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## It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year

You might have first heard those words as the lyrics of a Christmas song. Recently, it has become an advertising jingle for back-to-school shopping. Some of us would use the phrase to describe this month — which culminates with National Engineers Week, Feb. 20–26 — because of the opportunities it offers to educate the public about engineering. We are passionate about our work, and we want to share the details of what we do in the hopes of attracting bright young students who love math and science to the profession.

But those might not be the most-effective messages for us to be sending. A report by the National Academy of Engineering (NAE), *Changing the Conversation: Messages for Improving Public Understanding of Engineering*, recommends new messages that capture the creativity and inspiring nature of engineering:

- Engineers are creative problem-solvers.
- Engineers make a world of difference.
- Engineering is essential to our health, happiness, and safety.
- Engineers help shape the future.

The report also suggests several taglines: “Turning ideas into reality;” “Because dreams need doing;” “Designed to work wonders;” “Life takes engineering;” “The power to do;” “Bolder by design;” and “Behind the next big thing.”

To support the engineering community’s use of these messages and taglines in outreach and communication efforts, the NAE has launched a new website, [www.engineeringmessages.org](http://www.engineeringmessages.org). This site offers (among other things) tips on effectively communicating these ideas, as well as many tools that you can tailor to meet your own needs. It gives interesting, real-world examples of engineering in daily life, and explains the role of engineering in these applications.

The site eloquently expresses the nature of engineering: Engineers create elegant solutions while working within constraints. Yet, engineering requires a vision that goes beyond constraints to “see” solutions that others might miss or dismiss as farfetched. Engineers work in diverse teams, often across time zones and national borders, determining what people need or want, and figuring out the best way to provide it. When addressing societal needs, engineers take into account the potential negative unintended consequences of their innovations. Ultimately, anyone can dream about the future, but the people who actually turn those dreams into reality are engineers.

As you think about the picture you paint of engineering, keep in mind the positioning statement on which the messages and taglines are based. As a conceptual foundation, it is not meant to be used verbatim in external communications, but it can serve as a point of reference, or anchor, for your public outreach activities: *No profession unleashes the spirit of innovation like engineering. From research to real-world applications, engineers constantly discover how to improve our lives by creating bold new solutions that connect science to life in unexpected, forward-thinking ways. Few professions turn so many ideas into so many realities. Few have such a direct and positive effect on people’s everyday lives. We are counting on engineers and their imaginations to help us meet the needs of the 21st century.*

Cynthia F. Mascone, Editor-in-Chief

