



Communicating Successfully With a Plan

The road to success for any marketing or communications campaign starts with a focused plan. As advisers, you take the time to develop quality plans for fundraising, large and small school events, and civic engagement, so why not do the same for your communications activities?

A communications plan can serve as the roadmap that takes you from where you are to where you want to be with your outreach activities. This excellent tool can take you from a fresh idea to real implementation and help you organize your ideas and manage your tasks in the process.

The well-thought-out plan can make or break a communications campaign. It's the real difference between a mediocre campaign that communicates recent activities and a successful campaign that ensures that your target audience fully comprehends the messages that you are delivering about your students' good works.

As the lead communicator for your program, you need to provide easily understandable and informative messages for your target audiences (i.e., parents, students, school/district administration, the media, and the general community), whether through broadcast, print, or Web communications. A communications plan will help you organize your ideas, information, and objectives into a clear, concise, focused, and short document, and it will help you create an effective product that meets your school's communication needs and your targeted audiences' expectations for information.

Because the document serves as a roadmap, you will want to write it and have it in place before you initiate any projects that will require some level of information dissemination to your target audiences. At a bare minimum, your plan should answer these five questions:

1. What is the one measurable and realistic objective for this communication?
2. Who is the target audience (be as specific as possible)?
3. What is the project or result being communicated?

A communications plan can serve as the roadmap that takes you from where you are to where you want to be with your outreach activities.

4. What are the key messages you want to communicate? What are the supporting emotional and rational reasons to believe the message?
 5. What is the deliverable (e.g., community project, student or faculty awards, fundraising event, etc.), what communication vehicles will be used (e.g., letters to parents, the news media, school website, etc.), and what is the time frame?
- Although your communications plan might be specific to a particular initiative or activity, every plan should include the following items:
- School name
 - Title of project, initiative, or activity
 - Issue area (e.g., awards, fundraising, community projects, etc.)
 - Date of plan
 - Projected completion date of project
 - The key features and benefits

Perform a quick analysis by determining the following:

- What are my group's strengths?
- What are my groups's weaknesses?
- What opportunities does my group have for positive communications?
- What would impede my group from being successful?
- What is the group's key objective of this project? (This should be stated in measurable terms. For example, one objective might be to increase student body participation in a community service project by 50%. Also, the objective should be as spe-

cific as possible, realistic, and time-sensitive.)

- Who is the target audience? What is the profile of the target audience? What is their overall perspective concerning my group?
- What key messages should be included?
- Is there any specific information that needs to be incorporated into the communications, such as district/school/group policy, school boilerplate info, specific description of the group, or the like?
- What should the tone be?
- What key messages should the target audience take away from the communication? What action should they take?
- What medium are you using to communicate (e.g., local newspaper, radio, or TV station; direct mail; e-mail campaign; or school website)?
- Do you have copies of background materials, such as brochures, research, data sheets, press releases, case studies, testimonials, or other promotional materials?
- Is this a stand-alone piece or is it part of an integrated communications campaign? If it is part of an overall campaign, what other communication vehicles will you use? Is the message consistent across all communications?
- What is the time line for project completion? What are the key deliverables?

The final step is getting everyone on board with your communications activities. Having the support of the school community will ensure that you are on the right track to meeting your goals and will minimize the number of surprises that pop up along the way.

Having a thorough, functional communications plan in place will help you analyze, strategize, and organize your thoughts and ideas before initiating a project. Such a plan will result in fresh and exciting communications. ■

For more communication tips, please visit: www.nasc.us/prtps.