

Get ready to be inspired!

Engaging Stakeholders, Owning the Narrative, and Getting Loud About the Mission!



Left to right: Harjinder Shergill Chima, Adam Prock, Dolly Garfield, Brian Rockey, Alec Thomson, Helene Keeley,

At the very start of the session, the audience was asked a simple polling question: *“It’s wonderful how our lottery beneficiaries, political constituents, media and stakeholders are so outspoken in their support of their state lottery. Agree or disagree?”*

The result was brutal: **100% disagreed.**

That unanimous verdict set the tone for a candid, high-energy conversation about what Team Lottery can do to earn visible, vocal support from beneficiaries, lawmakers, media, and the public.

Harjinder agreed: “You can’t wait until you need a vote or a quote. If you’re quiet, they’ll fill that silence with their own story—and it might not be your story.”

Dolly Garfield framed the shift even more starkly.

“Our old mantra was, ‘Keep your head down, stay quiet, don’t attract attention, and hope everyone just leaves us alone,’” she said. “I’m done with that. I’m about rocking it.”

For Dolly, that means redefining who the “player” is. “We’re not just marketing to people who want to win big,” she said. “We’re also marketing to people who want to **do good**. The parent who buys a raffle ticket at a school fundraiser—that’s our person. I want them to know that when they buy a lottery ticket, they’re supporting scholarships—just like that fundraiser. We need a base of supporters, not just buyers.”

The panel, moderated by **Harjinder Shergill Chima**, Director of the California Lottery, brought together:

- **Dolly Garfield**, Executive Director, South Carolina Lottery
- **Helene Keeley**, Executive Director, Delaware Lottery
- **Adam Prock**, Executive Director, Minnesota Lottery
- **Brian Rockey**, Director, Nebraska Lottery
- **Alec Thomson**, Executive Director, Arizona Lottery

Six lottery directors talked about the ways they engage constituents (and everyone is a constituent), the hard work of changing misperceptions, and the urgency of turning passive stakeholders into active advocates.

From “Who Are You?” to “We’ve Got Your Back”

Harjinder Chima opened by explaining how the topic came out of necessity in California.

“When I was appointed director,” she said, “the first reaction in a lot of quarters was, ‘Who is this person?’ So we knew we had to introduce me and, frankly, reintroduce the California Lottery after years of change. Stakeholder engagement wasn’t optional—it was survival.”

For **Adam Prock**, effective engagement begins well before a crisis. “We all have a long list of stakeholders we *think* we’re communicating with,” he said. “But the real test is: are we building relationships that create advocates and ambassadors? Effective engagement is about finding common ground and investing in people long before you need them.”

Bringing Stakeholders Inside the Engine Room

Several panelists argued that the fastest way to build trust is to open the doors—literally.

Brian Rockey has been tied to the Nebraska Lottery since its inception in 1993. Early on, he and his colleagues traveled the state doing what he fondly called the “dog-and-pony show” with beneficiaries.

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“We used to show up every time the environmental trust or education folks made grants,” he recalled. “Over time, we drifted away from that and went into a lower-profile mode. That was a mistake.”

In the last decade, Nebraska reversed course. “We now hold **beneficiary briefings** at least once a year,” Brian said. “We bring stakeholders into the warehouse, feed them lunch, show them how tickets are printed, stacked, audited—everything. It blows them away. And when the media comes calling, those beneficiaries now say, ‘Yes, we know what’s going on. The lottery briefs us every year. They’re transparent. We like what they do.’ That turns a potential headache into a pretty good story.”

“I love that,” Harjinder said. “You’re giving them the knowledge and the visuals to tell the story themselves. That’s powerful. And I’m absolutely stealing it for California.”

Helene Keeley took a similar approach in Delaware, but with a legislative twist. A former legislator and long-time chair of the gaming committee, she arrived at the lottery convinced she knew the business inside out—until she walked through the door as deputy director.

“Within a week I realized, *I know nothing*,” she admitted. “I’d chaired hearings about the lottery for years and had never once been inside the operation.”

That realization changed her strategy: “We made it a priority to get legislators into the building,” Helene said. “We’re a small state—62 legislators. Every year I aim to bring six to eight of them in. They see the control room, the security, the technology, our vendor’s operations. They say, ‘We had no idea you did all this.’ That one-and-a-half-hour visit does more than a hundred memos.”

Legislators: Tough Rooms, Big Payoffs

The panel agreed: legislators are a critical stakeholder group—and often the most misinformed about what lotteries do and who they serve.

Adam offered a story that got the room laughing and nodding at the same time. “One of my first meetings as a new director was with a very senior legislator,” he said. “I walked in ready to talk strategy. He looked

at me and said, *I just want you to know I don’t like you. I’m sure you’re a fine person, but I hate what you do.*”

This legislator, like all citizens of Minnesota, Adam stressed, is still a valued stakeholder. “We can’t slink away and look for people who are more supportive,” he said. “We need to lean into that discomfort and look for common ground. *You may hate gambling, but let’s talk about the college kids getting scholarships, the conservation projects, the veterans’ programs.*’ It’s our job to connect with all of our constituents, even those, or perhaps especially those, who don’t necessarily love us. We may not change their minds, but we can still treat them with respect and maybe earn their respect over time.”

Harjinder shared a similar experience from California. “We had a lawmaker tell us flat out, ‘I don’t believe in gambling, and I don’t believe in what you do,’” she said. “I had to remind him: the lottery exists because the voters created it. My job is to run it responsibly—and to show the good it does. By the end of the meeting, he said, *I still don’t like what you do, but I respect how you do it.*’ That’s a win.”

Helene, with her legislative background, offered a blunt rule of thumb: “You can’t give up even in the face of cancelled meetings or rejection,” she said. “Every corporation in your state, as well as casinos, sports-betting operators, and other gambling interests, are inviting legislators to events, offering tickets, are working hard to build that relationship. We have to be just as irrepensible. Invite them to lottery-sponsored events, host them at concerts or local galas, get them into your building like Brian does. It’s like sales: you don’t stop at one or two voicemails or discouraging meetings and declare defeat.”

Calling Out Hypocrisy, Gently

Sometimes, stakeholder engagement means pointing out double standards—politely but clearly.

Helene described a conversation with a legislator who fiercely opposed Delaware’s iLottery rollout on grounds of addiction risk. “The legislator said, ‘You’re taking advantage of people, they’re going to become addicted,’” Helene recalled. “I gently reminded her that just a week earlier, the legislature voted to let DoorDash deliver

margaritas to people’s homes. And people everywhere are gambling in casinos and betting on sports. It makes no sense to demonize lottery while authorizing products that are clearly more addictive and harmful than lottery. State lotteries already operate under tighter controls, higher security, and apply a higher standard of player protection. And unlike the other gaming options, Lotteries are dedicated to serving society and good causes. We need to be ready to defend the honor of the lottery!”

Customers, Communities, and the “I Don’t Understand It” Barrier

The panelists also stressed that players and communities are stakeholders with voices that count and should be spotlighted.

Dolly has gone big on local events: “We’ve hired a full-time events manager,” she said. “We’re back at festivals, fairs, and campus events all over the state. My staff volunteers, they have fun, and we get face time with real people. I can’t tell you how many friends have said, ‘I’d love to play, but I don’t understand it.’ They’re not going to ask a clerk at a busy c-store how to play. But they’ll ask us at a booth.”

She pushed hard on aligning messaging with outcomes: “We partner deeply with colleges,” Dolly said. “Not just slapping a logo on a scoreboard—we sponsor specific games, present game balls, and highlight scholarship recipients on the field. And when I speak at campuses now and ask, *‘Who here is on a lottery-funded scholarship?’* more hands go up. That didn’t happen before. That’s not an accident; that’s storytelling that connects the dots.”

In Delaware, constrained by big, expensive media markets in Philadelphia and Baltimore, Helene’s team has focused on social and hyper-local engagement.

“We can’t afford the big-city TV rates,” she said. “So we think small and we think smart. One of our campaigns surprised players at the point of purchase with gift baskets full of lottery swag—we filmed it, posted it, and the reactions were priceless. It got so much traction that the governor called and said, *I want to do that.*’ When your governor wants in on your content, that’s a good sign.”

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Alec Thomson took a broad view of community presence:

“I think of every engagement as filling a cup of social capital,” he said. “Sponsorships, community events, legislative briefings—each one is a deposit. And when you need support, that’s the cup you drink from. The trick is to say ‘yes’ as often as you reasonably can, or at least point people to the right partners if you can’t do it yourself.”

He also warned against doing community engagement on autopilot: “Our strategies have to evolve with the industry and the community,” Alec said. “You can’t just do the same slate of events year after year and call it stakeholder engagement. Look at what’s happening in gaming, in entertainment, in your local communities—and tailor your approach.”

Making Media Your Megaphone, Not Your Enemy

Media came up again and again—not as a threat, but as a tool that lotteries must learn to use better.

Dolly’s state is anonymous, which makes traditional “big winner” stories harder to tell. Her answer is relentless storytelling.

“I’m lucky to have a PR rock star on staff,” she said. “She turns everyday wins into human stories, things like ‘Clerk prints wrong ticket, customer wins \$100,000’, and pushes out press releases constantly. On slow news days, those ‘cute little stories’ are exactly what the state paper wants. And stakeholders in South Carolina read that paper. That’s how they see the good we do.”

Adam’s team in Minnesota has built a system that makes it easy for overworked newsrooms to say yes. “Most newsrooms are running on a skeleton crew,” he said. “We don’t just send a press release. We send the story written in publishable form, with photos, captions—everything. In many cases, they run it almost verbatim. If you do the work for them, you’re a lot more likely to see your message in print.”

But Adam believes the most powerful stories are the ones the lottery doesn’t tell directly. “Earned media is most effective when it’s someone else speaking on your behalf,” he said. “If I stand up and say,

‘We’re doing great work for the environment,’ that’s one thing. If the Minnesota Zoo brings baby turtles in front of the cameras and says, “Thanks to Minnesota Lottery players, these turtles have a future,” that’s a different league. Same with winners. It’s more compelling when they say, *‘Now I can buy a snowblower,’* instead of us saying, “Someone won.”

Brian emphasized that Nebraska builds media hooks into its operational calendar. “For instance, we transfer proceeds quarterly,” he said. “That’s four natural news windows a year. We coordinate with our partners to tie those to stories about college scholarships or conservation grants and other beneficiaries. Our public information officer has nurtured relationships with a small number of reporters who still cover local beat stories. It’s not glamorous, but it works.”

Helene, battling a shrinking local news ecosystem, echoed that sentiment: “We’ll do everything the other lotteries do—press releases, photos, feel-good stories,” she said. “But in a state dominated by a single chain of papers with fewer and fewer reporters, getting picked up is hard. That makes social media, direct outreach, and creative content even more important.”

Alec underscored the emerging role of digital channels: “Younger audiences are getting news from TikTok and other platforms, whether we like it or not,” he said. “We launched a TikTok channel to be where our future players and voters already are.”

When the Story Turns Negative

The panel also tackled what happens when coverage goes sideways.

Harjinder inherited California’s lottery after a period of negative headlines about prior leadership. “We had to do a full reset,” she said. “Not defensiveness—transparency. We made a conscious decision that when something was wrong, we owned it quickly, corrected it, and communicated clearly. The only thing worse than bad news is silence. Silence lets other people define who you are, and lets the audience coalesce around negativity.”

Helene was blunt about dealing with inaccuracies. “If a story misquotes you or uses

the wrong data, you have to call it out,” she said. “Do it respectfully, but do it. Ask to talk to the reporter. Say, *‘Here’s what I actually said, here’s the real number.’* And don’t be afraid to ask, *‘Can I see the story before it goes live?’* or to go off the record and back on the record as needed. You’re protecting the integrity of the institution.”

Brian added a crisis-communications principle: “In a crisis, regular, concise communication is crucial,” he said. “Get the facts, get your narrative straight, and share updates as the situation evolves. Radio silence is rarely the best response. Making yourself available to answer questions shows confidence and competence—even when the news isn’t great.”

Adam distilled it down: “Fast and accurate,” he said. “If something negative happens, you can’t hide from it. You address it quickly, you get your facts straight, and you correct inaccuracies wherever they appear. That’s how you earn credibility.”

Brand, Mission, and the Battle for Relevance

The conversation ended where it began: with the mission.

Dolly’s team in South Carolina leans heavily into beneficiary-focused advertising. “We rarely advertise just the product,” she said. “Most of our campaigns feature real people whose lives have been changed by lottery-funded scholarships. We want viewers to think, *‘Buying a ticket is how I support stories like this.’* It’s not just about chasing the jackpot.”

Brian described Nebraska’s approach as “sustained beneficiary messaging.”

“We run a steady baseline of beneficiary advertising, not just big bursts,” he said. “It may not be the largest piece of the budget, but it’s a constant reminder that lottery is about more than a winning number—it’s about education, the environment, and community.”

Alec talked about weaving product and mission together. “Our ‘Love to Play’ campaign is both product-focused and beneficiary-focused,” he said. “The message is: you can love the game and love the impact you’re having on the community at the same time. And then we make sure that message reaches people

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on multiple platforms, not just TV or one social channel.”

Harjinder highlighted California’s focus on diversity and relevance. “Our player base is incredibly diverse,” she said. “We don’t assume one generic ad will work for everyone. We work with dedicated agencies for Hispanic, Asian, African American, and general markets, and we rely on their research to shape culturally relevant storytelling. What works in English-language media may not work in Spanish or Mandarin—and we honor that.”

Final Advice: Authentic, Loud, and Unafraid of Change

As the session wrapped, Harjinder asked the panel: *What advice would you give to newer lottery directors trying to build lasting trust with stakeholders?*

Helene went first: “Be authentic and be honest,” she said. “If there’s a problem,

acknowledge it. Don’t sugarcoat. And don’t give up because a legislator canceled twice or a reporter ignored you. Persistence, done the right way, is respect.”

Brian followed: “Listen more,” he said. “We all love to talk, but you can’t understand stakeholders if you’re not listening to what they value. And don’t be afraid of change. This industry is moving fast—products, expectations, channels. If we’re scared of moving, we’ll get left behind.”

Alec stressed accessibility and substance: “Be accessible and bring something of value to every conversation,” he said. “Give people at least one piece of information that makes them say, ‘I didn’t know that.’ When stakeholders walk away smarter, they’re more likely to come back—and to speak up for you when it counts.”

Dolly boiled it down to communication: “Overcommunicate,” she said. “With staff, vendors, legislators, media, players—everyone. Communication builds trust, and trust is what carries you through the tough

days. No one likes surprises, especially not in public service.”

Harjinder closed on integrity: “Authenticity and integrity are non-negotiable,” she said. “We’re stewards of a public asset. When we mess up, we admit it. When we do something great, we share it. Either way, we tell the truth. If we do that consistently, stakeholders see it. And that’s how we earn the right to ask them to stand with us.”

The message from the panel was clear: **we don’t get enthusiastic stakeholders by staying quiet, keeping our heads down, and hoping for the best.**

We get them by showing up, opening the doors, telling real stories, calling out old myths, owning our mistakes, and relentlessly reminding the public that lottery is not just about games—it’s about **public good**.

The poll at the beginning may have been unanimous. The goal now is to make sure that if we ask that question again in a few years, the answer won’t be. ■

E-Instants: A Transatlantic Conversation on Lottery Innovation — continued from page 19

take actual player behaviour into account to understand and assess the player experience.

D. Gale: Visual elements alone do not define the gaming experience. While some imagery may overlap due to shared cultural references, the player experience is shaped primarily by game structure and interaction, not aesthetics.

E-instants are non-interactive in terms of outcome influence, with no skill-based decision-making, no escalating wagers, and no open-ended play cycles. Players cannot alter results through choices, timing, or strategy. These limitations are fundamental differences from casino games, where player agency and wagering dynamics are central to the experience.

Lotteries must still remain mindful of how presentation impacts perception. This is why NASPL encourages thoughtful product design and clear differentiation in messaging, ensuring players understand the nature of the game and can make informed choices.

Given the importance of gaming to younger generations, there seems to be a growing trend towards further gamification of games. How could e-instants develop further while remaining faithful to traditional lottery features?

D. Gale: There are many ways e-instants can continue to evolve by focusing on engagement without altering the fundamental nature of lottery games. Development can focus on gamification at the experience level rather than the outcome level. For example, e-instants can incorporate richer storytelling through themed game journeys, progressive narrative elements, or seasonal/topical content that unfolds over time without changing odds or prize structures.

Additional gamification characteristics could include non-monetary achievements, such as badges for completing a game or trying different themes, and optional challenges that encourage exploration rather than increased spend or frequency of play. Enhanced animations, sound design, and interactive reveals can also modernize the experience.

Equally important, gamification can support player understanding and well-being. Interactive tutorials, transparent probability displays, and real-time reminders about how spend or play duration can be designed in a game-like, intuitive way that helps players stay informed and in control. When implemented thoughtfully – and following best practices from regulators, suppliers, and responsible gaming experts – these features

allow e-instants to feel contemporary and engaging while staying true to the core characteristics that define lottery games.

P. Van Baeveghem: E-instants already play an important role in the portfolio of products that some lotteries offer today. This is particularly so when these lotteries operate in an environment increasingly shaped by online casino games and other digital products that have certain characteristics that are identical to games of chance, such as “loot boxes” or other types of games where players can win cash prizes if they place a certain bet, for example.

It seems important that lotteries are allowed to continue to offer e-instants in order to remain relevant in a context where they are otherwise at risk of being squeezed between two extremes.

The worst thing that could happen is for regulators to opt to treat e-instants as online casino games, while at the same time treating the completely non-transparent “loot boxes” as ordinary entertainment games. It is at this point that cooperation between regional associations such as EL and NASPL can offer advantages in terms of exchanging experiences and informing regulators and legislators. ■