

CREATING A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

A HOW-TO GUIDE

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What is a communications plan?

A communications plan is a strategic roadmap for turning an organization's goals into meaningful communication. It identifies what you want to accomplish, who you need to reach, what they need to know, and the strategies and channels you'll use to reach them. A communications plan can guide an organization's overall communications or focus on a specific project, program, campaign, or crisis.

Develop an effective communications plan by following these steps. Be as specific as possible to get the most out of your plan. **Use the free Excel template** on laurenlipuma.com to build your plan or create your own!

1. Define your goals

What do you hope to accomplish through your communication efforts? It may help to start by defining what your organization does and what its mission and values are.

Example goals: To build awareness around a specific issue, benefit, program, or project; to increase understanding of a particular issue; to motivate action, such as encouraging someone to sign up for a course, apply for a fellowship, buy a product, etc.

2. Identify your key audiences

Who do you want to reach? You might start by listing every type of audience you could reach and then pulling out the top 3-5 groups you want to engage with the most. You might ask: Who are our messages important to? Who is already talking about this topic?

To be even more specific, ask yourself: How do these audiences know your organization? What do they need or want? How can your organization fulfill those needs or wants? What key actions do you want your audiences to take?

Example audiences: Adults interested in your organization's focus; children; students; local clubs; policymakers; journalists; local civic leaders; business owners.

3. Identify the channels you will use

How will your messages reach your key audiences?

Example channels: Your organization's website, social media channels, newsletters, events, etc.

4. Craft your core messages

What information do your audiences need to know? Tailor your messages to each audience you want to reach and use language that is clear and accessible.

5. Conduct a situational analysis

See where your organization, project, or program stands today.

Questions to consider: What communications strategies have you tried so far? How do you currently reach your audiences? Are your communications effective? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Are there other organizations that provide similar services? How do you compare to them? What makes your organization or program unique? What can you provide that others don't? What valuable resources do you have?

6. Create an action plan

This is the meat of your communications plan. Based on the information outlined above, what strategies will you employ to meet your goals? What communications activities and products are you going to execute or produce? What is the timeline for completing these activities and who will be responsible for each?

7. Build a budget

Does your plan require funding for certain activities or products? If so, outline them here.

8. Determine how you'll measure success

What does success look like to you? How and when will you evaluate whether your goals have been met? List measurable outcomes or metrics against which to track your progress and what tools you'll use (such as Google Analytics).

Example metrics: Pageviews for a website; signups for a workshop; media mentions; changes in social media engagement; etc.