



# Stakeholder Communication in High-Stakes Healthcare Programs

When your decisions affect patient safety, workforce mobility, and public trust, stakeholder communication is a core programmatic responsibility. Effective communication with stakeholders strengthens the credibility of your credentialing program and mitigates reputational risk. By contrast, even the most technically sound assessment programs can crumble with poor communication.

When I was studying for my Project Management Professional (PMP®) certification, one of the core knowledge areas that resonated most with me was stakeholder management. It goes well beyond simply identifying who your stakeholders are. It requires a deliberate plan for engaging them, managing those engagements over time, and monitoring how stakeholder needs and perceptions evolve. Those lessons have stayed with me.

As Executive Director of the Certification Board of Infection Control and Epidemiology, my professional background is not in test development or psychometrics. Instead, I have spent my career managing assessment programs and have learned valuable lessons, both from successful launches and from those that were less successful. There are few things worse than announcing a major programmatic change and then realizing, “Oh, we forgot to notify \_\_\_\_.”

When developing a new credential or implementing changes to an existing one, I keep a simple stakeholder checklist handy and regularly ask myself: What are their priorities? What is their risk tolerance? Below are a few questions your team may want to work through during the planning phase of a new or revised program:



### **Candidates and certificants**

- How will this new program impact existing credential holders?
- What are the consequences—intended or unintended—of introducing a new credential?
- Are there issues of fairness or eligibility that need to be addressed prior to launch?

### **Employers and healthcare organizations**

- What is the impact on workforce readiness and hiring decisions?
- How will credibility be perceived by employers and leaders in the field?

### **Regulators and accreditors**

- If you are an accredited program, will you pursue accreditation immediately for the new credential?
- If accreditation is planned, how does that decision affect your development timeline and resources?

### **Subject matter experts and volunteers**

- What role will volunteers play throughout development and implementation?
- Who are the decision-makers, and how are decisions communicated back to contributors?

### **Patients and the public**

- What will the outcomes of this assessment signal to the public about competence and quality?

One-size-fits-all communication does not work for high-stakes programs, especially those with international reach. Messaging that is appropriate for regulators may overwhelm or confuse candidates, while public-facing communications may lack the depth or specificity regulators expect. Segmentation matters.

### **Helpful Hints**

- **Be transparent without overexposing.** Clearly explaining how decisions are made and by who builds trust. However, disclosing overly technical psychometric details can confuse rather than inform.
- **Apply consistency across communications.** Alignment between customer service responses, written policies, and public messaging reduces appeals, complaints, and perceptions of unfairness.
- **Anticipate emotional responses.** High-stakes assessments are inherently stressful. Plain, direct language, especially around pass/fail decisions, is essential. Be explicit about next steps, timelines, and available options.



### **Lessons Learned**

Don't rely on dense legal language that obscures meaning. If you and your staff don't understand it, others won't either! Communicate policy changes well in advance. Budgets and staffing decisions are often made months ahead. Ensure internal teams are fully prepared before making major programmatic announcements. Once again, if your team doesn't understand it, others won't either!

### **Conclusion**

High-stakes healthcare assessments require psychometric rigor and technical quality, but those elements alone are not enough. Stakeholders evaluate programs not only on outcomes, but on how those outcomes are explained and contextualized. Effective stakeholder communication reinforces perceptions of fairness and legitimacy and ultimately supports long-term program sustainability.