CommNet Takeover Participant Feedback Overview

CommNet takeover: September 15, 2026

Purpose and scope

This overview synthesizes participant feedback gathered during the CommNet takeover on Sept. 15, 2026. It brings together input for the Steering Committee and five task forces: Collaboration and Culture; Recruitment Marketing; Brand Creative and Media Development; Storytelling Content and Channels; and Systems Technology and AI.

The overview identifies themes with the greatest resonance, the tensions that recommendations will need to address, and where needs overlap across workstreams. Upvote totals are included where they help show relative interest. Because participation and prompts varied by board, the totals should be treated as directional rather than as a statistically comparable ranking across committees.

Executive summary

Communicators want shared infrastructure, clearer strategy, better access to tools and expertise, and stronger coordination. They also want any alignment model to preserve the local knowledge, relationships, flexibility and autonomy that make unit-level communications effective.

1. **Build shared infrastructure:** Participants repeatedly asked for a trusted digital asset management tool, shared events calendars, visible editorial calendars, common project and content management systems, connected recruitment data, and easier access to approved templates, photos, video, and guidance.
2. **Clarify strategy and decision rights:** Communicators want to understand university priorities, who owns strategy, how decisions are made, what standards apply, and where colleges and units retain flexibility.
3. **Preserve local expertise and relationships:** The clearest caution was against a one-size-fits-all model. Participants emphasized that authentic content, specialized audience knowledge, and trusted local relationships are core strengths to retain.
4. **Make support more equitable:** Cost and access barriers—particularly for design, photography, video, web support, software and professional development—leave smaller or less-resourced units at a disadvantage.
5. **Invest in people and capacity:** Bandwidth, staffing, career pathways, compensation, training and professional recognition emerged as alignment issues, not separate workforce concerns.
6. **Use evidence to guide the work:** Participants want shared evaluation measures, stronger analytics, and a visible feedback loop that shows what works, what does not, and how performance informs future priorities.
7. **Create practical governance:** Brand, web, accessibility, AI, social media, storytelling, and recruitment all need clear, usable guidance supported by training, examples and consistent implementation.

Important tensions to resolve

- Common direction and standards versus flexibility for distinct audiences, programs, and local cultures.
- Shared systems and visibility versus the time, cost, and change management required for adoption.
- Central capacity and coordination versus equitable access and the preservation of distributed expertise.
- The speed and efficiency offered by AI and templates versus human judgment, originality, accuracy, and trust.
- The desire for more measurement versus fragmented data, inconsistent access, and limited staff capacity.

Several needs appeared independently across multiple committees. Together, they point toward an alignment model that combines common infrastructure and enterprise direction with distributed expertise and audience-specific execution.

Participants are not asking CSU to choose between coordination and local strength. They are asking for a system that enables both: shared direction and infrastructure that reduce duplication and inequity, paired with the autonomy, expertise, and relationships needed to communicate credibly with distinct audiences. That balance should remain in the central design principle as the committees move from listening to generating recommendations.

Recurring signal	What participants described	What it suggests
Shared assets and systems	Digital asset management, templates, photos, video, calendars, project management systems, CRM and data connections	A common operating backbone with clear access and ownership
Strategy and visibility	University priorities, content plans, editorial calendars, recruitment activity and project status	Earlier information sharing and shared planning routines
Local expertise	Program knowledge, audience relationships, distinct voices and specialized recruitment needs	Explicit decision rights and meaningful unit representation
Equitable support	Central service costs, uneven staffing, software seats and access to production support	A transparent service model that does not privilege well-funded units
Standards and guardrails	Brand, accessibility, web, AI, social media and data use	Practical guidance paired with training and trusted consultation
People and profession	Capacity, compensation, career growth, development and respect for specialized skills	A workforce strategy that supports retention and quality
Measurement	Analytics, shared outcomes, content performance and recruitment insights	A feedback loop connecting evidence to priorities and investment

Steering Committee

Participants described successful alignment as a transparent, collaborative, and well-supported way of working, not simply a new reporting structure. They want clarity about decisions, roles, and services, alongside explicit protection for local autonomy and culture.

Strongest signals

- Preserve local autonomy and recognize unit cultures. Maintaining autonomy received 13 upvotes and creating a new way of working that respects local cultures received 12.
- Explain decisions and the process. Transparency about which recommendations are adopted and why received 13 upvotes.
- Invest in shared infrastructure. Shared enterprise systems received 8 upvotes; a viewable common project or content management system received 5.
- Create more collaboration with fewer barriers. This received 9 upvotes and was paired with calls for shared goals, strategy, and outcomes.
- Make high-demand support easier to access. A shared digital asset manager and no-cost photo assets received 21 upvotes; additional web support received 18.
- Provide practical standards and access points. Participants asked for accessibility support, standard procedures, design templates, AI guidance, and an easy way to request help.

- Address workforce stability and growth. Feedback raised compensation, promotion pathways, professional development, workload, position stability, and consistent workplace expectations.

What to carry forward

Recommendations should clearly explain what's changing, what will remain local, who will decide, how communicators will access support, and how the model will be reviewed over time. The process itself will be an important test of transparency, and trust participants are asking the future system to embody.

Collaboration and Culture

This feedback connects operating effectiveness directly to the employee experience. Participants see limited time, staffing and resources as the largest barrier to more strategic work, while also identifying significant expertise that could be shared more intentionally across the communicator community.

Strongest signals

- Address capacity constraints. Time, budget, bandwidth and skilled staffing drew the strongest response with 32 combined upvotes; doing more with less at the expense of strategy received 14.
- Create equitable access to development and services. Professional development and career pathways each received 7 upvotes, as did concern about paying for central video and photography services.
- Build communities of practice. Suggested groups included graphic design, social media, video production, internal communications, academic program communications, CRM use, and digital recruitment marketing.
- Make expertise and resources easy to find. Participants currently rely heavily on Google, YouTube, Reddit, and informal peer networks when answers are not available within their teams.
- Share assets and evidence. Access to video, photography, and other assets received 16 upvotes; using analytics to guide strategy also received 16.
- Bring professional development to campus. Affordable local opportunities received 12 upvotes, with additional interest in Adobe tools, management, project management, digital advertising, analytics, AI, accessibility and SEO.
- Focus on transparency, respect, and collaboration. Transparency received 14 upvotes, respect 9 and collaboration 4; salary equity received 9 and flexibility and work-life balance received 7.

What to carry forward

A strong operating model should make peer expertise visible, create predictable opportunities to learn and collaborate, and reduce the friction involved in finding answers, tools and support. Implementation planning should include capacity, compensation, professional growth, and recognition of specialized skills.

Recruitment Marketing and Student Lifecycle

Participants support stronger coordination of recruitment communications, but they worry that uniform approaches could weaken program knowledge, audience specialization, and effective local systems. Their preferred future state is a connected ecosystem with shared strategy, data and timing rather than identical execution everywhere.

Strongest signals

- Avoid a one-size-fits-all model. This concern received 18 upvotes; the need for different approaches by college, program, and audience received 10.
- Protect specialized expertise and relationships. Participants highlighted local trust, authentic unit content, and distinct needs for international, online, graduate, and other student populations.

- Assign clear ownership for recruitment strategy. The need for a central authority or accountable owner received 10 upvotes.
- Connect systems and data. Participants described a future ecosystem linking Slate, Banner, Salesforce, Aries, and department systems, with shared insight across channels.
- Create shared visibility. A recruitment calendar and coordinated communications plan would help units understand who is communicating what, to whom and when.
- Improve consistency where students experience CSU. A more consistent digital experience across colleges, Admissions, Graduate School, CSU Online and university websites received 6 upvotes.
- Strengthen shared audience intelligence. Participants requested research on emerging student audiences and changing market conditions, along with better access to performance data and student lists.
- Address uneven capacity. Admissions, CSU Online, the Graduate School, colleges and other partners need adequate staffing, funding, and production support.

What to carry forward

The committee should distinguish the elements that require enterprise ownership—strategy, data connections, journey visibility, shared standards and market intelligence—from the elements that benefit from local ownership, including program detail, audience relationships, content and channel choices. Transition timing should account for peak recruitment periods and protect effective existing journeys.

Brand and Creative

Participants want the university brand to be easier to use and easier to find. The dominant request was for shared assets, templates, production resources, and practical guidance that support quality and accessibility without eliminating creative flexibility.

Strongest signals

- Create a campus-wide digital asset management approach. Free access to a photo and media platform received 20 upvotes, with repeated requests for clear ownership, permissions, and maintenance.
- Build one trusted resource hub. Participants want searchable access to approved assets, templates, vendors, photography, video, social content, and guidance.
- Expand accessible templates and training. Brand-compliant templates for non-designers received 11 upvotes; requests also included Canva resources, design training and practical accessibility guidance.
- Share capacity across units. Participants asked for a searchable vendor pool, more trained designers, better access to videographers, and shared production opportunities.
- Clarify brand governance. Feedback called for clear decision rights, approval pathways, project roles and the boundaries between university consistency and unit-level flexibility.
- Develop a practical standards playbook. Communicators want technical procedures, examples, implementation tools, project phases and refresher training—not standards alone.
- Support reputation and messaging. Participants connected visual brand work to voice, institutional statistics, proof points, positive national media, and coordinated storytelling plans.

What to carry forward

The strongest opportunity is to pair a shared asset and template ecosystem with a clear service and governance model. Resources should be usable by non-specialists, accessible by design, and flexible enough to support different audiences and creative needs. Specialized design and production expertise should remain visible and valued.

Storytelling, Content and Channels

Participants see storytelling as a significant CSU strength, with no shortage of ideas and positive media coverage. The challenge is converting that strength into a coordinated content system with shared goals, clearer channel roles, visible planning and evidence about what moves audiences.

Strongest signals

- Define and communicate university content goals. Participants want to understand the priorities, why they matter, and how unit work can contribute to outcomes such as recruitment, research reputation, retention, engagement, fundraising, and national visibility.
- Co-create a university-wide content strategy. The strategy should be broad enough for units to see themselves in it and should be supported through workshops, onboarding, regular planning, and follow-through.
- Create shared planning infrastructure. Requests included an editorial calendar, a story-idea repository, an expert database, a modern events calendar, and shared workflow systems.
- Clarify channel strategy. SOURCE, websites, social media and email were the most frequently used channels, but participants noted that not every idea needs to become a SOURCE story and that earned media remains underused.
- Preserve unit expertise and autonomy. Participants value storytelling within colleges and units, subject-matter expertise, local relationships and autonomy for college social accounts, with stronger collaboration.
- Prioritize audience needs. Prospective and undergraduate students were the most frequently identified audiences, followed by graduate students, faculty, staff, community members, prospective families and the scientific community.
- Improve external reach. Participants requested more support placing stories beyond CSU, more media training, consideration of influencers and ambassadors, and stronger community and workforce impact stories.
- Close the measurement loop. Communicators want analytics that show which stories and channels work and a visible process for using those findings to shape future strategy.

What to carry forward

The committee can add value by defining a repeatable planning and measurement cycle: shared goals, coordinated editorial planning, flexible story and expert pipelines, clear channel choices, distribution support, and performance review. The system should enable content to be adapted across audiences and channels rather than requiring each unit to recreate it.

Systems, Technology and AI

The systems feedback reflects a desire for fewer fragmented tools, stronger integration, and expert implementation support. Participants are open to AI for assistive and analytical work, but they want clear guardrails, human accountability and protection against inaccurate or inauthentic public-facing content.

Strongest signals

- Reduce licensing and access barriers. Cost, insufficient seats and licensing complexity received 20 upvotes, including concern about purchasing tools already available elsewhere on campus.
- Address adoption as well as acquisition. Learning curves and training received 11 upvotes; team buy-in, onboarding and consistent adoption also received 11.
- Improve integration and common processes. System and data integration received 8 upvotes, as did the lack of consistent processes and best practices.
- Strengthen design asset and web infrastructure. Large-file asset management received 13 upvotes; consistent WordPress management, branding and standards received 7.

- Make accessibility a core technology requirement. Digital accessibility received 7 upvotes, and generating draft alt text was the highest-supported appropriate AI use with 6.
- Use AI as an assistive tool with human review. Appropriate uses included drafts, ideas, data analysis, synthesis, accessibility support, format conversion and repeatable processes.
- Prohibit unreviewed or deceptive public-facing uses. Finished marketing materials without appropriate human control received 9 upvotes; low-quality unreviewed output received 8; invented people, places or events received 5.
- Provide durable governance and expertise. Participants want continuously updated policy, approved tools, privacy safeguards, editorial guidance and access to specialists in AI, data and metrics.

What to carry forward

Technology recommendations should begin with common requirements and governance before selecting platforms. Any enterprise tool will need sustainable licensing, integration, administration, training and adoption support. AI guidance should distinguish low-risk assistive uses from high-risk public-facing uses and make human review, accuracy, privacy, consent, accessibility and brand protection explicit.

Implications for Recommendation Development

The CommNet feedback does not prescribe a single organizational model. It does, however, establish practical tests that recommendations should meet. The following implications are derived from the recurring needs and cautions across the committees.

1. **Define the core:** Identify which strategies, standards, systems, assets, data and services should be shared across CSU, and which decisions should remain closest to audiences and subject-matter experts.
2. **Design the service model:** Clarify what University MarComm provides, how requests enter the system, expected response and cost models, how priorities are set and how smaller units receive equitable access.
3. **Sequence infrastructure investments:** Prioritize high-value shared foundations such as digital asset management, planning calendars, project visibility, web support, and connected recruitment data rather than attempting to change every platform at once.
4. **Build adoption into every recommendation:** Include ownership, training, documentation, onboarding, permissions, maintenance, integration and a process for updating standards and tools.
5. **Protect and connect expertise:** Create mechanisms for local communicators and specialists to shape strategy, contribute content and share practices while maintaining the relationships that support effective work.
6. **Make workforce impacts visible:** Assess workload, staffing, classification, compensation, career growth, role clarity and position stability as part of the feasibility and sustainability of each recommendation.
7. **Commit to transparency and iteration:** Report what was recommended, what was adopted and why; establish measures and regular pulse checks so the model can improve based on evidence and experience.