



## **Fulfilling the Clean Energy Potential of Nuclear: The Importance of Effective Communications**

*May 9, 2019*

*By Jarret Adams*

---

When it comes to the issues of clean energy and climate change, nuclear technology is often the elephant in the room. Even though nuclear is the second largest source of emissions-free energy worldwide after hydro, it is often ignored in discussions about climate change mitigation.

Many advocates prefer talking about solar, wind and other sources of clean energy while turning a blind eye to an obvious solution -- safe, clean, efficient and reliable nuclear technology. Yet nuclear energy is the largest source of zero-emission power in the United States, European Union, South Korea, and other advanced economies.

Leading climate experts generally agree that advanced nuclear technologies can play a significant role in the mitigation of climate change. While there is a growing consensus among these experts, widespread public opinion remains skeptical about the safety of nuclear power.

Obviously, there is a disconnect between the experts and the general public, because the message is not getting through. This situation can only be remedied by effective communication strategies.

### The Importance of Communications

Some members of the public will never be persuaded that nuclear energy is safe, clean and capable of being a major contributor in the fight against climate change. But there are large segments of the population who are concerned about the climate issue and who are open to considering nuclear as a means for meeting the world's demand for carbon-free energy.

How can this population be convinced that nuclear energy is a critical component of

the fight for climate mitigation?

The first key is recognizing that effective communication is essential to a successful nuclear energy sector. The last half century has demonstrated that simply operating nuclear power plants effectively is not enough to maintain their viability.

Some markets in the United States do not recognize the ability of nuclear power plants to produce electricity around the clock without producing greenhouse gases. As a result, 12 U.S. reactors are slated for early retirement, which if shuttered would result in higher emissions and electricity prices.

Nuclear power generates half of Belgium's electricity and 80 percent of its carbon-free power. Yet its nuclear plants are in danger of replacement by gas-fired plants, driving up electricity costs and greenhouse gas emissions in the country.

An April 2019 [poll for Vox Media](#) found that more Americans support a future energy mix that is clean -- which includes nuclear -- than one consisting solely of renewables. So, what does this mean for nuclear energy sectors worldwide facing implacable opponents and competition from other energy sources?

Fortunately, concerted stakeholder outreach works. According to a 2016 [survey](#) for the Nuclear Energy Institute, the more people understood the benefits of nuclear energy, the more they supported the technology.

#### Developing a Communications Strategy for Nuclear Energy

Implementing a comprehensive, integrated communication strategy is the key: A strategy that informs people about the benefits of nuclear energy and which seeks feedback from stakeholders. A good place to start is determining which target audiences must be reached in order for a nuclear energy program to succeed.

The first pitfall is assuming that if people are not well informed about nuclear energy, their opinions don't matter. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, understanding what they do know is critical to knowing how to engage with people and how to establish a basis for trust. How can one provide answers if one doesn't know what the questions are?

The next question is how to reach the right audiences. What media do the target audiences consume? What do they watch? What social media do they use? Which outlets and voices are most respected and influential?

Once the right mediums to connect with stakeholders have been identified, what stories should be told?

For example, one could note that France relies on nuclear energy for 75 percent of its electricity. Its grid is 10 times cleaner than that of neighboring Germany, which has invested hundreds of billions of euros in new renewable generation, while phasing out nuclear. As a result, Germany is not significantly reducing emissions.

Or in the United States, one could report that the nuclear power plant fleet on average has been online, producing reliable, emissions-free power more than 90 percent of the time for the past two decades.

South Korea's nuclear power plants represent nearly all the nation's emission-free generation and produce its least expensive electricity. The new government proposed significantly reducing its reliance on nuclear energy, only to see a citizen's panel in 2017 [vote in favor](#) of continuing two nuclear plant construction projects.

This was a close call. Despite the Korean nuclear sector's relative success with building pressurized water reactors, its future export ambitions will be inhibited by limitations on nuclear energy domestically. The U.S. nuclear industry faces the same dilemma. If U.S. nuclear plants keep closing early, international customers will question whether they want to buy American.

### Looking Forward

One consistent problem has been that the nuclear industry has not adequately prioritized communication efforts, focusing instead on technological upgrades to address people's uncertainties. While accurately measuring the effectiveness of outreach strategies has previously been difficult, this is beginning to change.

As the effects of climate change are becoming more widely felt, more people are recognizing the importance of nuclear energy. In addition, new generation nuclear reactor designs are causing some to take a fresh look at the technology.

Whether the cause is keeping existing reactors in operation or encouraging investment in next-generation nuclear technology, neither will succeed without an effective communication strategy. And successful communication initiatives can produce some of the highest returns on investment of any corporate activity.

With nuclear energy growing rapidly in some countries and more slowly in others, determining its global trajectory is difficult. But what has become clear is that charting the future of nuclear energy cannot just rely on favorable government policy or government-to-government agreements.

Ultimately nuclear energy's future will depend on durable support of a wide range of stakeholders that view the technology as clean, reliable and affordable, and this relies on a consistent, effective communications strategy.

---

**Jarret Adams** is Founder and CEO of [Full On Communications](#), a communications consulting firm. Prior to establishing Full On Communications, Mr. Adams worked for AREVA, where he served as Vice President of Communications and Director of Media Relations and Online Communications. He has also worked as Senior Communications Consultant/Senior Writer for the Nuclear Energy Institute. Mr. Adams currently serves on the U.S. Civil Nuclear Trade Advisory Committee (CINTAC).

Global America Business Institute | 1001 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 435,  
Washington, DC 20036 | 202-499-7979 | [FLL@thegabi.com](mailto:FLL@thegabi.com) | [www.thegabi.com](http://www.thegabi.com)

---

STAY CONNECTED:

