

Developing A Communications Plan

Whether you are creating a plan to increase awareness of your organization or to promote a specific program or initiative, you will want to identify a variety of factors before you get started.

Overall Objective(s):

What are you hoping to accomplish with this communication plan? If you don't have a clear idea of what you want the communication to achieve, you'll likely get poor results. Goals can include things like:

- Build and reinforce your brand
- Promote a new or existing program
- Challenge existing perceptions of your organization, your mission, or the population that you serve
- Mitigate the impact of negative publicity

You may have more than one objective within the same plan.

Audience:

Who are you trying to reach with your messages? Often you will have multiple audience groups that should each receive a slightly modified version of the message. Some people may belong to more than one audience. Audiences can include:

- Stakeholders/Funders/Donors
- Members
- The population targeted by your services
- Parents
- Schools
- All community members

Audience Objectives and Messages:

For each audience you will likely tailor the message to address the things that have most meaning to that audience. If you are promoting a program for at-risk youth, the message that you want the



parents to get is likely about safety, improved positive behaviors and decreased problems in school and the community. The message that you want the youth to get will be more about what's in it for them, i.e., fun, adventure, and socialization. The message to a potential corporate supporter or donor would be more about the benefit to the community through reduced juvenile justice involvement and higher graduation rates. Each audience that you address wants to know first and foremost why they should care about your message.

Channels:

Write down every way that you communicate with any of your audiences. Think broadly and creatively. What channels are out there that you are not currently using? Channels can include:

- Email/E-newsletters
- Social Media
- Face to Face meetings
- Phone calls
- Bulletin Boards (virtual and physical)
- Printed newsletters, brochures, or postcards

Identify which channels will be most effective for each audience.

Timing:

Determine when you want to roll out the messages and try to think of things that may interfere with delivery of the message. If you are rolling out a project in June, you may be reaching out to funders and donors in January for support, but you may not want to start promoting it to the target population of the program until much closer to the start date. How many times and how often do you repeat the message to any given audience? Marketers say it takes 7-9 "touches" before someone takes action on your message. How do you get those touches in without irritating people by inundating them? Spread them out, use different channels and get creative with message presentation.

Person Responsible:

There are two considerations when you think about who is responsible for the message.



1. Who is responsible for executing the message?
 - a. Who creates the postcard, designs the email etc.?
 - b. Who makes sure it goes out on time?
2. Who is the message from? Who is the spokesperson?
 - a. When responding to media inquiries, who is authorized to speak for the organization?
 - b. How is it communicated within the organization when message should only come from one source?
 - c. Are there audiences which should be handled exclusively by the Executive Director or Board Chair?
 - d. For example, an email to a donor asking for support should likely not come from your info@ email address.

Evaluation:

How will you know if your messages are effective? For some campaigns this is easy to measure through funds received, registrations for a program, or attendance at an event. For other campaigns it is harder to quantify. Using a special link on a brochure or postcard versus ones that you use in emails can give you an idea of which channel is producing the most “click-throughs” to your call-to-action page. Tracking the number of phone inquiries and asking where they heard about “it” can also provide some insight. Pre- and post-campaign surveys might be useful if the goal was more about changing a perception or belief.



Communications Plan Template

Communication Plan for:

Overall Objective(s):

Audience	Audience Objectives	Message	Channel(s)	Timing	Person Responsible	Evaluation

