

PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

Better government. Stronger democracy.

COMMUNICATIONS TIPS

Tips for discussing the role of the federal government with the public

November 2026

The federal government is facing a crisis of public support. Although civil servants are generally seen positively, less than one-third of Americans say they trust the federal government overall while 75% say it is wasteful and 72% say it is corrupt. At the same time, federal agencies and the civil service are undergoing significant changes that will alter the way government delivers public services for years to come.

<1 in 3

Americans say they trust the federal government

75%

say the federal government is wasteful

69%

say most civil servants are 'committed to helping people like me'

Source: "The State of Public Trust in Government 2026," Partnership for Public Service, Sept. 2026.

To effectively engage with people about the state of our government, we need to acknowledge the dissatisfaction many have, emphasize government's role in serving the public and show how government can be improved.

Based on 25 years of experience telling the story of government's impact and six years of studying public opinion, the Partnership has compiled the following tips on how best to communicate the value of the federal government with a wide range of constituencies. These tips are designed to appeal to the broad public and to those who may not have thought much about the role the federal government plays in their lives and communities.

Highlight the government's impact

DO	DON'T
DO focus on areas where government makes Americans' lives safer and more secure—topics such as public safety, infrastructure and education.	**DON'T** focus on how cuts to the budget, workforce or programs harm federal employees. Instead, incorporate harms to federal employees with information about how cuts affect results for the public.
DO talk about the positive impact of the federal government on families and the American people.	**DON'T** presume the public knows (or cares) about differences between agencies or federal, state and local governments. Most people care about whether they are getting what they need, not which government entity it comes from.
DO focus on how the federal government finds solutions and solves problems.	
DO offer practical solutions to clear problems.	
DO share concrete examples of government success stories.	

Communicate clearly

DO	DON'T
DO use plain language that is easy to understand. Avoid jargon and technical terms as much as possible.	**DON'T** overwhelm the public with data. Instead, complement data with stories or visuals.
DO emphasize the ways that the federal government and civil servants are held accountable.	**DON'T** use stock footage. Such images can appear inauthentic and turn people off.
DO focus on measurable results of government work.	**DON'T** lecture your audience.
DO provide the public with a specific call to action whenever possible—a prompt to encourage an immediate, specific step.	**DON'T** use too many abbreviations or acronyms. They can be confusing.

Find common ground

DO	DON'T
DO find an issue your audience cares about and describe how the federal government plays a positive role. For example, discuss how Medicare helps care for the elderly and how national parks are important for those who enjoy the outdoors.	**DON'T** relitigate old issues or single out political leaders or parties. Such discussions are likely to polarize audiences.
DO explain how effective government promotes fairness for all Americans.	**DON'T** tell people they are wrong. People will be more responsive if you frame new information as a chance to learn. For example, introduce information with, "Did you know?"
DO acknowledge people's frustrations with government.	**DON'T** communicate as though government or civil servants are perfect and there is no need for reform. Emphasize that improvement is needed but should be done thoughtfully and with the impact on the American people as the primary concern.
DO emphasize that federal workers serve the American people and take an oath to support and defend the Constitution, not any political leader or party.	
DO explain how the government provides stability in concrete ways. For example, federal workers keep our water clean, promote public health and prevent outbreaks of infectious diseases.	
DO try to understand your audience's values and concerns—and address them directly.	

Focus the conversation

DO	DON'T
DO highlight stories of specific civil servants—what brought them to public service, what their work does for the public and why their work matters.	**DON'T** focus extensively on innovation unless innovative government is a priority for your audience. Most people want their government to be dependable, consistent and reliable—especially during times of crisis.
DO be honest and open about both successes and challenges.	**DON'T** use vague or alarmist language. Instead, focus on concrete and practical issues and solutions. Phrases such as "end of democracy" can turn people off.
DO highlight the ways the federal workforce reflects America: 87% of federal workers are located outside of the Washington, D.C., metro area. Many have blue collar jobs like mechanics, nurses, security guards and food service workers.	

LEARN MORE

Resources

Federal Harms Tracker: The real cost to your government and community
federalharmstracker.org

- **The Cost of Cutting American Science**
  science.federalharmstracker.org
- **The Cost to Our Economy**
  federalharmstracker.org/cost-to-our-economy
- **The Cost to Your Community**
  federalharmstracker.org/cost-to-your-community
- **The Cost to Your Government**
  federalharmstracker.org/cost-to-your-government

Government for a New Era
neweragov.org

Service to America Medals®
servicetoamericamedals.org

Share your story
ourpublicservice.org/publications/government-impact-storytelling-communications-guide

Storytelling toolkit
ourpublicservice.org/publications/government-impact-storytelling-communications-guide

Toolkits for download
ourpublicservice.org/take-action/download-toolkits

Help tell the story of government's impact.

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