

Communications Plan

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[insert coalition name] is the company represented in this document. Each mention of: coalition organization or agency shall refer to [insert name] unless otherwise specified. [insert name] Communications Department is the department represented in this document. Each mention of: department shall refer to [insert name] Communications Department unless otherwise specified.

Communications Plan:

Communications Overview

Information and effective utilization of information is the foundation for progress in modern business practices. Money is information—it is a perception of values based on agreed standards, and values fluctuate based on information. Sales is information—publics' initial introduction and consumption of goods and services are based on their perception of information surrounding these goods and services. Philanthropy is information—advocacy and awareness raised within publics garners philanthropic support, which is accomplished through information. Information is paramount to business health, and controlling the flow of this information through effective communications practices determines the value of the information.

Communication flow between this company and its publics shall be filtered effectively through a well-developed strategy and executed prudently, deliberately and ethically. A communications plan, placing the Communications Department as the central gateway between certain information and targeted publics, will serve to improve publics' perceptions, raising the overall value of the company as:

- a vital community resource;
- a solution to targeted social problems;
- a cooperative member of the community;
- a link to up-to-date research and targeted content; and,
- a supportive entity raising the standards of societal expectations.

The department shall develop measurable objectives and strategies and track outcomes for efficacy, trends for continued communication evolution and determine this department's strategic alignment in fulfilling its role as a necessary, integral component in achieving the overall mission of the company.

Objective: to augment current communications practices through a strategic, integrated, company-wide approach and to develop communication systems to foster transparency, accuracy, efficacy and message unification, furthering the mission of the company.

Mission: to widen the breadth of communications strategies to garner more support through philanthropy, funding, collaborations, advocacy and awareness, and an overall unified public image.

Target: defining all staff members who interact with the public or consumers, regardless of position, as public representatives of the company.

Likewise, identifying specific target audiences:

- local, state and national publics and communities;
- potential consumers;
- interagency workers;

- community partners;
- local business sector;
- government sector;
- potential or current funding entities;
- media professionals;
- potential or current referral sources
- philanthropists; and,
- advocates.

Communication Delivery: Whereas the official communication deliverers tend to serve in administrative and executive capacities, and delivery methods focus on print and formal, deliberate personal communications, most company communication is conducted on the frontline. As it is understood that every public contact conveys a message about the company, it is equally understood that each company representative is a key player in communication delivery.

Official Communications:

- Speeches
- Copy/Content: boilerplates, grants, white papers, articles, etc.
- Print Media: brochures, newsletters, annual reports, etc.
- Electronic Media: web and email
- Television
- Radio
- Phone Calls
- Personal Interaction: meetings, conferences, special events, etc.

Frontline Communications:

- Phone Calls
- Personal Interaction: employee/consumer, employee/public, employee/potential consumer, etc.

It is vital that each communication deliverer is aware of the company's policy regarding his or her capacity to engage in communication delivery. For instance, a business manager shall not participate in a press conference without express permission from an executive. However, it is equally important that each communication deliverer has overall knowledge of the programs and services that the company provides and an understanding of proper communication etiquette per applicable medium regarding his or her capacity of official engagement.

Trainings shall be delivered to staff to ensure their understanding of the programs and services offered by the company and review etiquette as it applies to various media and capacity for official engagement: phone, memos, email, meetings, net-meetings, social interactions, etc. Each staff member shall be made aware that they are always representatives of the company and shall conduct themselves accordingly.

Key Audience:

- Indirect Public: media
- Direct Public
- Service Receivers: consumers, potential consumers
- Support and Funding Entities: foundations, government agencies, community/business donations
- Other Agencies

Each key audience group shall have information delivered to them in a fashion that promotes the most efficacy for the company. Likewise, each delivery method utilized shall be measured to determine this efficacy when possible.

Communications Strategies Linked to Organizational Mission and Goals:

Communications methods are critical in fulfilling the mission of the company and a powerful tool in fundraising, marketing and expanding collaborative partnerships and cooperative community relationships. The company’s messages and utilization of communication delivery methods is closely linked to funding, referrals and in mobilizing public and governmental support. In the absence of advertising budgets, a well-executed communications strategy can serve similar purposes at low to no cost.

Communication Strategic Plan:

Key Audience	Message	Delivery Strategies	Objective	Measurement Tool
Indirect Public: Media <i>[includes: national and local print papers, magazines and journals; national, local and cable television; and, national and local radio]</i>	Raise Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press Releases • Public Service Announcements (PSA) • Feature Stories • Video News Releases (VNR) • Email campaigns • Letters To The Editor 	To increase press coverage to raise awareness of issues pertinent to mission.	Track frequency of Agency/Media and Media/Agency contact and compare with frequency of actual press coverage on cited objective.
	Feature Programs and Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press Releases • Feature Stories • VNR 	To increase press coverage to highlight agency programs and services.	Track frequency of Agency/Media and Media/Agency contact and compare with frequency of actual press coverage on cited objective.
	Business News: awards, certifications, appointments, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press Releases • Feature Stories • VNR 	To increase press coverage to address business news.	Track frequency of Agency/Media and Media/Agency contact and compare with frequency of actual press coverage on cited objective.
	Be a Source—provide expert opinions to media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert Comments • Provide List of Experts on Web 	Nurture proactive media relations.	Track frequency of Media/Agency contact for expert opinions.

Audience	Message	Delivery Strategies	Objective	Measurement Tool
Direct Public	Raise Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters • Brochures • PSA • Speaking Engagements • Special Events • Website: on-line FACTS, tests and surveys. • Agency Hosted TV and Radio 	To increase public awareness by increasing method type and frequency to reach larger audiences.	Track frequency of public awareness delivery and request feedback from public through web or regular mail. Feedback: opinions, suggestions, thoughts...
	Marketing Programs and Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters • Brochures • Speaking Engagements • Special Events • Website: summaries, contact info. • Agency Hosted TV and Radio 	To increase public awareness of agency-specific programs and develop referral sources.	When individuals contact the agency about programs and services, request information on how they learned of these programs and services. Document these findings; track aggregates; and, request feedback from individuals about what they think of the information available to them on the programs and services: accessibility, comprehensiveness, methodology, clarity, etc.
Service Receivers: consumers, potential consumers	Service Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Delivered Directly by Programs and Services</i> 	N/A	N/A
	Marketing Programs and Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters • Brochures • Speaking Engagements • Special Events • Website: summaries, contact info. • Agency Hosted TV and Radio • Call Center 	To broaden client base.	When individuals contact the agency about programs and services, request information on how they learned of these programs and services. Document these findings; track aggregates; and, request feedback from individuals about what they think of the information available to them on the programs and services: accessibility, comprehensiveness, methodology, clarity, etc.

Audience	Message	Delivery Strategies	Objective	Measurement Tool
Support and Funding: foundations, government agencies, community/business donations...	Garner support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters • Events • Speaking Engagements at Chamber Meetings and other arenas where you can solicit donations • Grants 	Increase funding and philanthropic donations.	Track communications efforts targeted towards this goal and compare with funds raised.
	Hospitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank You Notes • Holiday Cards • Invitations • Newsletters • Annual Report 	Express appreciation; maintain contact and awareness.	N/A
Other Agencies	To continually further cooperative relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters • Brochures • Reciprocation in Support and Advocacy • Direct Correspondence praising agency efforts 	Develop reputation as a transparent entity, sharing resources and information to benefit the community.	Track requests from other agencies and the information or support provided Maintain a portfolio of positive correspondence from other agencies: letters of support, thank you notes, etc.
	To develop collaborative partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct Correspondence: email or letter • Personal Contact • Continually Research and Brainstorm Potential Opportunities 	Serve as a leader in developing innovative community collaborative approaches to service delivery.	Track number of potential collaborative opportunities with development and execution.
	Hospitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank You Notes • Holiday Cards • Invitations • Newsletters • Annual Report 	Express appreciation; maintain contact and awareness.	N/A

Crisis Management

No company is immune to crises. Anticipation and planning of potential problems can replace problems with a mere execution of previously agreed upon solutions. A crisis management plan is necessary to maintain the inertia of this company even in the face of problems. A well-developed plan will help the company return to the business of furthering its mission quickly.

Crisis Plan Objectives

- Protect the reputation of the company
- Protect the immediate bottom line
- Protect the specific program or service
- Protect the current management and staff
- Protect the progress of the company from unnecessary delays

Plan: This department shall be an integral part of designing a crisis plan specifically responsible for aiding in the development of communication practices and all components responsible for information dissemination. However, the official plan in its entirety must be developed through a team approach including various executives and individual departments within the company.

While it is advisable to plan for potential crises in advance—it isn't entirely realistic. Each crisis is unique and should be regarded with sensitivity to the precise nature of the particular event. Listed below are some aspects to be considered when development of an official comprehensive crisis plan is executed as it pertains to communications strategies:

- Plan behaviors and leave specific tactics until the unknowns are answered
- Assess threat potential and assign responsibility accordingly
- Plan to communicate “upstream” to provide early warnings
- Centralize control of top-tier crisis situations
- Make directional decisions now—anticipate crisis situations based on history and known plausibilities
- Anticipate tough questions and pre-formulate the best answer
- Create a proprietary distribution network: executive, legal, board members, committees, etc.
- Create a crisis management team: trusted individuals to help prudently execute a formulated crisis management plan
- Always tell the truth. If we don't, it will probably be found out, and then we will have that crisis to field next
- Appear to care—demonstrate compassion
- Move quickly—make fast decisions and execute them immediately so that we appear to be working to correct a problem rather than acting because of pressure to do so

- Never say, “No comment.” If we don’t have an answer, we say so, then get the answer
- Return all calls from the press promptly. Everyday we don’t respond to an accusation, the bad press it generates gets exponentially worse
- Don’t avoid the press—actively seek opportunities to get in front of the camera and tell our story
- Hold the media to the truth. Form a team of people to monitor and correct any and all media errors or omissions. Understand that each instance will not be corrected—the objective is to make sure that the database is reasonably accurate as each new reporter on the scene will use it as a basis for their coverage
- Provide a location for the press to meet, communicate and get briefings from our organization. If we want to get our message across, we need to be an easily accessible source of information

Assess Crisis Severity: Certain questions can help an organization understand the severity of a crisis quickly, and this understanding may serve to alter the extent of the company’s crisis management execution:

- How will this affect the mission and to what degree?
- What is the intensity and urgency of the crisis, and what is the potential for it getting worse?
- Which of the company’s values are affected?
- What is the long-term potential for damage?
- What relationships are threatened?

Once these questions have been answered as thoroughly as possible, the agency can most accurately determine the amount of time and effort necessary to devote to implementing crisis management tactics.

Identification of Crisis Sources: While there are infinite possibilities of potential crises, the true source of most can be categorized methodically. This is important in identifying potential crises and to plan for these events as well as possible. Sources of crises include:

Ethical crisis. Describes a situation where ethical conflict directly causes a crisis.

Incentive crisis. Companies who provide incentives to individuals creating a false result, unsafe or illegal labor practices or misconduct directly resulting from the implementation of the incentive.

Values crisis. When the values of the company collide with the overall values of the public.

Stonewalling crisis. When a company or individual refuses to admit a problem, even for a short period, they lose credibility.

Responsibility crisis. When a company refuses to accept blame or even express regret, the public turns on it.

Planning crisis. It is the slow-burning crisis that should have been anticipated. Communication is not a substitution for action—if a problem appears inevitable, work immediately to correct it, or if that's not possible, have an immediate response planned.

Repetition crisis. Never become an expert in the same mistake. Once a crisis hits, is dealt with and the agency can move on—learn from it. Not all crises can be prevented, but we should know how to lesson the impact upon experience.

Identify specific potential threats to your company: Identifying potential crisis situations as specifically as possible aids in crisis management development by allowing the company to develop plans that pertain specifically to the nature of each potential crisis before they become a problem. It is too late to plan for crisis management after an event has occurred. At this point a company will have already lost the majority of its control over fielding information to the public. Here a company has lost its advantage of acting to a crisis and has fallen into the process of reacting to a crisis. Listed below are some specific threats that have the potential of affecting this company. These shall be amended in a team approach at a later time. It would be prudent to prepare for action now in case of an event in the future:

- Employee misconduct
- Consumer misconduct
- Program-related problems
- Natural disasters: fires, explosions
- Employee or community relations event
- Accidents
- Terrorism
- Legal issues
- Public health
- Safety and security issues
- Financial and business issues
- Business practices and ethics
- False advertising
- Consumer complaints (present or former)
- Employee complaints (present or former)

Prepare Materials in Advance: As soon as we know a crisis is upon us, and preferably before the press is aware of our predicament, these strategies must be formulated and executed:

1. A press response stating that we have incomplete knowledge of the crisis details, if truthful
2. Our best answer and information if: personnel discriminate or the administrator embezzles or the building goes up in flames...
3. Some generic but positive information about the company that has some bearing on the crisis: if the building catches on fire, explain what safety measures and plans are in place to reduce risk
4. There is usually an early vacuum of information—fill it with information that will form a background and control media speculation. Mention positive things about the company: programs and services, safety records, audits, management.... “If we don’t, nobody will.”

Managing the Crisis: There is a four-step process necessary in crisis management as it pertains to communications strategies. Following this process is the basis for all effective crisis management communications strategies:

Regret. Say we’re sorry it happened. This is not the same as admitting guilt or responsibility, just that we regret the event. Check with legal—some counselors advise to the contrary. Just understand that the real costs are not in the courtroom, they are in the public eye. And second, crisis research is clear: if we do not express regret, nobody will listen to anything else we say.

Resolution. State, if appropriate, what we will do to resolve the issue, or if it’s not our fault and there are no preventative measures that we can take—explain this.

Reform. Assure, if appropriate, it will not happen again. And then, in some cases...

Restitution. Everybody wants something. This doesn’t refer to legal judgments but to goodwill gestures.

Media Relations

Media entities can be a company's greatest asset one moment and a deficit the next. Effective relationship building with key media professionals will help to reduce the risk of the most grave media problem—inaccurate information dissemination. It is equally important to remember that media professionals are human, and as impartial as they may try to be when deciding what stories to run or in determining a particular slant to a story, it helps if the media professionals like the company and its representatives. Developing and maintaining effective professional relationships with specific media personnel is necessary in furthering the company's mission as this is the source of a majority of the public's perception of this company's image, which equates to the value of the company to its publics.

This department shall work to establish specific media relationships and maintain them through a cooperative, professional alliance. Additionally, this department will communicate with media professionals all inaccuracies identified regarding this agency and will distribute letters to the editor on other information inaccuracies that pertain to topics of which this agency is deemed an expert.

Media Campaigns: Specific media campaigns foster specific results. Elements of media campaigns are not constant; rather they fluctuate to cause the greatest effect with the least amount of effort. There are some campaigns that will serve the company well to continue on a regular basis such as press releases, letters to the editor and volunteering to serve as experts on specific subjects. Other campaigns shall be reserved to strengthen the impact of the campaign. Some of these include: hosting press conferences, submitting feature stories, submitting Op-Ed articles and flooding media sources to raise public awareness during crucial times such as during elections or asking for constituent support to contact representatives about a proposed bill that may affect this industry.

Timing: The right kind of media attention at the right time can play an important reinforcing role in communications effort. If, for example, a national news story profiles the work of a company at the same time a bill is being debated in the legislature related to this company's industry, the impact can be considerable. To address timing, this department shall:

- Call attention to specific issues when the message is reinforced by media that has created a general bed of awareness about it. Media will be fed this information from our organization, but our organization would benefit to wait to employ its campaign, when possible, until media has set the foundation.
- Track media attention on issues that relate to the organization, and time the organization's communications strategies to echo or counter current media sentiments. This is often easier than attempting to predict or manipulate when media will focus on certain issues. Plan in advance and wait for proper timing.

Press Release: What is said and how has the ability to have an enormous impact. Revolutions have been started from a single document. A few postings on a website can cause stock prices to plummet. Similarly, a well-designed press release can sometimes raise more awareness than a multi-million dollar ad campaign.

This department shall work to continually measure the efficacy of its press release campaigns and strive to improve this efficacy through researching current trends and following-up on submitted releases via email or phone as appropriate. Additionally, media coverage garnered through press releases shall be tracked and documented in aggregate to further measure efficacy—a news scanning services shall be contracted to track stories relating to the company. The style of each submitted press release shall be appropriate to the message delivered. Some characteristics to observe include:

- Headlines summarize uniqueness of story without being blatantly promotional
- Inject news in headline when possible
- News leads—mimic opening of a straight news story covering: who, what when, where, why, how and who cares. Useful if news editors chop release and only run first paragraph.
- Feature leads—mimics opening of a magazine feature article: entertaining, clever, startling or dramatic. Purpose is to grab attention.
- Communicate with editors when possible. Agree to provide another angle on a story, and pay attention when a story gets printed on the angle and style used so that future press releases can be modified to that style for that editor.
- Attach a fact sheet to press releases to avoid cluttering the release with too much content.
- Put opinions and interpretations in executive quotations.
- White space—keep it clean, direct, energetic and very readable. How it looks matters.
- Write for a specific editorial department.
- End releases with boilerplate company overview. Never assume the media source knows anything. Feed them what you want them to know each time.
- Utilize media relationships to send out as many press releases via email directly to appropriate individuals as possible. Most faxed press releases are discarded.

Feature Articles: Whether writing the article in-house or sending out a pitch to solicit editors to write a piece, feature articles are an invaluable communications tool. Some executives have been able to develop a niche of their own in journals, newspapers and magazines by submitting quality feature stories on topics of which they are experts to publications on a regular basis. Many of these articles are even ghost written by professional writers within the executive's company.

This department will work with in-house experts to write and submit feature articles to appropriate publications. This department shall:

- Query appropriate publications to solicit interest in articles
- Research and maintain a list of appropriate publications with editorial contact information to query for different angles and topics
- Offer editors with exclusive rights
- Learn whether editors want phone or written queries for initial pitch. Submit letter of introduction first followed by a phone call a week or two later. Editorial departments will tell us when we call how to query—we will make note, and follow these wishes in the future.
- Maintain a database of professional quality photographs that can accompany articles including headshots of “figureheads”, properties that may house featured programs, etc. Have gray-scaled and color versions of each.
- It may take several months to get a story printed—best practices would include having multiple queries out authored by several “figureheads” with stories completed and on file ready to submit.
- Be prepared to change entire angle of story upon editorial request.
- When an article is sold, develop and maintain editorial relationships with “figurehead” at forefront.

Op-Ed Articles: This department will follow a similar plan as outlined above in “Feature Stories”, but, obviously, it will be geared to Op-Ed style writing.

Website: Publics and news outlets often turn to the internet for information on a company. The more content-rich the website is, the more reason individuals will have to visit a website. The more people visit a company's website, and the more varied their reasons are for visiting the site, the more value the company's website has to its publics. This raises the overall value of the company in the eyes of its publics. The more valuable the company is to its publics is directly related to the company's success in furthering its mission.

This department will work to ensure that web content is expanded to serve as a source for research and media relations:

- PDF files of published works relating to this agency or links when appropriate: articles, white papers, etc.
- Links to government agencies where individuals can learn more about industry specific topics
- Profiles of individuals affiliated with the agency who are deemed to be experts on specific subjects and a contact link for media to request information and interviews from these individuals
- PDF files of press releases and overview of press coverage as deemed beneficial for communications purposes

Other media campaigns such as press conferences, special event coverage, query for donations and support, etc. shall be developed uniquely as time and circumstances require. Media kits and various promotional materials shall be available at all times to use at a moment's notice. Other media kits and promotional materials along with invitations, brochures and programs designed for specific occasions. And, the website shall be maintained on a regular basis to provide additional content regarding any timely communications and media related matters. It is to the company's benefit that the company provides as much direct, timely and accurate information to the media as often as possible and to make this content as accessible as possible. This is most easily accomplished through email, direct mail and website updates.

Media Relationships: Nonprofit companies often lack the capital required to maintain personnel who are solely devoted to developing and nurturing media relationships. Therefore, most of this responsibility is spread throughout the executive level branch.

This department will absorb the responsibility of serving as a contact source and disseminating information to media personnel. This department will also maintain contact information on key players in the media on local, state, national and industry-specific levels.

It is important to reemphasize that building professional relationships with key media personnel is very important. People tend to prefer working with individuals whom they know, like and trust. If executed properly, advancing media relationships will equate to more media coverage and from a most just perspective. This department will focus on ways to advance media relationships and request the participation from other executives to assist in furthering this goal: