**COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

An effective communications plan is simply a way to help you think about how to talk to the right people about the right things at the right time – in the right way. It should be a support for your organization’s larger strategy, so that communications become another way to ‘move the strategic ball down the field.’

**Situation Snapshot**

Whether or not this is part of your written plan, take some time to reflect: what does the landscape look like? What particular strengths, challenges, or opportunities are facing your organization over the next year? Are there other positive or negative facts, perceptions, etc. that may be relevant?

**Communications Objectives**

What are the 2-3 tangible, measurable communications outcomes you want to achieve over the planning time (usually a year)?

For each objective, chart out:

**Target Audience**

Identify the primary audience you’re after.

* + - What do you want them to do?
    - What will that take?
    - What are the challenges or opportunities here?
* Secondary audience – is there one? How do they differ from primary audience? (Be sure that most energy goes into primary audiences)
* Research – how do you know what they think?

**Key Messages**

What do you want to tell your target audience? Speak in their language, from their perspective, about things they care about. Keep it simple.

* Identify the problem & make sure you have proof.
* Position your organization as part of the solution.
* Have a clear call to action.

**Strategic Approach**

Are there a few overarching strategies that can direct the path forward – besides “getting the word out?” Some strategies that work for non-profits or government agencies include:

* Define yourself (which could include re-introducing yourself)
* Be the expert
* Court the media
* Put a face on the problem

**Budget**

* What’s the estimated cost of each activity? Can it be done in-kind?
* Are there sponsors or partners who can underwrite it?

**Who’s Responsible?**

* Present the final plan to staff – and board – to get feedback.
* Each component of a communications plan depends on someone to provide information, data, or process support. The plan must have an “owner” but everyone in the organization should be accountable for supporting it.

**Timeline**

* Chart out what activity needs to happen in each month, or week leading up to your deadline.
* What’s already on the calendar that can be leveraged?

**Evaluation**

How and when will you evaluate the success?

* What’s your system to track media coverage and Web site activity? (Downloads or length of visits is better than hits)

**Communications Plan**

**Situation Analysis**

(Describe scenario as planning period begins. What particular issues, facts, perceptions, etc. are relevant to the communications plan being undertaken? )

**Key Objectives of the Communication Plan**

(What tangible outcomes would you like to achieve as a result of the communications effort?)

**Identify and profile each target audience.**

(Describe specific audiences you are targeting through the communication effort, and the ways the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of each needs to change in order to meet your goal(s). What barriers must be overcome to each audience fully supporting or participating in reaching your goal? What are the characteristics of each audience that would affect how you would choose to communicate with them — language, education, media habits, etc.?) What research is needed to understand each audience better and how to reach it?

Target Audience A: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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Target Audience B: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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Others? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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**Key Messages**

Key Messages Common to All Target Audiences: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Key Messages Specific to Target Audience A: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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Key Messages Specific to Target Audience B: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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Appropriate Spokespeople: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

News Hooks during Plan: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Communications Channels**

(Based on what you know about each target audience, pick communications channels that would be effective ways of reaching them. In each category, be specific about which particular channels you will use within the category selected.

* Television stations
* Radio Stations
* Newspapers
* Web sites
* Community centers
* Laundromats
* Malls
* Schools
* Vocational and language training centers
* Libraries
* Recreation centers
* Supermarkets
* Literature rack
* Mail

**Communications Tools**

(Indicate which tools you will employ, and what the purpose of each will be.)

* Brochures
* Flyers
* Posters
* Newsletters
* Annual report
* Web site
* Press kit
* News release
* Story pitch
* Article reprint
* Letter to the editor
* Op/ed piece
* News conference
* Direct mail
* PSA
* Advertising
* Event
* Electronic media
* Blog
* Promotional items and giveaways
* Others

**Plan Implementation**

(By each planned activity, assign a budget estimate, staff that will be responsible for the deliverable and a date for each step in the implementation of the activity. Create a timeline for the entire plan.)

**Evaluation**

(Specify times to take stock of progress in implementing the communications plan. Determine strengths and weaknesses of plan execution to date. When obstacles are identified, create and implement new approaches. Evaluate again at the next touch point.)

**Before Next Year’s Planning Process Commences**

Identify successes.

Identify disappointments.

Identify what you want to do differently going forward.

**Communications Plan Matrix**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Objective** | **Audience** | **Activity – channel/tools** | **Budget** | **Timeline** | **Owner** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
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