

Communications Concepts

Guidelines for Developing a Communications Plan for Tribal Energy Development

The National Renewable Energy Laboratory's (NREL's) Communications & Public Affairs Office developed this document and the corresponding slides to provide guidance and a template tribes can use in developing a proactive strategy for Stakeholder Education and Engagement as they move forward with energy planning and development.

A communications plan is a "road map" that identifies communications goals and key messages for a specific organization, project, or initiative; outlines strategies and tactics for achieving the goals; and measures progress toward the goals.

Elements of a communications plan:

Strategic Communications Planning

Strategic communications planning is a collaborative effort with stakeholders to establish key messages and communications goals for an organization, project, or initiative; develop a set of strategies and tactics that serve as a road map for achieving the goals; and identify ways to measure success.

Thinking strategically about communications ties your communications effort to your mission and goals to ensure that you get the results you're looking for.

1. Conduct a strategic planning session

Strategic planning will help you tailor your activities to achieve your goals and meet your audience needs. It helps you determine which strategies and tools you'll use and budget appropriately. And it will help connect your communications effort to your organizational mission and goals to ensure that you get the results you're looking for. This strategy session will enable you to effectively:

- *Identify your key audiences/target customers* – those you need to communicate to/with, engage, inspire, and motivate to action.
- *Highlight what makes you stand out and why it's important to your audiences/customers*
- *Identify key messages that will resonate w/ each audience* – the most important things you want them to know about your organization/project/product and how its existence benefits them
- *Establish communications goals* – link these to your mission, and make them achievable and measurable
- *Determine the most effective strategies (how you accomplish the goals) and tactics (specific tools and actions) for achieving your communications goals.*

2. Research

This is critical: You need this to get a clear picture of who you are, where you want to go, what you want to accomplish. It also helps you understand who your audiences are and the landscape in which you operate.

Research can consist of surveys, focus groups, and audience interviews.

Once you've completed your research, you should be able to answer these questions:

- Do you know your mission and goals?
- Are your communications goals and strategies aligned w/ your organizational goals?
- Who are your key audiences?
- What marketing and communications tools work best for those you seek to communicate with/engage/inspire/motivate?
- What does your current communications effort look like, and where are the holes?
- Do you have the resources and budget to carry out your communications effort?

3. Develop an Elevator Speech or About Statement

This is the story of your organization told in a concise and compelling way. It's a short description of what you do and why it's important. You should be able to deliver it in 30 seconds or less. It should say a lot in as few words as possible. It provides an overview of the organization and its programs/services in a way that captivates the listener and makes them want to know more — and do more. Incorporating stats and stories can strengthen it. Often it includes a specific call to action.

4. Develop Key Messages

Your key messages frame the conversation about who you are and why you exist. They convey the key points you want to make consistently every time you talk to your key audiences. And they always tie back to your brand and reinforce it. These are big, bold benefits-driven statements that grab people's attention and explain why they should care.

Well-crafted messaging takes time. Brand strategists at big agencies spend weeks or months developing key messages, which lay the foundation for creative teams to find clever and compelling ways to express them.

Key messages highlight your unique benefits and move or motivate your audiences. They are:

- Informative – conveying what you want people to know or understand
- Compelling and engaging – designed to influence what people think and say about you, and inspire or motivate them to do what you want them to do
- Concise – using simple, straightforward language that's believable and authentic—and easy to recall and repeat

- Consistent – Everyone involved in your organization/project/business should deliver these same messages so you're speaking in a unified voice about who you are and why you're relevant to your key audiences. The key messages should all reflect your brand, and using them consistently is how you establish and reinforce your brand
- Targeted – In addition your core messages (ideally 1-3, and no more than 5), you will need messages tailored to communicate with specific audiences in a way that resonates with them because it addresses their needs and unique perspective

Key messages provide value to the organization/project/business by helping you:

- Prioritize and crystallize the most important information about your mission, purpose, goals, services, and offerings
- Set your organization apart from the "competition"
- Stay on point and focused when engaging with key audiences
- Communicate consistently and accurately

5) Establish communications goals and strategies/tactics for achieving them

A communications plan is comprised of your communications goals, strategies, and tactics.

- Goals are *what* you want your communications effort to accomplish and are tied to your organizational goals (e.g., establish an interactive dialogue between the organization and key audiences).
- Strategies are *how* you accomplish the goals (e.g., social media).
- Tactics are *specific tools or actions* that carry out the strategies (e.g., Blog, Facebook, Twitter).

Brand

Establishing or reinforcing a brand is another example of a communications goal. It aligns with and supports the organization's mission and goals.

- This is your identity; it's what makes your tribe, Native corporation, initiative, program, or project unique. It's comprised of:
 - *Your purpose*: What you do, why you exist strategically. This is a foundation upon which you can build focused goals.
 - *Your attributes/traits*: Your personality. An expression of your core values and the relationships you have with your stakeholders or customers
 - *Your promise*: The emotional part of your brand purpose – the strengths you bring to the table and the benefits you deliver. This is what establishes and maintains confidence in your organization/project/business.
- The brand is the most important tool you have to build confidence in your organization/project/business, which starts from within. To build a strong

brand, you first need to get everyone internal to your organization/project/business to buy in, support, and steward your brand.

- Branding helps crystallize what you stand for, and this in turn helps you communicate who you are to your key audiences.
- The brand is more than your logo and tagline! These serve to reinforce your brand identity but *they are not your brand*.
- Your brand is the essence of the organization/project/business – what you stand for and what you do. It should be reflected in your culture, your communications, your relationships and partnerships, and the promises you make to your stakeholders/audiences/customers.

Campaign

Organizing a **campaign** is another example of a communications strategy. *A campaign is organized around a specific goal* (e.g., educate key audiences about energy efficiency and motivate/inspire them to change their behavior), is conducted for a limited period of time with a specific outcome in mind, and has a theme or slogan (e.g., Solarize Akwesasne).

A campaign can be defined as an operation or series of operations energetically pursued to accomplish a specific purpose at a specific point in time. Campaigns come and go, whereas strategic communications plans/programs deliver ongoing valuable and relevant content that has a long shelf-life and builds over time toward a specific business outcome.

The best and most profitable organizations understand that communications strategy leads, not campaigns. Campaigns are tactical. They create little peaks but not ongoing upward movement toward your goal. They're specific tactics that help push a strategy forward, and they have a specific call to action that helps advance your larger, long-term organizational goals by leading the audience to a key behavior, action, or decision.