

Branding 101 Recap

Big Idea: Your brand is a story that exists in the hearts and minds of your stakeholders. To resonate with your stakeholders, your brand has to speak to their interests and values.

Branding & Stakeholder Engagement

You can use a branding process to authentically engage your most important stakeholders.

- Map and prioritize your network of stakeholders
- Identify what stakeholders value most about the impact your organization achieves
- Build awareness of your vision and affinity for your brand by authentically seeking and incorporating stakeholder feedback
- Create an authentic and aspirational brand – one that is real, and inspiring!

Stakeholder Engagement Principles

Align your stakeholder-engagement process with these guiding principles to ensure you create authentic buy-in and get valid and valuable feedback.

- Decide at the beginning of the process who has ultimate accountability for decisions. It isn't always easy to choose a path forward, especially if feedback from various stakeholder groups isn't aligned.
- If you plan to engage stakeholders at any stage of your branding process, make sure you engage them from the beginning. For example, don't wait and try to collect feedback for the first time as part of your logo process. It will be hard for your stakeholders to evaluate logo options if they're not grounded in the research and messaging that supported the design decisions.
- Balance internal and external feedback. Staff, donors and program/service recipients are equally important audiences!

Market Research

Market research that adds value to strategic planning and branding often takes the form of:

- **Stakeholder interviews** – confidential, one-on-one interviews, often conducted with senior leaders (Board and staff), with your direct beneficiaries and with influencers
- **Surveys** – used to identify quantitative insights, such as “the majority of our current volunteers struggle to describe our organization’s mission and vision”
- **Focus groups** – often used to probe more deeply into themes identified in stakeholder interviews or surveys, such as understanding the extent to which Spanish-speaking parents see language as a barrier to engagement

Messaging

The insights you derive from your market research will directly inform your messaging. Key messaging tools you may want to develop include:

- **A messaging platform or key messages** – these messages serve as the foundation for all future marketing and communications. Clear, concise and compelling messages will help ensure that valuable communications resources are devoted less to explaining your organization’s purpose, and more to building engagement and excitement around a compelling vision and unique value proposition. A messaging platform guides your approach to highlighting stories of success and building a case for greater and more sustainable support by all stakeholders, including donors.
- **An elevator pitch** – the elevator pitch introduces your organization to the world. Rather than include everything there is to know about you, your elevator pitch gives a quick introduction to who you are, what you believe, and why you are needed.
- **A creative messaging concept** – sometimes called a tagline, this is a short, engaging, memorable phrase that sums up the unique value and impact for which you want to be known.

Logo

Sometimes optional – you may adjust your brand positioning without making changes to your logo – your logo symbolizes the values, personality traits and ideas articulated in your research and messaging processes.

- Look for a designer or agency that specializes in logos. They’re highly symbolic, and therefore hard to get right!
- Be sure to ask for at least three concepts for your logo. We recommend a process by which you’d choose one of the initial options and make tweaks from there.