



COMMUNICATIONS



Your NPO's success depends on how effectively it communicates. Through your communications, beneficiaries, donors and community members learn about your NPO's goals, activities and accomplishments. They develop their impressions of your NPO based on the quality of your communications. These impressions determine whether beneficiaries choose to seek your NPO's services and whether donors choose to donate. Good communications support donor and volunteer satisfaction with your NPO, and they establish your NPO's reputation in the community.

Because communications are so important, it is essential that they be carefully planned. Communications planning helps ensure that your NPO is conveying clear information to the people it needs to reach, in a format that they will use and understand. It helps avoid sending inconsistent or incorrect messages. It can prevent wasting time and money with communications that do not convey the right message or do not reach the intended audience.

Following are common "myths" about communications planning, along with "truths".

Myth	Truth
We are a small NPO. We do not need to do communications planning.	Communications planning is important for all NPOs, regardless of size. Good communications planning helps small NPOs get know and establish their reputation in the community. It helps them find beneficiaries, donors and volunteers so they can grow.
Communications planning is time consuming.	Communications planning requires some time and thought, but it does not need to be overly time consuming. By using the process outlined in this tool, along with the templates in the attachment, the communications process can be done in an efficient manner. Good communications planning can save you time and money in the long-run by preventing wasteful, ineffective communications.
Communications are only important for fundraising.	Communications are important for fundraising, and it is essential to have a good strategy for communicating with donors and potential donors. But communications are also important for almost everything else your NPO does. Every day, you communicate with beneficiaries, employees, and volunteers. You may have interactions with community members or government agencies. It is important that all of these communications be done well.
If we do our work well, people will know it. We do not need to do communications planning.	Unless you communicate your accomplishments, it is unlikely that anyone will learn about them.
We have a website (or brochure, or Facebook page). That is enough.	There is no reason to believe that people will learn about and access your website (or brochure, or Facebook page), unless you have a communications strategy to help assure that they learn about it and want to access that information.

This tool:

- Outlines a step-by-step approach for communications planning
- Provides a set of questions for self-assessing your NPO's communication planning efforts
- Identifies references for further information
- Contains a series of templates that your NPO can use for communications planning. In addition to blank templates, examples of completed templates are included to demonstrate how the templates can be used.

PART I: MAJOR COMPONENTS OF NPO COMMUNICATIONS

COMPONENT	WHAT IT INCLUDES	SUGGESTIONS FOR BUILDING YOUR COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM	WHY THIS IMPORTANT
<p>1. Develop a "Communications Statement"—a clear, concise description of your NPO's goals, activities and accomplishments.</p>	<p>A Communications Statement" provides clear and concise information about your NPO. It enables people to quickly understand your NPO's goals, activities and accomplishments. This statement will help you prepare all of your NPO's communications, ensuring that you communicate important information about your NPO in a clear and consistent manner.</p> <p>You will not necessarily use the communications statement directly in all communications. However you can refer to it as you prepare your</p>	<p>New and developing NPOs:</p> <p>The NPO mission statement can serve as the communications statement for new and developing NPOs. The mission statement concisely describes what the NPO is trying to accomplish and what it does.</p> <p>Established NPOs:</p> <p>Established NPOs may wish to develop a more comprehensive communications statement, answering the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your NPO trying to accomplish? • What are your strategies for making this happen? • What are your NPO's capabilities for doing this? • How will you know if you are making progress? • What have you accomplished so far? <p>The Communications Statement should be developed with participation from key stakeholders, including board members, staff, donors and beneficiaries.</p>	<p>Everyone who communicates about your NPO should be able to do so in a clear, compelling, and consistent manner. A well-written Communications Statement provides a basis for doing this.</p> <p>While you will tailor your communications for different groups and purposes, referencing your Communications Statement as you prepare your communications helps you describe your NPO accurately, consistently, and appropriately.</p> <p>Without a Communications Statement, there is a risk that your communications will be unclear or inconsistent, and that people receiving the communication will not</p>

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	<p>communications, to make sure that they are consistent and accurate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If your NPO has a mission statement, it can form the basis of your communications statement. • If your NPO has a strategic plan, it can provide information to support development of a more comprehensive communications statement. <p>See Attachment 1—NPO Communications Statement Template</p> <p>See Attachment 1A-Example for Childhood Literacy NPO</p>	<p>understand your NPO's goals and activities.</p>

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<p>2. Identify the audiences with whom your NPO communicates. Then determine the purpose of your communications with each audience group.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the major audiences with which you need to communicate? • Why do you need to communicate with them? • What are the needs, interests and concerns of each audience that should help shape your communications? 	<p>Every NPO communicates with multiple audiences, such as beneficiaries, donors, volunteers, and the community in general. You want to tailor your communications to the needs, interests and concerns of each audience group.</p> <p>The purpose of your communications will differ by audience. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your communications with potential beneficiaries will inform them about the services your NPO provides and how to enroll for those services. • Your communications with potential donors will discuss your NPO's accomplishments, and why donating to your NPO is worthwhile. <p>The audience and goals of these communications will differ significantly, and may require different communications approaches.</p> <p>New and developing NPOs: New and developing NPOs may initially focus on developing communications strategies for their primary audiences only—for example, beneficiaries and donors.</p> <p>Established NPOs: Depending on their activities and needs, established NPOs may wish to develop communications strategies for a broader range of</p>	<p>Being clear about your audiences and what you want to convey to each will help assure that your communications are successful. It will help assure that you direct your communications to the right people, and that they are tailored motivate the response that you are seeking.</p>

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		<p>audiences, such as the community at large or government officials.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Attachment 2—Audience Identification Worksheet Template • See Attachment 2A Example for Childhood Literacy NPO • See Attachment 2B—LIN Center for Community Development Target Audiences from 2013 Communication Plan 	

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<p>3. What is the message you want to convey?</p>	<p>Determine what message you want to send through your communications.</p>	<p>The message you want to send determines how you craft your communications. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you want to show the importance, urgency or magnitude of an issue? • Do you want to demonstrate that your NPO is effective in meeting its goals? • Do you want to reassure people that you can help them? • Do you want recipients of the communication to take some sort of action (donating, volunteering, signing up as beneficiary, etc.)? <p>Your message should support the objective of your communication. In developing your message:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure it is clear and consistent. • Stress your main points. • Use a tone (for example--reassuring, concerned, or confident) that reinforces the message you are trying to send. • Make sure that your message is credible, both in terms of the information provided and the person delivering it. • Make sure it addresses issues and concerns that the intended audience considers to be most important (not just what you consider important). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Attachment 3—Message Development Worksheet template • See Attachment 3A - Example for Childhood Literacy NPO 	<p>Your communications will have better results if you are clear about the message you want to convey. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A communication encouraging potential beneficiaries to sign up for your program could reassure them that your program can help meet their needs. You might want to include “success stories” from people they can relate to demonstrate how you can help. You would not want to approach potential beneficiaries with a communication full of “facts and figures” about the problems you are trying to solve. • A communication to potential donors could be similar to one for beneficiaries, focusing on “success stories” to motivate donations. However, depending on the interests and needs of your potential donors, you might also include “facts and figures” about the significance and scope of the problems your NPO is addressing and the urgent need for financial donations to address those problems.

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<p>4. What form will your communication take?</p>	<p>Your communication can take a variety of forms, depending on the communication objective and the target audience. Examples of ways that communication can take place include but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notices or articles in newspapers • Posters in public places • Informational brochures • Social media • Email • Special events • Phone calls • In-person meetings 	<p>The choice of communication form depends on <i>who</i> you want to communicate with, <i>what</i> you want to communicate, and your NPO's ability to use and afford this communication form. It is important to choose a communication form that your target audience will use and which is practical and affordable for your NPO. For example, advertising in newspapers does not make sense if your target audience does not read newspapers. Similarly, using email or social media will only work if your audience has access to the Internet.</p> <p>E-mail, websites and social media are of growing importance, as more and more people rely on the Internet and social media for information and communications. Internet-based communications provide unique opportunities for communicating about your NPO. However, like any other form of communication, Internet-based communication must be done well to be effective. See Attachment 4B for additional information on Internet-based communications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Attachment 4—Communications Format Worksheet template • See Attachment 4A—Example for Childhood Literacy NPO • See Attachment 4B—Tips on Internet-based Communications (websites, blogs, email, social media) 	<p>Selecting the right communication format helps you get your message out in a way that your intended audience will hear it. The communication format should reflect an understanding of how your target audience likes to communicate. It also must be realistic given your NPO's budget constraints.</p>

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5. What partnerships can help promote your communications?	Groups, organizations or businesses may exist that could help your NPO communicate by providing funds, expertise or other services to help your NPO communicate.	<p>Here are a few examples of possible partnerships to support NPO communications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A printer agrees to print a NPO’s brochure for a reduced charge. • A student group helps a NPO set up a website or Facebook page. • A business agrees to make a NPO’s literature available to its customers. • The NPO arranges to submit articles to a magazine or newspaper on a regular basis. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Attachment 5—Community Partnership Worksheet Template • See Attachment 5A— Example for Childhood Literacy NPO 	By establishing partnerships with supporters, your NPO’s ability to communicate effectively can be enhanced.
6. How can you work effectively with the media to get communicate about your NPO?	Establishing good working relationships with media outlets can increase the effectiveness of your NPO’s communications. Potential media outlets include including newspapers, newsletters, radio stations, TV stations and web-based media.	<p>By establishing good relationships with the media and giving them the information they need to do their job, you can help get the word out about your NPO. Possible approaches include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop personal relationships with reporters, editors and media gatekeepers. Periodically contact them with suggestions for stories about your NPO or the issues that you work with. • Hold events that will be of interest to the media, and invite reporters to attend. • Develop written materials, recordings and photos that media outlets can easily use in their reporting. If a 	Media outlets by their nature reach many people. Using them to “spread the word” about your NPO can greatly increase the number of people who know and care about your organization.

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		<p>reporter is developing a story on your NPO, arrange interviews with beneficiaries or other community members to assist them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute news releases on significant developments. • Some media outlets might be interested in publishing a regular column written by your NPO. 	
<p>7. Develop your written communications plan.</p>	<p>Summarize all parts of your communications strategy (steps 1-5). Identify steps for carrying out the strategy. Set timelines and make assignments for carrying out the communications plan.</p>	<p>A written communication plan will help make sure that your communication strategies are carried out as intended. The information included in Attachments 1-5 is pulled together to develop your comprehensive communications plan. Attachment 6 provides a template for doing this.</p> <p>If your NPO does Action Planning, developing the communications plan can be part of your Action Planning process. Otherwise, a stand-alone communications plan can be developed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Attachment 7—Consolidated Communications Planning Worksheet template • See Attachment 7A—Example for Childhood Literacy NPO 	<p>A formal communications plan with timelines and assignments increases the likelihood that the communications strategy will be successfully implemented.</p>

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<p>8. Monitor your communications program and update as needed.</p>	<p>Regularly check progress in implementing your communications plan and make needed changes.</p>	<p>If the communications plan is not being carried out as intended, why did that happen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the people who were supposed to carry out the plan get too busy with other tasks? • Did your NPO not have the money to carry out the plan? • Did you try carrying out the plan, but found it ineffective? (For example, communications to donors did not result in many donations) <p>Depending on the problems identified, you may need to make new assignments or reallocate budget resources to carry out your plan. You may need to change your plan if you found it ineffective, or if you determine that it is impractical for some other reason.</p>	<p>Carrying out a communications strategy is an ongoing effort. By checking on progress, evaluating results, and making changes as needed, you will assure that your NPO's communications are effective.</p>

PART II: LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

TOPIC	ATTACHMENTS
NPO Communications Statement	Attachment 1: NPO Communication Statement Template
NPO Communications Statement Example	Attachment 1A: NPO Communications Statement Example for Childhood Literacy NPO
Audience Identification	Attachment 2: Audience Identification Worksheet Template
Audience Identification Example	Attachment 2A: Audience Identification Worksheet example for Childhood Literacy NPO
LIN Center for Community Development - Targeted Audiencces from 2013 Communications Plan	Attachment 2B: LIN Center for Community Development – Targeted Audiencces from 2013 Communications Plan
Message Development	Attachment 3: Message Development Worksheet Template
Message Development Example	Attachment 3A: Message Development Worksheet example for Childhood Literacy NPO

Communications Format	Attachment 4: Communications Format Worksheet Template
Communications Format Worksheet Example	Attachment 4A: Communications Format Worksheet Example for Childhood Literacy NPO
Tips On Internet-based Communications	Attachment 4B: Tips On Internet-based Communications (websites, blogs, email, social media)
Community Partnership	Attachment 5: Community Partnership Worksheet Template
Community Partnership Worksheet Example	Attachment 5A: Community Partnership Worksheet Example for Childhood Literacy NPO
Consolidated Communications Planning	Attachment 6: Consolidated Communications Planning Worksheet Template
Consolidated Communications Planning Example	Attachment 6A: Consolidated Communications Planning Example for Childhood Literacy NPO

PART III: HELPFUL REFERENCES ON NPO COMMUNICATIONS

AUTHOR AND TITLE	WHERE IT CAN BE FOUND	WHAT THIS REFERENCE COVERS
Charting Impact	http://chartingimpact.org	Charting Impact’s website includes a “Five Powerful Questions” feature. The website describes it as follows: “Charting Impact enables your organization to serve your community better. It sharpens your thinking about your work, and it creates a concise, standardized report about your plans and progress that you can share with people looking to invest their money, time, and attention.”
WK Kellogg Foundation—Template for Strategic Communications Plan	http://www.wkkf.org/knowledge-center/resources/2006/01/template-for-strategic-communications-plan.aspx	Template to walk NPOs through the steps of developing a strategic communications plan.
National Council of Non-profits	http://www.councilofnonprofits.org/resources/communications-planning	Website lists multiple resources on non-profit communications.
Thomas Wolf <i>Managing a Nonprofit Organization</i>, Simon and Schuster 2012		General guide to non-profit management.

PART IV: NPO SELF-ASSESSMENT: COMMUNICATIONS

Your NPO can use the following worksheet to assess its Communications Planning. The worksheet is designed to help you identify areas of strength and areas where you can improve your capacity.

For each Communications Planning Component, **check** the appropriate box to show whether the described component is fully achieved, partially achieved, or not present in your NPO.

COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM COMPONENT	ACHIEVED	PARTIALLY ACHIEVED	NOT PRESENT	COMMENTS
<p>1. Our NPO has a clear, concise communications statement.</p> <p>New and developing NPOs: Our mission statement serves as a communications statement.</p> <p>Established NPOs: Our communications statement includes our mission statement, and may provide additional information about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What we are trying to accomplish • Our strategies for making this happen • Our NPO’s capabilities for doing this • How we know if we are making progress • What we have you accomplished so far 				
2. Our NPO has identified the audiences that we communicate with and the goal of our communications with each audience.				
3. Our NPO knows the message it wants to send to each audience.				
4. Our NPO has selected communications formats that are appropriate for reaching the				

COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM COMPONENT	ACHIEVED	PARTIALLY ACHIEVED	NOT PRESENT	COMMENTS
audiences we want to communicate with.				
5. If we are using email and social media for communications, we are using it in an effective manner.				
6. We have established partnerships with other organizations to help us with our communications.				
7. We have a communications plan that includes all communications-related activities, makes assignments and sets timelines.				
8. We regularly review our communications plan and update it as necessary.				

PART V. SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS AND NEXT STEPS

Choose 2 or more communication components (Partially Achieved or Not Present) from the Self-Assessment Table in Part 3 and complete the following table.

PRIORITIZED COMMUNICATIONS COMPONENT (Enter #1 to #8)	WHAT WILL BE DONE IN NEXT 6 MONTHS?	WHO WILL BE RESPONSIBLE?	PROJECTED START AND COMPLETION DATES