

# Communications Strategies for Vision Zero

Lessons from New York City

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## Summary

New York City launched its Vision Zero effort in 2014, the first of the pioneering cities in the U.S. to adapt the Swedish-inspired, human-centered approach to traffic safety. New York's efforts have drawn significant attention, particularly as other U.S. cities look for lessons learned, inspiration, best practices, and shared experiences that can help with their own Vision Zero ambitions. By virtue of being one of the earliest adopters, as well as having a robust, relatively well-funded, multi-disciplinary Vision Zero program with a strong emphasis on data collection and analysis, New York's experiences offer valuable insights to other cities working to eliminate traffic deaths and serious injuries. New York may not have all the answers, but it does have the most experience with Vision Zero of any American city.

This white paper is intended to help the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) advance its communication efforts around Vision Zero by highlighting some of the core communications practices of a peer agency in a comparable city. But the strategies discussed below are not only relevant to San Francisco. Any city pursuing Vision Zero efforts will find the lessons of New York City helpful to their communications planning, though some of the concepts will need to be scaled and adapted to local budgets and cultures. Cities are also advised to consult the Vision Zero Network case study "Communications Strategies to Advance Vision Zero" for more details, examples and best practices from San Francisco and New York (see Resources section at end of report).

This report is organized into three sections, each one highlighting a key lesson, practice, or particular Vision Zero communications example from New York City:

1. **INTERNAL OUTREACH** – Building a Vision Zero culture within the city family
2. **EXTERNAL OUTREACH** – Using data to craft effective messages
3. **CAMPAIGN CASE STUDY** – 'Your Choices Matter'

## **Internal communications: Building a Vision Zero culture within the city family**

Communications have always been a part of street safety efforts in New York City, and are a key part of NYC's modern Vision Zero work. Traditionally, Vision Zero dialogues around street design, speed management, and law enforcement tend to be led by professionals in transportation or public policy. However, communicating clearly with the public about these subjects, as well as leading education and behavior change campaigns, is a task best assigned to strategic communications professionals. More than many city-led initiatives, Vision Zero demands a high degree of coordination and collaboration across departments and with community members and stakeholders. In New York City, the Department of Transportation (NYC DOT) is the lead agency behind Vision Zero efforts and the hub for communications, but good communications require coordination with other agencies and departments that share Vision Zero implementation roles. In NYC's example, communications functions are tightly coordinated among partners in the Mayor's Office, Police Department, Department of Public Health, and other departments.

Creating a formal task force was essential to internal Vision Zero coordination. "The task force was everything. The marketing working group was established early to bring different agencies together," said Michelle Kaucic, Director of Strategic Communications at NYC DOT. The formal presence of the task force, combined with high-level political support, allowed internal champions to unite behind a unified Vision Zero message. In other words, there were already a lot of people within New York City's vast bureaucracy who cared about and were working on traffic safety, but giving it a name and a brand — Vision Zero — was a powerful rallying cry that helped overcome departmental differences.

One of the fundamental lessons from New York City regarding communications is being savvy and strategic about internal (City agencies and partners) and external (the public) audiences. While cities may be well-practiced at communicating with constituents, marketing to other arms of city government isn't always as intuitive. Staff may feel less confident in their ability to approach this audience. Yet it's critical to the long-term success of traffic safety goals to build a shared ownership and leadership of Vision Zero across city departments. Vision Zero can not be successful due to the efforts of one agency or individual leader alone; broad and meaningful buy-in from all relevant arms of city government is essential to success.

### **The Brand Book**

To ensure consistent communication across departments, NYC DOT's communications staff created an internal "brand book." The document provides statistics, talking points, graphics, and guidance about terminology, messaging and language related to Vision Zero. "We want everyone to feel they're contributing to the (Vision Zero) initiative in a positive way, and internal communications within the agency are really important," said NYC DOT's Kaucic. The creation of the book involved a task force of communications specialists from multiple agencies. While

there may be different styles and goals among the communications staff from different agencies, it is critical that the public-facing communications about Vision Zero come from a consistent 'City' voice.

It isn't enough to just create the internal brand book. It needs to be promoted and understood by its audiences. The NYC DOT team invests real resources into continuous internal promotion through the city intranet, email blasts, and in-person trainings with key staff in targeted departments. Furthermore, the internal brand book undergoes regular revisions as the narrative around Vision Zero evolves. Finding and nurturing internal champions within different agencies, along with support and resources from a high-level leadership, enabled the Vision Zero marketing group to achieve a broad adoption of the messaging strategies defined in the brand book.

Of course, the communications efforts to transform internal culture are only supporting measures. Nothing can replace strong political leadership, a talented and empowered staff with adequate resources, and effective community partners. Building on all of that, a well-coordinated internal outreach plan is still a must-do to sustain momentum for Vision Zero interventions beyond the initial ribbon cutting.

## **External outreach: Using data to communicate effectively**

A core theme of New York City's work is the collection, analysis, and application of data to guide Vision Zero communications work. This scientific precision comes from an understanding that resources are limited, and that communications should be focused where they can deliver the highest return on investment. Public-facing messaging should be inclusive, but that doesn't mean that audiences shouldn't be segmented and targeted, campaigns evaluated, and crash data analyzed to understand patterns and behaviors that can save lives.

### **Using market research data to deploy communications**

New York City stresses the importance of utilizing professional marketing services in its external communications efforts. Sophisticated audience research and segmentation is standard in corporate marketing campaigns - yet is often de-prioritized by public agencies when tough decisions about budgets must be made. But without this information, it's very difficult to ensure that external communications are heard where they most need to be. For example, New York chose to focus much of its marketing efforts on men between ages 30-45, as well as senior citizens, because their data analysis showed that behavior change in these groups would have the greatest impact on traffic safety.

## **Visualizing crash data**

Most thoughtful Vision Zero efforts begin with a study of injury collisions to better understand where they happen, why they happen, and who is involved. While the quality of data varies from city to city, in most places clear patterns show that a significant portion of crashes resulting in death or serious injury happen in relatively few places under somewhat predictable circumstances. Communicating this analysis in a clear and transparent way is essential for helping constituents understand why design and behavior change efforts are prioritized in particular locations.

Visualizing this data in an interactive way is one of the strategies employed by NYC DOT early in its Vision Zero campaign to help build public trust around changes to streets, as well as to support the narrative that severe traffic crashes are not random, unpredictable events. Visualizations of crash data are only as good as the data itself; electronic crash data reporting is a promising technological tool that can help automate this process. A link to New York's 'Vision Zero View' crash data visualization is included in the Resources section of this report.

## **Self-evaluation and reporting**

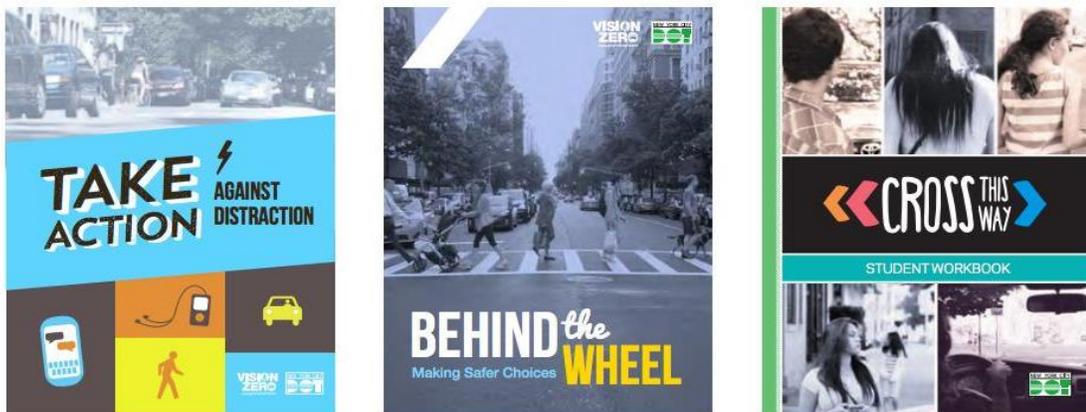
One challenge to building public support for Vision Zero is framing the goals effectively and convincingly. Like many public health crises, traffic violence is not particularly visible in daily public life, and it is easy to underestimate its impact. Once again, data is a powerful communications tool for providing a map between defining the problem and prioritizing and building public and political support for a response.

NYC DOT, along with its city and community partners, including the non-profits Families for Safe Streets and Transportation Alternatives, has been especially rigorous in self-evaluating and reporting progress. Their frequent Vision Zero reports are thoroughly researched and visually attractive — detailed enough for professionals but also approachable for anyone with an interest in the subject. While it does take an investment of time and money to produce the reports, their quality communicates a commitment to transparency and accountability, and builds a shared definition of the problems Vision Zero aims to address. Furthermore, the commitment to frequent reporting helps build internal urgency, with staff and political leaders knowing that progress is being watched closely and needs to be visible. See the Resources section for examples of New York's Vision Zero progress reports.

## **Safety education**

A commitment to education around Vision Zero in public schools is one of the ways that safety education is advanced. Schools were already committed to traffic safety education before Vision Zero, but aligning the brand with existing educational resources — and developing new ones — are helpful to building the brand among students, parents and educators.

Similarly, the City has increased Vision Zero branding within its professional driver training programs. The Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS), along with the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) and Metropolitan Transport Authority (MTA) are the agencies with the largest numbers of professional drivers on New York streets. In partnership with Families for Safe Streets and Transportation Alternatives, a 15-minute film, “Drive Like Your Family Lives Here,” was produced and is now a part of the required training for all taxi and city fleet drivers. The film uses interviews with traffic victim’s families to build an emotional case for safe driving behavior and needed infrastructure improvements. (See link to video in Resources section)



### Owned media

Like all communications work, New York’ City’s Vision Zero efforts span multiple types of media as part of the strategy to build a public narrative around traffic safety. Besides traditional earned media (journalism, blogs, and coverage produced by traditional news sources), paid media (advertising) and social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), NYC DOT has been particularly effective at using a fourth type — owned media — to advance its Vision Zero brand.

Owned media describes the communication channels that the City government directly controls. Consider all the different ways that a City communicates with its residents — mailings, websites, telephone interactions, signage and public space — and how a Vision Zero message could be integrated into them at little or no cost. In New York City, many of the municipal fleet vehicles that work in the public realm have Vision Zero branding and messages, providing rolling billboards in highly visible places. City work crews wear hazard vests with the Vision Zero logo boldly portrayed. And when safety improvements are made to fleet vehicles, such as truck side rails that help

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mitigate crash severity, Vision Zero messaging is prominent. This often-overlooked channel of media may be one of the practices that is most easily replicated in any city.



Source: New York City Vision Zero Year Two Report

### Case study: 'Your Choices Matter' campaign

New York City was one of the first to undertake an ambitious, large-scale, multi-year advertising campaign aimed at individual behavior changes as part of Vision Zero. The 'Your Choices Matter' messaging resulted from extensive market research of New Yorkers. To do this, NYC DOT employed the services of a full-service ad agency, something it highly recommends to other cities, if possible. Focus groups, interviews, and other qualitative research methods revealed that New Yorkers responded best to empowering messages that were not didactic, but rather offered them agency to make better decisions as street users. The campaign also needed to be direct and attention-grabbing — in the media-saturated landscape of New York, the campaign needed to be bold in order to be noticed. The resulting campaign is graphic and somewhat shocking. This potential controversy of this approach was considered, but the thorough research behind the campaign's effectiveness bolstered decision makers' confidence in going forward with its implementation.



The timeline of the campaign was designed to progress through a series of phases, moving from initial building of awareness to calling for action and behavior change. The campaign's creators looked to other public health campaigns for inspiration. Campaigns to curb smoking and reduce drunk driving, in particular, were effective in large part because of well-coordinated communications efforts. But they took many years to permeate society. Building an effective behavior change campaign requires tactical focus, resources, and perhaps most of all patient persistence.

FALL 2014	<b>AWARENESS</b>	Brand awareness built for umbrella message, placing responsibility on individual choices	
SPRING 2015	<b>FAMILIARITY</b>	Hard data reinforces dangerous driving as the priority issue	
SPRING 2016	<b>CONSIDERATION</b>	Build on early consideration and affect actions for behavior modification	
	<b>ACTION</b>		

New York City DOT stresses the importance of metrics. From the beginning, evaluating the results of the campaign was a top priority. The intent was not only to measure the effectiveness of the messaging as part of public outreach efforts, but also to help build an internal narrative around the value of sustained marketing. To do this, NYC DOT found it helpful to track a simplified set of metrics that are valuable for conveying the effectiveness of campaigns to non-marketing professionals in decision-making positions. These “at-a-glance” stats about how well the marketing effort is working were especially useful for high-level political discussions and as part of the budgeting process. This isn’t a replacement for the deep analysis and detailed metrics necessary for effective marketing, but an important tool for making the case with key, internal audiences.

*Simplified metrics: Providing an “at-a-glance” view of a campaign*

**Awareness:** How many people in our city have heard of Vision Zero? How many have seen the campaign? How many know about recent changes in policy (such as a city-wide speed limit reduction)?

**Behavior:** Is yielding behavior improving at target intersections? How many people expect more enforcement of traffic laws? Do people report that the ads caused them to pay more attention to safety in traffic?

**Objective numbers:** How many actual crashes are happening? How many deaths? Serious injuries? How many moving violation citations?

## Results

Two-plus years in, the City is observing the effects of the campaign. Initial results are promising. These results are all based on surveys of New York residents. NYC DOT admits that it is difficult to assign real behavior change to the campaign, since the results are self-reported and that actual behavior change is a result of many factors. With available funding, it would be preferable to add in-depth qualitative analysis methods to the evaluation, such as ethnographies, focus groups, and interviews.

Some of the initial results that NYC DOT has shared from the Your Choices Matter campaign include the following:

- 72% of drivers recall having seen an advertisement
- 91% of drivers understand it's their responsibility to yield to people in the crosswalk
- 79% of drivers identify driver behavior as a cause in fatal crashes
- 87% of drivers reported that the ads persuaded them to avoid texting or making calls while driving
- 86% of drivers reported that the ads reminded them to pay more attention to people walking and biking
- 75% of drivers said they expect more traffic law enforcement after seeing the ads
- 75% of non-drivers said the ads made them a more careful pedestrian

## Conclusions

New York City's solutions cannot be copied and pasted. Strategies must be tailored to the budgets and cultures of each city. But the methods NYC credits for its early successes — including enlisting professional marketing services, emphasizing data and metrics to craft and evaluate messages, and creating and implementing internal marketing protocols to achieve a high level of cross-departmental coordination — are replicable elsewhere. While the resulting messages, campaigns and outreach strategies may look different from place to place, building a solid base for strong internal and public communications is universally critical.

Drawing inspiration from other places is key to the spread of any innovation. Vision Zero is a new idea in the U.S. context, and the pace of evolution in the field is very fast. While early adopters like New York City may not offer the exact campaign models for every emerging Vision Zero city, its experiences can motivate better results in other places than would otherwise be achieved by working in a vacuum. By providing a springboard for action, New York's example can inspire other cities to protect and improve the lives of its citizens through a coordinated, cohesive effort.

## **Resources:**

Communications Strategies to Advance Vision Zero:

<http://visionzeronetwork.org/communications-strategies-to-advance-vision-zero/>  
<http://visionzeronetwork.org/communications-strategies-to-advance-vision-zero/>

NYC's Vision Zero Home Page:

[www.nyc.gov/visionzero](http://www.nyc.gov/visionzero)  
<http://www.nyc.gov/visionzero>

Vision Zero Plans & Reports:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/visionzero/pages/the-plan/library.shtml>  
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/visionzero/pages/the-plan/library.shtml>

Vision Zero View (visualization of crash data):

<http://www.nycvzv.info/>  
<http://www.nycvzv.info/>

"Your Choices Matter" Campaign Landing Page:

<http://yourchoicesmatter.nyc/>  
<http://yourchoicesmatter.nyc/>

NYC DOT Home Page:

[www.nyc.gov/dot](http://www.nyc.gov/dot)  
[www.nyc.gov/dot](http://www.nyc.gov/dot)

Drive Like Your Family Lives Here video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAnSw3nzj0U>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAnSw3nzj0U>  
<http://www.nyc.gov/dot>

Select Vision Zero Press Releases:

• [Mayor de Blasio Launches Interagency Working Group to Implement 'Vision Zero,' Prevent Pedestrian Fatalities](http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/023-14/mayor-de-blasio-launches-interagency-working-group-implement-vision-zero-prevent-pedestrian-%2F0)  
[http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/023-14/mayor-de-blasio-launches-interagency-working-group-implement-vision-zero-prevent-pedestrian - /0](http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/023-14/mayor-de-blasio-launches-interagency-working-group-implement-vision-zero-prevent-pedestrian-%2F0)

• [NYC DOT and NYPD Announce the Launch of the First Arterial Slow Zone, Designed to Reduce Speeding on Atlantic Avenue as the Agencies' Vision Zero Efforts Continue](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/pr2014/pr14-038.shtml)  
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/pr2014/pr14-038.shtml>

• [NYC DOT Invests \\$2.5 Million For Vision Zero Multi-Cultural Media Campaign Funded By the City Council](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/pr2016/pr16-017.shtml)  
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/pr2016/pr16-017.shtml>

• [NYC DOT and NYPD Launch Third Year of Vision Zero Street Teams Citywide](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/pr2016/pr16-036.shtml)  
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/pr2016/pr16-036.shtml>

- [During Grandparents Week, Transportation Department, Police Department and Department for the Aging Announce Education and Enforcement Efforts to Keep Seniors Safe On City Streets](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/pr2016/pr16-041.shtml)<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/pr2016/pr16-041.shtml>

NYC DOT Social Media Links:

[www.youtube.com/nycdot](http://www.youtube.com/nycdot)<http://www.youtube.com/nycdot>

[www.flickr.com/nycstreets](http://www.flickr.com/nycstreets)<http://www.flickr.com/nycstreets>

[www.facebook.com/nycdot](http://www.facebook.com/nycdot)<http://www.flickr.com/nycstreets>

[www.twitter.com/nyc\\_dot](http://www.twitter.com/nyc_dot)<http://www.flickr.com/nycstreets>

[www.instagram.com/nyc\\_dot](http://www.instagram.com/nyc_dot)