



ACS Today

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New Client Spotlight

ACS is pleased to work with the following new clients:

BUILD Initiative, a national organization that supports state leaders' efforts to develop a comprehensive early childhood systems, is a client with whom ACS has worked over the years in various capacities. From communication planning to messaging to conference presentations, ACS is fortunate to partner with them on various projects, including their latest project to develop messaging documents related to child care subsidies and the broader early childhood landscape.

The Chicago Teachers Union Foundation wants to shift the narrative for public education in Chicago into one that better reflects the perspectives and experiences of teachers. To help begin this shift, ACS is creating a plan for the Chicago Teachers Union Foundation to intentionally provide opportunities for teachers to become advocates for policy and learn the skills and knowledge to engage successfully with policymakers at the local and state level.

Capacity is King

Spring is a time of renewal, when you want to get out there and start all those projects you've been thinking about. But when it comes right down to it, the things that usually keep important projects from getting off the ground are related to capacity: not only the knowledge about how something should be done, but also the training to do at least some of it ourselves. Building capacity is one of the things in which Advocacy & Communication Solutions, LLC (ACS) has...well, capacity and expertise. In this newsletter, we'll take a look at ways in which our clients are building capacity to get things done!

ACS Helps Build Capacity for Foundations and Grantees

Funders who wish to amplify their investments and boost the knowledge and abilities of their grantees have been turning to ACS for capacity building strategies and services. In some cases, foundations are working with ACS to figure out their own communication strategies. In others, they're depending on ACS to help their grantees become more strategic and savvy in their use of communication and coalition building to help improve outcomes.

For example, in 2014 and 2015, ACS was a key part of a consulting team assembled by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to support its [Forward Promise initiative](#). RWJF launched Forward Promise in 2012 to expand the potential for boys and young men of color to grow up healthy, obtain a good education, and find meaningful employment. ACS helped the foundation develop and conduct a grantee assessment to determine where needs and opportunities lay for grantee organizations. Then, ACS developed customized strategies to support those needs and built trust among five Forward Promise collaborative initiatives across the country including Little Rock, AK, Chicago, IL, Phoenix AZ, Minneapolis, MN, and New Orleans, LA.

"At the beginning of our process, ACS really provided significant thought leadership in terms of the approach to assessing grantees," says Allen Frimpong of BCT Partners, RWJF's intermediary organization for Forward Promise. "They made sure we pinpointed

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Making the Case

ACS is pleased to share two new case studies as part of a series coming out in 2016 that showcase our clients' great stories and intriguing ideas. Both are available now on the ACS [website](#). Our newest additions include:

- A profile of our work for the highly praised PRE4CLE effort in Cleveland, Ohio, including how we kept more than 60 steering committee members engaged, informed and in agreement to produce the PRE4CLE plan. You can find the full case study on our [website here](#).
- As noted earlier, one of our new case studies provides a look at how ACS helped the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation enhance the value of investment in its Forward Promise initiative by assessing five key grantees, as well as amp up the strategic communication, capacity building, and collaboration of those grantees with tailored technical assistance. You can find the full case study on our [website here](#). ▲

Recent and Upcoming Appearances

Since our last newsletter, the ACS team has been making the rounds at various conferences throughout the country as lead presenters and have a few more appearances on the calendar for later this spring.

Where we've been:

The University of Denver: ACS President Lori McClung presented to an eager group of next-generation social policy advocates at The University of Denver on February 8, 2016. McClung covered the pros and cons of grassroots communication tools, such as Twitter and infographics, and helped her audience understand the importance of building policymaker relationships as part of a strategic advocacy plan instead of just making grassroots noise.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Public Policy Forum: Lori McClung spoke at the NAEYC Public Policy Forum February 28-29 in Washington, DC., which was attended by more than 200 early childhood practitioners and advocates from 45 states. McClung spoke on a panel with NAEYC Executive Director Rhian Evans Allvin about grassroots advocacy strategies and co-facilitated an Advocacy 101 training with national advocate Amy O'Leary (Director of the Early Education for All Campaign in Massachusetts) a full room of excited advocates. All of the sessions were focused on helping NAEYC representatives engage successfully in Capitol Hill visits during the Forum and in grassroots advocacy at home. To help boost your own advocacy efforts, check out ACS' federal advocacy tools [here!](#)

Where we'll be:

2016 National Smart Start Conference: Look for us in Greensboro, North Carolina, May 2-5 for three separate presentations, one of which is a featured session moderated by ACS Vice President Scarlett Boudier entitled "From Grassroots to Grasstops: Early Childhood as a Political Platform," featuring Rhian Evans Allvin, Executive Director for NAEYC; Local and State perspective: Katie Kelly, Executive Director for PRE4CLE; Tom Lamb, Government Affairs Director, PNC Bank.

At the same conference, Scarlett and ACS Senior Strategist Rebecca Cohen will lead a workshop on effective messaging entitled, "Be a Better Spokesperson for Infants and Toddlers." Then they will be rounding out their time with tips for motivating partners and champions in a session, "Moving from Buy-In to Ownership: Systems Change Through Authentic Collaboration," which covers lessons learned from our work across the country, and featuring the nationally recognized PRE4CLE initiative.

Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association Conference: Senior Strategist Rebecca Cohen is teaming up with new ACS partner Mike Lawrence (Principal of Community Workforce Advancements, LLC) to conduct a workshop at the [Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association Conference](#) on May 19, 2016. Lawrence brings more than 35 years of experience implementing workforce and economic development initiatives at the local, state, and federal levels. This session will emphasize the roles of local and state Workforce Boards in advancing strategic advocacy and communication efforts to build coalitions for workforce development, engage key leadership and create policy change.

Preparing Clients for Success: Prevent Child Abuse Arizona

According to an independent review by the Arizona Department of Child Safety, the threat of child abuse and neglect in Arizona has reached crisis proportions in recent years, growing by 44 percent, increasing the number of children that are placed into foster care by more than 20 percent (17,000 children) since 2009. As the state's Department of Child Safety is overwhelmed in responding to more than 52,000 reports of suspected child mistreatment each year, [Prevent Child Abuse Arizona \(PCA\)](#) is addressing the problem from the other end of the spectrum—prevention.

Armed with a hot-off-the-presses two-year advocacy strategy (developed by ACS), PCA is poised to elevate prevention as a crucial part of the statewide conversation, and build upon public will for more child abuse prevention to be incorporated in the state's efforts. The ultimate goal? Position prevention as the lead approach in the state's child safety system.

"PCA's advocacy strategy is built on four pillars: messaging, engaging champions as messengers, influencing the media, and engaging in direct advocacy," explains ACS Vice President Scarlett Boudier. "These four pillars work together to push the concept that prevention is a priority."

The ACS team spent several months meeting with PCA staff and leadership to get an accurate picture of the state landscape with regard to the legislature, the media, and community sentiments. ACS then led an advocacy session with PCA's executive director and board policy committee to identify short- and long-term policy goals, determine PCA's capacity, and create a network map to identify relationships that PCA could leverage for success. ACS then took all these factors into account to create the strategy that builds on PCA's strengths and will resonate in Arizona's current political and media environments.

"A key element for this particular plan is the use of community champions, who will carry the right messages to the media while PCA focuses on direct messaging to policymakers," Boudier explains.

By the end of 2017, PCA seeks an increase in attention for prevention by the media and key officials from the State of Arizona that they hope will ultimately lead to a higher level of child safety throughout Arizona. Check out highlights from the PCA Arizona plan here. ▲

ACS Spotlight: Rebecca Cohen

Rebecca Cohen is Senior Strategist at ACS, a position she relishes because, as she explains it, “I’m a data nerd, but I love building relationships and helping organizations troubleshoot their challenges and then building a plan to overcome those challenges with the resources they have at that moment in time.”

Rebecca leverages her strengths in problem solving and relationship building on a daily basis, working with ACS clients on strategy development, capacity building and communication. Some of her current engagements include facilitating a group of local stakeholders in Little Rock, Arkansas, to build a comprehensive plan for children, youth and families; developing a plan to help enhance statewide awareness of infant mental health issues in Wisconsin; and working with the Michigan Early Childhood Investment Council to encourage home child care providers to sign up for the state’s quality improvement rating system.

Rebecca’s social sector content knowledge centers around workforce development and early childhood—knowledge she gained in past jobs with groundWork™ Ohio, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, and the Workforce Intelligence Network of Southeast Michigan, a collaboration between community colleges and local workforce boards, which she helped launch.

In addition to providing valuable services to many ACS clients, Rebecca also takes the lead on ACS’ own marketing efforts. In fact, she developed ACS’ strategic plan for marketing and now oversees its execution. She’s also drawing on her own workforce development experience and contacts to expand ACS’ practice in that arena.

But it’s a belief in ACS clients and their issues that light a fire for Rebecca. “ACS clients are passionate about their work and improving their operations; they are dedicated to expanding their reach and influence to make their communities better for children, youth, and families. I am inspired by their work and the difference they make and I’m honored to be a part of it. I care about the issues that we work on - workforce development, restorative justice, early childhood health and education, public education. So, to quote my alma mater’s football coach Jim Harbaugh: ‘Who’s got it better than us? Nooo-body!’

ACS Helps Build Capacity for Foundations and Grantees

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not only the needs of grantees, but also their assets as we identified areas for growth. They did a phenomenal job of being thought leaders and bringing their significant experience to bear.”

ACS also developed a specific, tailored technical assistance experience for each RWJF grantee, depending on their strengths and needs. As an added bonus, the fact that ACS worked with all grantees simultaneously meant that grantees could learn from one another as well.

“Every individual grantee presented a different challenge, but we were able to find intersections of need that we could address collectively,” said ACS President Lori McClung. “We were able to help grantees learn as peers from one another, and share ideas that could feed into each others’ plans. Because we worked with all of them individually, we had a special vantage point to spot the potential for cross-pollination. That’s not something that generally happens if there are different consultants working with each grantee, but it helps funders get more mileage from their investments.”

The story of ACS’ work with Forward Promise grantees is captured in our latest case study, [“Raising the Bar on Behalf of Boys and Young Men of Color.”](#)

We can help you build the capacity you need for effective communication and advocacy work in your city, region, or state. Give us a call! ▲

Want to learn how communication, strategy development or advocacy can move your organization forward?

Need an expert for training sessions or conference presentations?

Contact one of our team members, call toll-free at 1-877-372-0166 or visit our website at advocacyandcommunication.org

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