A communications plan is the overall strategy for reaching the partnership’s communication goals for both internal and external partners. The plan consists of the goal, targeted audiences, key messages, smaller action plans for communication initiatives and analysis of all of the partnerships communications.

1.) Purpose

*Purpose of a Communications Plan*

The purpose of a communications plan is to support the strategic objectives and provide action items for the communications of the partnership for the next (amount of time). This plan serves as a guide for all internal and external communication regarding (partnership objectives) for (targeted audiences).

2.) Goals

*Mission of Partnership*

(What is the mission statement of the partnership?)

A mission statement describes what the partnership is going to do and why. It is a way to look at the big picture in a concrete and action oriented way. The mission statement should be:

- Concise- 1 to 2 sentences
- Goal Oriented- explains the goals of the partnership
- Inclusive- the statement should be broad enough to cover all current and potential partners

**Example:**

Mission: Graduate is a cradle-to-career education partnership that is focused on system change to help more students graduate from high school, earn a college degree or credential, and enter a career of their choosing in Central New Mexico.

*Partnership Goals*

(What are the aspirational goals of the partnership?)

The Partnership Goals are the aspirational goals of the partnership. The partnership goals are derived from the mission statement, values, and beliefs of the partnership. It is important that your communication objectives tie directly back to the partnership goals.

**Examples:**

- Every child succeeds academically.
- Every child is prepared for kindergarten.
**Communication Objectives**
(What does the partnership want to achieve through communication?)

Communication Objectives are the goals that you would like to achieve through communication. What issues do you wish to address through communications? Consider:

- What tangible outcomes would you like to achieve through your communication effort?
- How will you know when you achieve your goals? (Be specific)
- What would you like to see, hear or have in hand that will let you know you are making progress toward your goals?

**Examples:**
- Our social media efforts engage the community in conversations about education
- We have a website to keep the community informed and serve as an information resource
- All partners communicate a clear and consistent message about the partnership

### 3.) Audience

**Primary Audience**
(Whose knowledge, attitudes and behaviors must be changed in order to meet the partnership’s goal? This is the audience the messages should be tailored to.)

The Primary Audience is the group who communications will be focused on. Consider:

- Whose knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors must be changed in order to complete the partnership goals and communications objectives?
- What are the characteristics of the audience? (Gender, ethnicity, income, language)
- What are the barriers and benefits associated with communicating with this audience?

**Examples:**
Potential business sector partners; after-school program providers; funders; superintendents; parents

**Secondary Audience**
(Who else will be affected if the partnership succeeds in their goal? Keep this audience in mind when crafting messages.)

The secondary audience is made up of those who are not the intended target of communications but will receive the messages or will be affected by the success of the partnership’s goals and communication objectives. Consider:

- Who else might the communication strategies reach and impact?
- What groups will be directly or indirectly affected by the partnership?

**Examples:**
Students; teachers; non-educational community organizations
**Influencers**
(Who can help the partnership reach the primary and secondary audience? Allies, partners or influencers)

Influencers are those who can help the partnership reach the primary audience. Consider:
- What partners can help the partnership reach targeted audiences?
- Who do the targeted audiences find credible?
- Where do the targeted audiences get their information?

**Examples:**
Members of the Leadership Table; local political officials; reporters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Knowledge, attitudes, behaviors related to issue</th>
<th>Barriers &amp; Benefits</th>
<th>Profile characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What are the barriers to this audience fully supporting or participating in reaching goal? What are the benefits if they do?</td>
<td>Demographics. What/who are they influenced by? What or who could motivate change or action?</td>
</tr>
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Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Knowledge, attitudes, behaviors related to issue</th>
<th>Barriers &amp; Benefits</th>
<th>Profile characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elected Officials (City Council &amp; School Board members)</td>
<td>Low knowledge of the Partnership, Skeptical attitude of success, Limited political support</td>
<td>Barriers: Limited time in office, may have other policy priorities Benefits: Helps move policy change, gives the Partnership credit in the community</td>
<td>Demographics: 35-65; majority male Influences: Voters, Mayor, Parents Motivations: Proof the Partnership will work and is unique, pressure from voters and higher ranking officials (mayor, senior council)</td>
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</table>

4.) **Message**

Theme
(What is the overarching theme for the partnership’s messaging? The direction of the messaging.)

Themes are the building blocks for messages. They are concise statements about the partnership that you want the overall community to remember. Themes should be memorable, easy to understand and jargon free. Consider:
- What do you want to communicate about the partnership?
- Why is the partnership important?
- Who benefits from the partnership?
- Why is the partnership unique?
- What does the partnership do?
Example of Themes:
All Hands Raised, Portland, OR
- Transforming children into educated, independent adults is the job of the entire community.
- The Partnership has a specific focus on eliminating racial disparities to ensure opportunity and achievement is available to all students.
- This work is grounded in data with a framework of continuous improvement.
- Alignment around a common set of indicators and shared practices will get us to community-wide impact.

Messages
(What does the partnership want their audience to do, think, feel, or change? What are the compelling motivations the audience needs to hear in order to take action? What are barriers for the audience? How should the partnership communicate to the secondary audience (those who are not directly involved, but affected by the outcome)? The answers to these questions are the messages.)

Messages are tied to the theme, they deliver important information about the issue while compelling and directing how the targeted audience should think, feel, and act. Quite simply, your messages are what you want to communicate. Different messages will be created for each audience and purpose.
Messages can accomplish many things. They can:
- Show importance or urgency
- Show the relevance of the issue and the partnership
- Put a face on the issue
Consider
- What is the purpose of the message: to ask, persuade, thank or inform?
- Who are the primary and secondary audiences for the message?
- What will motivate the audience to change their mind or take action?
- What mood do you want the message to have?
- What kind of language will your message use?
- How frequently will you communicate the message?

Example: Strive Partnership, Cincinnati, OH
“The brain physically grows to 90% of its adult size by age 5. The brain connections that create this growth are primarily based on the experiences a child has in these early years. Quality early childhood education is essential. Like the Preschool Promise page to learn about our efforts in Cincinnati. #ipromisecincy”

Example: Commit! Dallas, TX
“The Stars on the Rise Scholarship Program is open to graduating high school seniors. However, high school juniors can register to receive an academic resume, college information, potential career options, and other helpful advice to prepare for their future collegiate studies. You can find out more about this wonderful scholarship opportunity here: http://wp.me/p1XabO-28d”
Mood
(Which emotions does the partnership want to appeal to? This is the tone the messages should take.)

Mood is the overall emotion of the message. The mood will determine the reaction to the message. Avoid overly negative or blaming language, if possible. Audiences have a tendency to disregard extreme messaging. If you have disheartening language strike a balance and end the message with a call to action or a solution that the partnership is offering.

Language
(What is the spoken language of the targeted audience? Communicating in the audience’s spoken language gives the messages authenticity. What type of language will the audience respond to; informal or formal, simple or complex concepts and terms, popular or relatively unknown ideas? Crafting messages using the right language context will help the partnership connect with the audience.)

The language of a message has two parts: the audience’s spoken language and the type of language used. Crafting messages in your audience’s native language is not only culturally sensitive but will help you connect and shows the partnership’s authenticity. The type of language is a harder determination to make. The type of language depends on both the audience and communication channel for the message.

Consider:
- Is it appropriate to use formal or informal language?
- Are simple or complex ideas being communicated?
- Is the audience familiar with the ideas being communicated or are there new concepts being introduced?

Frequency
(How often will the messages need to be communicated? A communication calendar can help partnerships map out all communication efforts.)

Frequency is how often the message is communicated. The frequency is determined by the communication channel, the audience and the content of the message.

Consider:
- A communication calendar will help the partnership map out messages.

Type
(What is the purpose of the communication: to inform, persuade, ask or thank? The type of communication will determine the method and strategy behind message delivery.)

Messages can accomplish four tasks:
- Inform: the message will relay information to the audience
- Ask: the message will ask the audience to take action
- Persuade: the message will convince the audience to think or feel a certain way
- Thank: the message will express gratitude to the audience

The type of communication you need to accomplish will determine the message content.
5.) Resources and Budget

Capacity
(What infrastructure does the partnership have in place to support communications? Who will do the work and own each message and process? How much staff time can the partnership commit to communications?)

Capacity refers to the ability of the partnership staff to fulfill communication tasks. Planning out communications initiatives can help you determine how much communications capacity is needed. Consider:
- What infrastructure does the partnership have in place to support communications?
- Who will own each message?

Example:
Communication Manager Job Description

Partners
(Who are the key partners the partnership can leverage for communicating? What target audience does each partner align with? Which partners can donate staff or volunteers to help with communication efforts? Which partners can donate or provide at a reduced rate: materials, air time, services or other communication needs?)

Many times, cradle to career partnerships are able to build a communications budget and capacity by leveraging partners with communications expertise. This can take the form of loaned staff, helping to target audiences, donations of physical resources, providing resources at a reduced rate, and providing airtime or page space in a publication for key partnership messages.

Consider:
- What partners have communication expertise?
- What target audience does each partner align with?
- Are there any partners that can donate staff or volunteers to help with communications efforts?
- Are there partners who can donate or provide at a reduced rate: materials, air time, services (printing) or other communications needs?

Example:
Red Wing Shoe Company provides graphic design services for the Every Hand Joined partnership in Red Wing, MN.
Budget
(What is the partnership’s budget for communications?)

The budget refers to the funding needed to cover the cost associated with communications. This includes the ongoing costs of staff time, physical resources (paper, software, printing, equipment, etc.), and any services or licenses needed to support communications.

Consider the resources needed for each type of outreach:

- **Social Media** (Click here for the [2013 CMO Social Media Landscape](#))
  - To engage in social media consistently and effectively, a project manager is needed to manage the social media strategy, post consistently (at least 3 times a week, if not daily), and manage and engage audiences.
  - If engaging in multiple forms of social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.), a license for a social media management service like Sprout Social or Argyle Social could be useful.

- **Print Materials**
  - To produce professional printed communications materials, a project manager is needed to manage the overall print communications strategy and manage the completion of individual print material products. Capacity is also needed around the design of these print materials which can either be done in-house if a staff person has design experience, or contracted out to a consultant or design firm.
  - For printed materials, it is necessary to consider the costs of paper, ink and other materials for printing when budgeting for print communications. Similar to design, printing can be done in-house or contracted out depending on the availability of in-house resources and the quality of materials to be printed. If producing in-house, the necessary design software (Adobe Creative Suite, Microsoft Publisher, etc.) will also need to be budgeted for. Finally, if the method of outreach is mailing, make sure to budget for postage.

- **Website Development and Maintenance**
  - The development of a website is not something that can be entirely contracted out; a project manager is needed to oversee every step of the process, from bidding to updates. It is easy to underestimate the amount of staff time that must be dedicated to developing, writing, and updating content on the website; these tasks often require several dedicated hours of staff time a week.
  - Many costs are associated with services and licensing related to website development. A web development firm must be used to build the website, which includes contract hours for a web designer, a developer, an architect, a user interface expert, and testers. Ongoing costs for maintaining a website include a person to manage and implement updates, licenses for the platform (content management system), and hosting server costs. Yearly enhancements are also a likely budget item to keep the website fresh and up to date.

6.) **Communication Vehicles**

**Spokesperson/Communicator**

(Who is the most credible person or partnership organization to deliver the message? Whose point of view will help articulate the message most clearly?)

A spokesperson/communicator is the person who delivers a message to a targeted audience. They are likely to be the most credible on the topic or have the strongest connection to the audience.

Consider:

- Who is the most credible person or partnership organization to deliver the message?
- Whose point of view will help articulate the message most clearly?

Examples:

- Leadership Table members
- Superintendents
- Parents
- Community Leaders
Channels
(Where or from whom does the targeted audience get its information? What sources do they find credible? What relationships does the partnership have to build in regard to the media? What is the message frequency?)

Communication channels carry the messages to the targeted audiences. Channels take many forms: newspapers, radio, television, blogs, events, etc.

Consider:
- Where or what form does the audience get its information currently?
- Who does the audience find credible?
- Where does the audience spend most of their time?
- Where is the audience most likely to give the partnership attention?

Activities & Materials
(How relevant is the event or activity to the desired outcome? How many resources (money and staff time) will the event or activity require? Is it the appropriate time for the event or activity? What are the travel considerations for the audience and staff? What channel is being used? What type of message are the materials supporting? Where does the audience get information? What is the cost for producing the material? How much staff or volunteer time will it take to create and distribute the materials?)

Activities and materials are used in a selected communications channel and deliver the partnership’s messages to the targeted audience.

Consider:
- What activity or material is appropriate for the audience, goal and message?
- How is the activity or material relevant to the desired communication objective?
- What is the appropriate time to hold the activity or publish the material?
- What kind of staff and budget capacity exists to support the activity or creation of the material?
- What is the community’s overall impression of the issue?

Sample communication vehicles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHANNELS</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>MATERIALS TO SUPPORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>News conferences</td>
<td>News releases, blog posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio/TV</td>
<td>Editorial board meetings</td>
<td>Fliers and brochures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web sites / Bloggers</td>
<td>Radio talk or newscasts</td>
<td>Opinion editorials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>Tweet-ups / chats</td>
<td>Letters to the editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct mail/ e-news</td>
<td>Speeches</td>
<td>Web pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face meetings</td>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>Public service announcements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradeshows, conferences</td>
<td>PR event/school visit</td>
<td>Talking Points for partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donor events</td>
<td>One-on-one meetings</td>
<td>Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth orgs/community centers</td>
<td>Open houses</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Racks</td>
<td>Information fair</td>
<td>Promotional items, giveaways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith-based organizations</td>
<td>A benefit race</td>
<td>Call-to-action/subscribe page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street festivals</td>
<td>Sponsorships, parade</td>
<td>Email Distribution lists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.) Implementation of Communication Initiatives

A communication initiative is the strategy for delivering a specific message to a targeted audience. Communication initiatives rely on many of the same process points as the overall communications plan, but relate to matters on a much smaller scale.

(What is your timeline for execution? What communication obstacles and errors may arise? What plans are in place to handle the obstacles and errors? What initiative will have the largest impact? What is the long term goal? What are the short term targets?)

Use the worksheet and matrices provided to complete action plans for partnership communication initiatives.
Communication Initiative Action Plan Worksheet

Consider the following questions when planning a communication initiative:

1. What are your long-term communication strategy goals?
2. What are your short-term target goals?
3. What is your timeline for completion?
4. Who are your target audiences?
5. What are the key communications messages?
6. What are your staff and budget resources?
7. What materials and activities will best disseminate these messages?
8. What media have you targeted?
9. What role will partners and staff play?
10. How will you analyze your effort

Example:

1. What are your long-term communication objectives?
   • To increase social media presence.
2. What are your short-term target goals?
   • To increase twitter followers by 10%.
3. What is your timeline for completion?
   • 3 months
4. Who are your target audiences?
   • Parents, Teachers, and After-School Providers
5. What are the key messages?
   • “ABC Partnership has a new way of doing things, by involving the whole community in the education of our children”
   • “Follow us on Twitter to learn more about ABC’s efforts to improve education for every child in our community”
   • “Follow us on Twitter to find out about upcoming events and news from ABC Partnership”
6. What are your staff and budget resources?
   • 1 communication manager- 10 hours/week on social media @ $40,500 salary
   • 1 intern- 15 hours/week on social media @ $500 stipend
   • $600 for printing
   • $75/month for office internet service
7. What communication channel will you use?
   • Social Media
8. What materials and activities will best disseminate these messages?
   • Materials- tweets, collateral with social media information on it
   • Activities- active tweeting, engaging in twitter conversations, encouraging people at community meetings to tweet about it using hashtags
9. What role will partners and staff play?
   • Partners- Encourage partners to tweet at and re-tweet the Partnership’s twitter account
   • Staff- Communication Manager: manage messaging and social media strategy; manage intern
   • Intern: Compose tweets, engage in twitter conversations
10. How will you analyze your efforts?
    • Set a baseline for twitter followers, re-tweets and mentions based on audience, monitor new follows, re-tweets, and mentions, after 3 months measure new followers and engagement.
## Communication Initiative Implementation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long Term Goal</th>
<th>Short Term Target</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Message</th>
<th>Vehicles (Channel, Activity, &amp; Material)</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Metric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase business sector engagement</td>
<td>Increase the number of businesses represented on partnership tables</td>
<td>Local and regional business leaders</td>
<td>Supporting the Partnership will help secure a strong future workforce</td>
<td>Channel: Face-to-Face meetings; Activity: presentation; meetings; Material: Brochure; Website; Facebook; Twitter</td>
<td>$600/Printing; 20 hours/week staff time</td>
<td>6 month timeline; 10 meetings scheduled a week</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td># of new business sector partners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Example:

8.) **Analysis and Measurement**

(What messages worked? Which messages were ineffective? What vehicles worked better than others? What activities were popular and repeatable? What issues need to be addressed? Evaluation and measurement are crucial parts of the communications and continuous improvement processes.)

Analysis and measurement allow the partnership to monitor communications efforts, determine their effectiveness, and retool efforts according to the findings.

Consider:

- What is the timeline?
- What outcome is directly measurable from the communication initiatives?
- What does communications success look like?
Example Measurements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Output-based metrics</th>
<th>Outcome-based metrics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Measure levels of communications and PR activity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Measures changes in behavior</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Typical dashboard metrics</em></td>
<td><em>Typical dashboard metrics</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Web / Blog**
- # visits / new & unique
- Time on page
- Total avg. time on site
- Clicks (if URL given)

**PR**
- # of press releases
- # of interviews
- Volume of coverage
- Tone of voice
- Share of voice
- Message penetration

**Social Media**
- # followers
- # RT / Mentions / likes
- Click-through (if URL given)

**Events**
- # of participants

**Newsletters**
- Deliverability
- Open-rate
- Click-through
- New subscribers
- Opt-outs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of leads</th>
<th>Cost per lead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased funding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># new community partners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ratio of positive to negative news stories</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- % increase in followers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- % increase in likes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- % increase in attendance</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>