in support of immigrants are rooted in the shared values of opportunity, equality, self-determination, hard work, safety, the right to live without fear, and children and families.”¹⁰

Example: “America is a nation of values, founded on the idea that all men and women are created equal, no matter what they look like or where they came from.” (America’s Voice)

Example: “We welcome migrants who come to Britain to contribute – by working hard, paying their taxes and learning English.” (British Future)

2. Be culturally attuned

Culture and identity mattered in these debates and has been used effectively by opponents. While this awareness was universal to the hubs’ work, its application, by definition, needed to be situational. British Future effectively connected immigration to moments of national identity including the Queen’s Jubilee, the Olympics and the centenary of World War I.

Example: “The British war effort included Empire and Commonwealth soldiers from countries including India and the West Indies, Australia and Canada. It is important for

¹⁰ Lake Research, Message Guidance: Immigration Advocacy in the Trump Era. (2017)

integration today that all of our children are taught about the shared history of a multi-ethnic Britain” (British Future)

The names of some of the hub organizations reflected these cultural frames: America’s Voice, British Future.

3. Provide solutions

The research suggested that people believed the immigration system was broken and that messages around chaos, communities and resources being “overwhelmed” and governments unable to handle immigration were being used very effectively by opponents of immigration. Therefore, it was identified as a need to deploy messaging that highlighted *solutions* and to reassure the “anxious middle” that the government was “minding the store” and could implement an immigration system that would be safe, legal and orderly.

Example: “When it comes to immigration, we need workable solutions that uphold our nation’s values, and move us forward together. We need to fix our system so that individuals who contribute and participate can live in the United States legally. That means creating a system where undocumented immigrants can register, get legal, learn English and contribute fully.” (Opportunity Agenda)

Example: “We need to invest properly in a system that’s fit for purpose – that can uphold the rules in a way that is effective, fair and humane.” (British Future)

This approach has been deployed in the more recent debate in the US around “Sanctuary Cities” where the message guidance to immigration groups is to use a safety frame and keep the focus local.

Example: “Our communities are safer when immigrants can trust the police and report crimes without fear.” (America’s Voice)

Example: “Local law enforcement should be focused on keeping criminals off the street and keeping everyone safe, not on tracking down everyone’s immigration status.” (America’s Voice)

4. Humanize Migrants

Research suggested it was more effective and relatable to talk about people, families and communities, rather than migrants or refugees. Related to this was guidance to be pro-active in using events like Olympics (US & UK) to talk about immigrants’ contributions to society. This would ensure that the media did not only talk about

Muslims and South Asians around terrorist incidents. Related to this was a deliberate effort by hubs to profile immigrants and to foster their voices. For example, the EPIM work had a goal of better representation of migrant voices.

Example: "There are seven and a half million examples of the everyday contributions which people born abroad are making to British society." (British Future)

In 2017, this frame has been used in the US in the debate around President Trump's proposed repeal of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals)¹¹ where pro-immigration groups have been encouraged to talk about children and families.

Example: "Mass deportation would separate more than 3 million US-born children from their undocumented parents." (America's Voice)

Example: "Families should stick together." (America's Voice)

¹¹ Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is an Obama Administration immigration policy that allowed some undocumented individuals who entered the US as minors, to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and to be eligible for a work.

Hubs & Dissemination

These new messages were disseminated across the sectors with some NGOs embracing them more than others. The hubs often led by example by using the messages in their own communications materials and producing resources (e.g. talking points, message guidance documents) so the messages could be disseminated to the sectors.

There were several models of how the hubs operationalized the dissemination work, both in **structure and function**. There were trade-offs in choosing between these models.

Structure

Existing or new?

In some cases, there was an existing organization that housed the hub. In other cases, a new organization was formed. There was also a hybrid model where the hub was housed (usually temporarily) with a fiscal sponsor that provided some back-end support. Some hubs evolved from a single consultant providing capacity support into something more formal.

Perhaps not surprisingly, a key driver for the “existing or new” decision tended to be what already existed in the sector. In the US, there were some hub organizations already in place. For example, ReThink was engaged in another hub project for Proteus¹² on international peace and security, and there was therefore an opportunity to expand the ReThink hub model to another topic area: security and rights. Similarly, Opportunity Agenda expanded their topic areas over the years, adding human rights to their work on immigration. But in some ways this difference is a function of the US being more “advanced” on this work when Oak began funding communications as **all of these hubs had at some point been created to respond to a messaging gap**, either in the immigration space or an adjacent area. In the UK or EU, there was less existing infrastructure so Oak and co-funders tended to be investing in an approach of creating a new organization.

Where there was a **deliberate preference for an existing structure** the intent was to **leverage what has already been built in the sector** and existing knowledge. For example, in issuing an RFP for managing a research repository hub, Four Freedoms Fund (FFF) selected Opportunity Agenda because they knew the organizations, understood

¹² The Proteus Fund is a re-granting platform for donors to pool funds and collaborate around shared issues of concern. They were the vehicle for several foundations, including Oak, to fund ReThink.

the movement and the players. Given the pressing need, for this work FFF did not believe that the sector had the luxury of time to develop trust with a new organization. There also tended to be a preference for existing organizations as a way to **expand and build capacity in the sector**.

Where there was a deliberate preference for **building a new organization**, it tended to come from concerns that if there wasn't an obvious sector leader, then placing the hub in one organization could lead the hub being "captured" – or be seen to have been "captured" by that organization. For example, in considering the next stage of the EPIM work, there is consideration of providing sector support through the Migration Policy Group, but a question as to whether they can be seen as neutral enough.

In an example of the hybrid model, IMiX was housed at Global Dialogue (GD), which coordinates funder alliances on multiple issues, and was therefore seen as neutral. GD provided back office support, which was helpful to allow IMiX staff to focus on communications, and GD was already managing Migration Exchange (MEX).¹³ However, GD are not communications specialists, and a service function was being housed at a funder alliance, not perhaps a natural fit.

To be fair, this was seen as an interim approach, with GD acting as an incubator, but a more communications-focused body might have been a better match as it could have provided additional communications knowledge and capacity and perhaps a permanent home that would have avoided the need for IMiX to focus on governance matters in year three or four of its existence, a point when it would ideally be moving at full steam on communications support for the sector.

In considering a "host" organization therefore it may be smart to **steer towards a communications organization**, rather than a sector body. This avoids the concern of "capture" by one organization in the sector and strengthens the hub around what its biggest value-add should be: communications expertise.

¹³ Migration Exchange (MEX), formerly known as Changing Minds, is an informal network of 12 independent funders, established in 2010. It aims to improve the lives of migrants and receiving communities in the UK by informing public debate on migration and creating welcoming communities. MEX is independent and non-partisan, it has been a programme of [Global Dialogue \(GD\)](#) since 2015. In addition to MEX, GD hosts a range of other [funder collaboratives, alliances and networks](#). MEX activities include commissioning research to inform funders and key partners to take effective action on shared concerns; supporting bold ventures where aligning grants enables activity to take place at scale or increases the potential for success; and using the convening power of members to support, connect and strengthen good work.

Non-profit or private sector?

A related choice, either for location of the hub or for support, was how much to engage private-sector expertise.

There was a strong reaction from some against private firms being engaged, for various reasons including:

- Concerns that the sector would become beholden to a private firm
- Worry that a private firm might be less accountable to the sector
- A desire for the movement to build its own capacities
- A sense that consultants come and go and expertise and institutional memory should reside within the movement

- Comfort with sharing. For example, in the case of the FFF-supported Repository, there was a sense that grantees would be more willing to share sensitive data in Repository run by a peer non-profit organization.
- An awareness that private sector firms, and that consultants are usually more expensive than non-profit organizations

There were also some more practical concerns, for example in the thinking that led to the creation of IMiX it was noted that a PR firm needs **a client who can make decisions quickly** and authoritatively and that could be a challenge for a hub with multiple funders.¹⁴

These are well-placed concerns, but it would be a mistake to be dogmatic. There are smart minds in the private sector and it would be advisable to find ways to draw on them, even if it is more project-based, to ensure the sector develops and grows. For example, the Social Change Initiative¹⁵ sponsored a one-day convening in London that engaged communications industry experts to provide advice on migration messaging and strategy – the sector was then able to take those ideas forward. Certainly, any private sector support should be carefully chosen to ensure cultural competency with the sector.

Another approach is to **replicate the agency model of the private sector but to do so with a non-profit structure** and led by people with sector and movement connections, for example Lynn Fahselt and Peter Ferenbach who founded ReThink Media and operate ReThink like a PR firm, but as a not-for-profit and *for* the sector.

¹⁴ *Creating a Rapid Rebuttal Mechanism For the Changing Minds Communications Effort* by Morris Lipson, July 2012.

¹⁵ Founded with support of Atlantic Philanthropies in 2015, the Social Change Initiative seeks to improve the effectiveness of social change activism through convening & dissemination of learning and resources, including related to strategic communications & public attitudinal change.

Function

There were also a number of choices in the *functions* the hubs provided.

Should the Hub combine research, messaging and dissemination?

As discussed above the creation of the hubs was driven by a perceived lack in each of the areas of research, messaging and dissemination. Hubs were a solution to each of these challenges but usually with separate hubs for research & messaging and for dissemination. There were several reasons for this, including:

- A sense that these were different functions with different skills
- A desire to keep the research “clean” and focused
- Being separate holds the research consultants more accountable
- In some cases there was already an existing organization ready to play one of these roles, e.g. in the US, America’s Voice was well-equipped to implement the results of the research FFF was supporting.
- A belief that creating a central structure for all functions would be viewed with too much suspicion by the sector.

However, all interviewees were clear that while all functions don’t have to be in one place, **coordination is vital**. In particular the end users of information need to be involved in the research both to provide their expertise and reduce the risk of rejection of the messaging guidance. Further, the research organizations should be members of any distribution networks maintained by an implementation hub

Neutral service provider or strategic driver of a campaign?

This choice is perhaps where there was greatest difference across hubs with some hubs being set up as neutral, behind-the-scenes resources and others trying to drive and lead the debate and the field.

The immigration sector, particularly in the UK, has been described as fractious and territorial. In the US the sector is large and broad. Perhaps responding to both of these dynamics, there was often a desire for the hubs to be neutral and not seen as pushing

an agenda within the immigration or human rights sectors.

In addition to the sectors' desire for neutrality, there were seen to be advantages to the hub being behind-the-scenes. Sometimes this came from a sense that the sector organizations, with existing brands and reputations, should be the ones to be out-front. Other times it came from a stretching of the term "neutrality" from *within* the sector to *beyond*, for example the suggestion that the precursor to IMiX be behind the scenes because "all efforts should be made to avoid a 'progressive' branding for the mechanism."¹⁶ But that would likely not have been realistic given the funding and purpose of the hub and would have risked the hub being portrayed as secretive and nefarious.

The trade-offs in this choice are perhaps most clearly illustrated in the case of British Future (BF). BF was created as a communications agency, but as they began work they saw a gap they could fill with a focus on strategic media placements around signature media moments and working with business, military and other allies or potential allies to reach the anxious middle, rather than doing communications *for* the immigration field. BF didn't try to be neutral, and instead provided a strong voice. However, it alienated some in sector by its approach (which was seen as too compromising) as well as a sense that BF had not met the original intent for supporting the field. This response was a driver for IMiX being created. **Of course, while a neutral support function may be what the sector wants, it's not clear that it is what delivers the greatest impact.**

Between the British Future and IMiX models sit ReThink and America's Voice (AV). ReThink says of their role, "we never appear in print" but they have a more independent identity than IMiX or the EPIM hub, perhaps driven by the fact that they work on more than one issue. AV plays more of a spokesperson role for sector but Frank Sharry, Executive Director of America's Voice, says that they had to earn that right over five to ten years. His goal is that AV be "of the movement" but independent enough to have its own voice, or to put it another way, "we will be in all the meetings but they [the sector] can't tell us what to do." Yet, Sharry believes that they have accountability to the movement through member organizations being on the AV board. An advantage of this independence is that groups engaging in lobbying and seeking to build relationships with members of Congress can claim some distance from the organization that may be attacking those same members of Congress.

The choice-making between campaign driver or neutral actor should be guided by whether the goal is a particular **policy change** (where an advocacy campaign with integrated message is needed to shift an issue) or the goal is broader **capacity building** for the field. However, as discussed later, the former may be a good way to help achieve the latter.

¹⁶ *Creating a Rapid Rebuttal Mechanism For the Changing Minds Communications Effort* by Morris Lipson, July 2012.

Deeper support for a few or broader support for many?

The hubs that were in a support role took a variety of approaches to breadth vs. depth. With IMiX and the EPIM hub five or six organizations were selected for focused support. Hubs like ReThink worked with a larger group of organizations and it was noted that “ReThink generally does not have the organizational capacity to provide individualized communications assistance for grantees.”¹⁷

Opportunity Agenda, while providing training for groups of organizations, overall took a very **open-source approach** to sharing messaging: “The nature and value of a narrative is that diverse actors within the movement can “run with it,” by adapting it to their voice and purposes, and we will foster adaptation through briefings and outreach.”¹⁸

Again, when making decision here, the goal of the work is key: if the intent is to build **capacity**, a more intense focus on fewer organizations may make more sense, but they should be carefully selected with a clear commitment to communications from senior leadership. If the goal is to **shift a narrative and have message consistency** across a sector, then the hub will need to support a larger group of NGOs, even if less intensively.

Balancing Wants and Needs

What the organizations in the sector **wanted** from a hub and the structure that would best place the hub to have the **most impact** were sometimes in tension. This can be a healthy tension and the chart below is designed to call-out those choices so the structure of the hub can be best aligned with the strategic goals of the funders.

Sector wants hubs to be...	To achieve impact, sector needs hubs to have...
Not a new organization	Enough independence to drive action
Neutral	A clear Point of View on message
Behind the scenes	A brand that media and influencers know
Without private sector involvement	Including private sector best-practice
Providing deep support, ideally bespoke, for their organization	Broad message consistency across the sector

¹⁷ Proteus Fund Security & Rights, Communications Infrastructure End of Grant Report (2017)

¹⁸ Opportunity Agenda, Project Progress Report (2011)

Models Across the Atlantic

Most of the hubs examined were either in the US or the UK and there are certain similarities – and differences – in approaches to hubs between the two countries, and also between the US/UK and EU. There was certainly a sense of enough commonality for learning visits to be established. For example, the IMiX Director and the communications officers IMiX supported were part of an Exchange Visit to the US, where comparative discussions were held with Rethink Media and America’s Voice (AV). The European hubs also looked to learn from the US, and the UK with EPIM influenced by the “Anglo-Saxon” experience. Frank Sharry, Executive Director of AV, consulted with British Future, IMiX and EPIM.

Perspectives on the value of these exchanges and the amount of replicability varied. Some UK interviewers praised the US model saying we were “drawing on them all the time” and noted that the US experience helped UK organizations to “leap frog over some mistakes.” One interviewee admired AV’s “volume and velocity” and the need they identified to be “out there, loudly.”

Others noted the differences between the two countries: culturally, the federal system, the scale of resources held by philanthropy in the US and the different cultures of philanthropy. Interestingly, it was noted that the foundations in Europe, despite having less money, have been more assertive in setting hub strategy than US foundations. This may be because the NGOs in Europe were smaller and more fractious and the funders therefore felt the need to be more directive, and are culturally more used to acting in that way. In the US there was more of a dynamic of organizations, like AV and Opportunity Agenda, making a case and pitching funders. In the UK and EU, funders came together and identified a need that they saw requiring the creation of a new organization.

Others flagged the “danger of fetishizing” the US, noting that the work there does not constitute a compelling track-record of success: Comprehensive Immigration Reform has not been secured, and Trump was elected.

In conclusion it seems that learning from the US experience was helpful to **accelerate** the process in the UK and EU. The US hubs were more of an **inspiration and reference** point than a direct equivalent, but they were useful for principles and frameworks.

Impact

This section seeks to evaluate the hubs' impact in each of their core areas of work. In each area we look at what worked and at the challenges.

Communications Strategy

The creation of hubs came out of a perceived need for the sector to be more strategic in communications. In some cases, the hubs helped to set or direct that strategy.

What Worked

The hubs:

- Raised the importance and value of strategic communications in the sector and increased “communications literacy.” For example, EPIM noted that one organization they were supporting is now including communications in their theory of change. An organization IMiX supported has committed to continuing to fund their communications officer through general support funds.
- Helped the sector to segment audiences and the need to engage them differently, i.e. mobilize the existing base, reach out to and persuade the skeptical or anxious middle, and discredit opponents.
- Made the case for partnering with unlikely allies e.g. British Future's work with military or America's Voice engagement with law enforcement.

Challenges

- The perceived value of communications in the sector started at a low level so even with growth there is still a large amount of scepticism.
- Communications is often an afterthought for policy organizations or service organizations.
- Communications organizations can't shift the broader strategy for a sector alone.
- There was a tendency for organizations to push their own immediate priorities rather than defer to a coordinated sector strategy.

- Uniting around a strategy was challenging due to baggage from previous battles, for example in the US there was bad feeling from previous comprehensive immigration reform work where national communications firms were seen to have pushed an unhelpful narrative around good vs bad immigrants.
- Audience dynamics have shifted, for example the US is now even more polarized into a 50/50 split, the “middle” is shrinking.
- It was not always clear what the sector was fighting for. Goals like “more balanced debate” are perhaps not a rallying cry.

Research

What Worked:

- Polling and other research revealed perspectives and points of view that advocates may not have had from contact with their own circles. While there have been some challenges with the research, it is a core component of the hub model.
- By collecting and sharing the research the hubs helped the sector to build on previous work and avoid duplication. The proposed FFF Repository is designed to further this goal.
- Facilitating interaction and mutual learning. For example, at the Repository convening in October 2017 people learned for the first time about others’ projects.

Challenges

- There is still some sector scepticism of the value of research: some see it as too expensive and/or “telling us what we already know.”
- Proposals for research tended to be short-term projects and there was very little longitudinal research.
- There is a need for additional research (especially in light of Brexit and Trump). There are some contrasting views here.
 - British Future considers the research basically set. They do updates to research to show opinion formers what the perspectives were, especially if attitudes are

not what they might be expected to be (e.g. after the Referendum a poll showed that 84% wanted EU migrants to stay).

- However, an analysis FFF funded after the 2016 US election concluded that the research being used was a “mile wide and inch deep” instilling false confidence.¹⁹ In fact the base was not as solid as was thought and the research was driven too much around specific policies or events:

“Many of the existing research projects may have had as a central or ancillary goal to use the data for public communication in order to move policymakers, as opposed to research designed to understand the nuances of public opinion generally or particular segments of the population.”²⁰

Messaging

What Worked

- There were shifts in public opinion over the period of work. For example, in an April 2017 NBC/WSJ poll, 60% of respondents agreed that that **immigration helps more than it hurts**, a high-water mark dating back to 2005, when only 37% felt that way.
- Hubs allowed for wider dissemination of messaging to NGOs that were not grant recipients and may have had no communications capacity at all. This was particularly fostered through a more open source approach used by Opportunity Agenda and by British Future (after a couple of years) with the publication of *How To Talk About Immigration*.
- US messaging experience allowed for more rapid deployment in UK.
- Hubs built the capacity to harness conversations and themes in the zeitgeist.

Challenges

- **Data.** The ability to measure public attitudes before and after the hubs’ work has been limited. Reasons for this include:
 - The hubs have not always had a clear starting point as they sometimes evolved from more informal arrangements with consultants
 - Research has focused at the front end of the process to establish the challenge and test messaging

¹⁹ Four Freedoms Fund, *What The Numbers Don’t Tell Us* Report (2017)

²⁰ Ibid.

- Collecting comprehensive public opinion data is expensive

There has been progress on the data challenge with the More in Common initiative²¹ investing heavily in research and the FFF Repository bringing together various data sources, but there is still a need for more **systematic longitudinal surveys** which could be done by adding questions to a survey like the British Social Attitudes (BSA) Survey (as Changing Minds did once) or deploying reputable pollsters in the US. The key thing is to conduct them with **consistent questions and to do so regularly over time.**
- Given Brexit and Trump and the French and German elections, there are **questions over whether these message frames were as effective as first thought.** Some have suggested a need for a more bold, positive framing about the benefits of immigration. There was discussion in 2017 in both the US and UK as to whether the messaging designed for the anxious middle overcompensated and turned off the base. There is certainly a value in having enthusiastic message carriers and some organizations just wouldn't deliver messages that were too pragmatic or compromising for them.
- **Messaging consistency.** This was hard due to the diversity of the sector and also limited capacity and knowledge. For example, in EPIM's work, they felt they were not at a stage where they could impose messaging on NGOs, the goal was simply to get the organizations to think about the value of messaging.
- **Sector resistance** to messaging guidance. This was driven by:
 - A lack of visibility into research and where it is coming from. It helped to provide advocates with ability to observe, e.g. focus groups
 - Frames like "American values" can be hard for some groups. ReThink took the approach that they offered their messaging guidance up for organizations to take and use as they wish. But at a certain point an a la carte approach defeats the purpose of *coordinated* messaging. This can perhaps be managed by asking groups to "opt-in" from the beginning (with a clear sense of the strategy and approach) rather than groups feeling obliged to "opt-out" because they don't agree with the messaging, after work is already underway.
- **Did this work start too late?** On both sides of the Atlantic the creation of hubs came from a sense that pro-immigration and human rights groups were on the back-foot

²¹ 'More in Common' is a multi-country initiative that seeks to equip civil society and the political establishment with the tools and means to respond more effectively to the challenges posed by the refugee crisis through better messaging, outreach and communications. Developed by Brendan Cox and Purpose-Europe and supported by SCI and a range of other funders, More in Common, in its initial phase, is focusing on creating hubs in France, Germany, UK and the US.

and losing the debate. Perhaps the opponents had too much of a head start in framing the debate on their terms?

- In looking at the disconnect between the seeming resonance of the messages deployed and election results that seem to suggest otherwise, one theory advanced – and perhaps to keep in mind going forward – was the possible presence of **social desirability bias**, i.e. the tendency of survey respondents to answer questions in a manner that will be viewed favorably by others.

Communications Tools

What Worked

- **Campaigns** like One Day Without Us²² and Refugee Week in the UK where the hubs were able to facilitate longer term planning were deemed to make the campaigns more impactful. The hubs ability to be more strategic also allowed them to connect with what was on the media's agenda, for example British Future engaged with the WWI centenary, the Olympics, and the tenth anniversary of the 7/7 London terrorist attacks.
- Rapid response / crisis response / atrocity response. Hubs were helpful in
 - **Preparing for shock events** by developing messaging guidance that is adaptable
 - Help in **fielding interviews** if an organization was overwhelmed in the aftermath of an event
- **Spokesperson media training.** Opportunity Agenda was seen as a leader in delivering messaging and media presentation workshops, including intensive four-day 'Communications Institutes'.
- **Media engagement** tools including:
 - Providing press lists (EPIM) & media database access (ReThink)
 - Media tracking technology (ReThink)
 - Connecting reporters and organisations
 - A daily news digest (ReThink)
 - Analysis of angles and media coverage
 - Conference call briefings
 - Development of op-eds and other collateral.

The hubs sat on a spectrum as to how much of this type of work they did *for* the organizations versus building capacity. Peter Ferenbach of ReThink put it nicely when

²² A National Day of Action to celebrate the contributions of migrants to British society.

he said they while they were “mostly interested in teaching people to fish” and would “give you the best fishing equipment, “sometimes they would also jump into support with “putting some fish in your pail.”

Challenges

- Improving capacity tended to be better received by the sector than proactive pushing of a narrative or a campaign.
- Very different levels of capacity across the NGOs.
- There remained sector suspicion of PR and communications.
- Communications can be hard to measure (compared to a metric like the number of people housed or released from detention).

Communications Staff for NGOs

Several of the hubs provided direct capacity support for sector organizations through funding communications officers. In some cases (EPIM and IMiX) this was also seen as a way to foster increased coordination between the organizations.

What Worked

- Helped senior executives think more about communications, either through the process of applying for funding, the presence of a dedicated communications person on staff or giving them additional time and convening space to stop and think about communications.
- Opportunity for communications officers to engage with and share learning with their peers in other NGOs. Oftentimes they were the only communications people in their organization.
- Organizations have been encouraged and enabled to “spread their own wings” on communications: ReThink’s initial cohort now has their own communications capacity, allowing ReThink to focus on newer, emerging organizations that need capacity building assistance.

Challenges

- The communications officers placed through the hubs at NGOs were usually junior or mid-level people and/or had other responsibilities. As the EPIM mid-term report said
“Engagement in the project is a challenge for all 5 Programme Officers who have to live up to their organisations’ expectations and agendas first and find it hard to make time for the work in this group.”
- There was turnover in the communications officers. Communications tends to be a fairly high-turnover sector, especially at junior levels.
- The original plan for IMiX communications officers to be very regional focused didn’t fully play out - in the end four were in London, in effect added capacity in the capital.
- A big injection of funds into a small organization can be challenging, especially if the purpose (communications) is not seen a strategic priority.
- Coordination – the NGOs being supported were not necessarily a group of organizations that were a strategic fit with each other, making joint work challenging.

The direct support was not a universal offering of the hubs. For example America’s Voice does “surprisingly little” direct support saying that they would rather “act than coordinate” (acknowledging that both are important). This was certainly also the perspective of British Future. In some cases, the approach evolved: Thomas Paine Initiative’s (TPI) sub-grantee Equally Ours, hosted by Equality and Diversity Forum (EDF),²³ was established as a communications hub to support eight national charities. It evolved into a stand-alone organization (still hosted by EDF) supporting a broader group of organizations.

²³ Equality and Diversity Forum is a UK network of organisations working across all areas of equality and human rights.

Recommendations

In considering the deployment of the hub model, this section sets out key factors that will make a hub more likely to succeed and the optimal approaches for building a hub.

Key Components for Hub Success

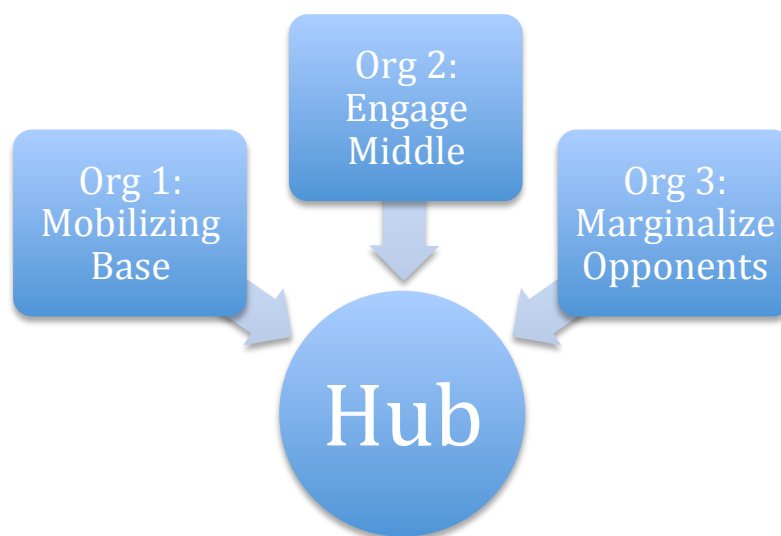
- 1) **Sector alignment.** Of course, in a diverse and broad sector this will not be 100% achievable, but if the hub leadership is spending a lot of time on diplomacy and hand-holding they are not focusing on communications. The hub should be a **manifestation of a desire for collective impact, not a tool to create it.** This sector buy-in should include a belief by the CSOs in the sector that a hub is needed. There is a danger that if the hub is seen as too funder-driven, the sector will not feel ownership. The hubs in UK emerged out of frustration from funders, and that was then perceived by some as criticism of the NGOs in the sector. At the very least there needs to be a certain level of collegiality and cooperation. If there is not that level of alignment, funders may want to consider an alternative approach like placing a big bet on improving communications capacity in one existing organization or creating a new communications-focused organization, but one that makes no pretence that it is serving the sector as a hub.
- 2) **A positive galvanizing goal.** In the US, passing Comprehensive Immigration Reform provided a vehicle for coordination and collaboration. Having a clear goal can help sector cohesion and encourage buy-in from sector leadership. EPIM is trying this approach with a European Citizens Initiative,²⁴ although signing a petition represents fairly low-level engagement. In the work in the UK, one challenge may have been that the goal was set by a response to a negative: ensuring a more informed, nuanced and less hostile public opinion, and therefore “detoxifying” the migration issue. That can be a harder type of goal to rally around.
- 3) **Communications is valued and prioritized.** Funders should ensure that program and leadership at sector organizations are on-board and engaged with the hub. It can’t be just the communications officer getting/seeing the value. Further, communications and the rest of the organization’s work have to be closely connected since communications is not a magic bullet. Funders may want to more explicitly tie engagement with a communications strategy into other funding and make it a requirement. This is what happened in LGBT movement around marriage equality, but there has been a hesitancy to do so in immigration.

²⁴ A European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is an invitation to the European Commission to propose legislation on matters where the EU has competence to legislate. An ECI must be backed by at least one million EU citizens, coming from at least 7 out of the 28 member states.

Recommended approaches

Research & Messaging

- While there may have been some limitations with research over this period, the hubs need to keep doing it, particularly in a volatile political environment, and to have a structure in place for more comparative, longitudinal studies.
- The activists should be engaged in the research to increase their buy-in.
- Cultural messages need to be location specific. Going forward the US, UK and EU are likely to be even more different.
- A messaging strategy that appeals to either just the base (those who are solidly political liberal) or just the “anxious middle” will likely be too limiting. Much of the work examined in this report started with the important appreciation that organizations were only speaking to the base, and important work was done to craft messages that would speak to the “anxious middle.” However, in a context where, especially in the US, **the middle is shrinking** any strategy that neglects the base is likely to be unsuccessful. It may well be that different organizations are focused on different audiences (mobilizing base, appealing to the center and marginalizing opponents). The sector will need a range of actors speaking to and connecting with different audience and it is hard for one organization to play all of those roles and yet, of course, there needs to be coordination. That is where the hub can play a crucial role.



Structure

- Communications is expensive, resource and time intensive. See what exists already, as building a new structure takes time and resources
- In considering existing organizations, favour a communications group – that will likely allow for a quick start, deliver the most value add for communications skills and mitigate some of the inter-sector dynamics that could be present if an advocacy or service organization from the sector is selected
- Staffing: The organizations selected – or created – should be staffed with experts in strategic communications. However, the staff should have connections to advocates and the issues, or aligned issues
- With more experience of the hub model there should now be the ability to have business plans and strategies and measurement in place from the beginning, and less need to evolve as the work develops. However, in a dynamic moment with volatile politics, don't be too set into one model
- Be clear as to whether the hub is designed to **belong to the sector** or to be independent **to benefit the sector** and set expectations accordingly

Evolution of the Hub Model

As the hub model develops some factors to consider:

Hub and Spoke

A further growth of the hub model could be towards a “hub and spoke” approach that would invest in communications in states (US), countries (EU) and regions (UK) where there is both need and potential. This was a common theme in the interviews for this Reflection and spoke to both a post-Brexit/Trump awareness of what may have been missing previously as well as a sense of where energy – and likely success – will be in the next few years, especially in the US. This suggests a particular role for new and existing hubs of coordinating and supporting regional “hublets.”

Social media and digital

This should not be seen as an “add on” but should be integral to the strategy of any new hubs being created or funded.

Collaboration with other progressive and social justice sectors.

Several interviewees identified a need to connect more closely with other progressive organizations to align better on messaging, to support each others' campaigns and to learn from each other. An increasing focus on intersectionality, and the political dynamic that progressives feel under acute threat, has been driving this desire for closer connection and collaboration. One respondent noted that the progressive movement in US does not have a good way of sharing messaging guidance across issues. This thinking is also reflected in the perspective of the More in Common initiative that work on refugees must be connected to addressing the broader rise of xenophobic populism and attacks on liberal values.

The reason this has not been done more to date seemed to be **a question of capacity rather than intent** with one respondent noting that the sector is just "too busy." There have been some recent moves in this direction, for example NEON - a network of over 1,600 UK organisers from 900 different CSOs. NEON runs trainings and support campaigns. While more coordination is important, the goal should not be to create a new entity - a "hub of hubs" - not least because of the expense that would entail. But - given the capacity constraints of these sectors - it would seem worthwhile for the hubs in each sector to be charged with improving cross-sector collaboration and coordination, given both the hubs' deep knowledge of messaging and their ability to efficiently pass through broader guidance to multiple organizations in a sector.

Checklist

There is no “one size fits all” model for a hub but this checklist reflects what has worked well:

- ✓ **Independent in the sector:** The hub should ideally not be housed at any individual sector organization.
- ✓ **Incubate with communications expertise:** Instead identify a communications-focused host organization
- ✓ **Non-profit with private sector skills:** Do not house the hub in a private sector PR firm, but it should operate like a good PR firm (creative, quick and with strong media relationships)
- ✓ **Sector savvy:** The hub should be well-connected to the sector through communications staff with sector connections or comparable experience and an advisory committee
- ✓ **Modest but known:** The hub’s role and profile should be “behind-the-scenes” but with sufficient brand identity to be known to journalists, policy makers and allies
- ✓ **Maximize the value:** The hub should aim to provide support to many organizations across the sector in an open-access way. It should look to provide consistent broad support for the sector, but with deep support for specific organizations when they particularly need it.

Conclusion

In seeking to shift public attitudes and change public policy, there is no choice but to use communications. The question is how to best deploy resources to advance communications goals.

The creation, or support, of hubs can play a crucial role in developing well-researched messages, coordinating communications activities across the sector, capacity building (through training, media lists and developing media contacts) for both pro-active activities and rapid response. **However, there needs to be fertile ground in the sector.** Otherwise the hub's work cannot take root.

The support of hubs in the immigration and human rights space is instructive. These hubs were created in response to the politics of backlash. Hate and fear is the context in which this work was and is taking place. That makes it hard to measure success. Is success actually that public opinion is not as negative as it could have been?

These hubs faced complicated sectors with suspicion as to whether framing and narratives designed to appeal to the middle were necessary. Perhaps, not surprisingly, funding and a focus on improving capacity was better received than proactive pushing of a narrative.

And yet, the hubs managed to varying degrees to do both: to provide communications capacity (both focused and broad) and to advance more effective message frames, which most of the sector got behind, even if with varying degrees of enthusiasm. The skill and sophistication of the sectors has improved, but still has a long way to go.

Lack of capacity and cultural suspicion of communications can lead to a layering of communications capacity and creating hubs on top of the sector. That may sometimes be necessary, but it is advisable to do as much work as possible to mitigate by investing in communications capacity in the NGOs too, as the hubs will be most effective if there are receptors to their services at NGOs. **That's why capacity building and narrative change need to go hand-in-hand.** Ideally the capacity building will be directed broadly across the sector and directed from a communications-agency style hub.

The goal of this work was to drive broader positive public attitudinal change and that requires significant resources (one consultant providing capacity support to very under-resourced organizations will have limited impact) as well as a significant time commitment to build relationships with media, reinforce messages, bring the sector together, and for nimbler and communications-focused leaders and organizations to come into place.

On messaging, the frames did move public opinion but the ultimate policy goals remain elusive or threatened. Could there have been – or is there - a narrative silver bullet? It's unlikely since messaging operates in a dynamic context, not a vacuum.

On structure and dissemination, in an era of “post-truth,” some might question if a strategy of diligent research, careful message testing and structures to ensure close sector coordination old-fashioned? However, it is most likely the only way to win.

Appendix: List of interviews

Frank Sharry	America's Voice
Debbie Pippard	Barrow Cadbury Trust
Sunder Katwala	British Future
Bobby Clark	Communications advisor to Four Freedoms Fund
Jerome Phelps	Detention Action
Aimee Nichols	Detention Watch Network
Sarah Sommer	EPIM
Philippa Nuttall Jones	EPIM
Anita Khashu	Four Freedoms Fund
Robert Bray	Four Freedoms Fund
Tim Finch	IMiX
Emma Harrison	IMiX
Sarah Cutler	Migration Exchange
Alan Jenkins	Opportunity Agenda
Peter Ferenbach	ReThink Media
Shireen Zaman	Security & Rights Collaborative at the Proteus Fund
Martin O'Brian	Social Change Initiative
Will Somerville	Unbound Philanthropy