

Appendix B: The Five Plan Elements of a Communications Plan

I. Goals and Objectives

Just as we discuss how to develop SMART goals in chapters for the economic development initiative as a whole, the communications plan should identify goals and objectives specific to communications. Communications goals should focus outreach efforts and lead to measurable outcomes needed to build buy-in, support, or other identified objectives. When developing goals, leaders should identify three to five objectives, such as driving legislative change; raising visibility of efforts with the community or with local business leaders; creating buy-in from a specific audience; or raising money or awareness for sustainability of the region's efforts.

Identifying what success looks like will help with measuring outcomes and evaluating the strength and versatility of the communications plan and activities. When developing communications goals it is important to include short-term goals and milestones as well as long-term goals.

Example: *(Note that this will ultimately be shown visually.)*

- Long-term goal: Raising awareness of economic development activities within the community in order to gain support and resources for encouraging business attraction and retention.
- Indicators of success:
 - Recognition by public that initiative is important for long-term growth and success of the community
 - Broader understanding of and acceptance for an agenda promoting economic diversification in region
 - Increased media coverage of issues relating to economic diversification
 - Gubernatorial, legislative, and business leadership participation
- Short-term goals:
 - Strong media coverage for launch event or specific identified event
 - Building of partnerships that disseminate information across networks
 - Increased attendance at community meetings and briefings
 - Mention of initiative by legislative leadership speech or at events
- Intermediate goals:
 - Resources leveraged to advance the economic development agenda
 - Strong Gubernatorial and legislative support measured by public statements and actions
 - An active and powerful base of champions working to advance agenda

- Long-term goals:
 - An increase in businesses relocating to region
 - Successful change in policy or tax structure to support new and existing business
 - Changes in attitudes and opinions of general public, as measured by opinion research

II. Audience Analysis

An audience analysis is one of the most important and often overlooked parts of developing a comprehensive communications strategy. During this step, regional leaders must identify and prioritize audiences. Leadership must work to understand their audiences' concerns, identify obstacles, and understand the core characteristics that make up each audience segment. No two audiences will have the same needs in terms of communications, so understanding who they are, how you may best reach them, and the obstacles that may arise are essential.

When building an audience analysis it is essential to be as specific as possible. Narrowing target groups down as far as possible may seem tedious but will be effective in helping the Leadership Group identify priorities and potential skeptics. For example, perhaps one priority is to keep local students from the research college in the region post-graduation, or the initiative is seeking to establish an entrepreneurship program in the public schools.

Some organizations may find it useful to develop an audience analysis table such as the one shown below. Documenting each audience in this manner will help inform message development as well as strategies and tactics for communications.

Note: Table will be populated with examples.

Audience	Concerns/Needs	Possible Action	Added Value	Potential Risks
State Policymakers				

III. Core Messages

Messaging is ultimately the core product of the strategic communications planning process. Tactics and strategies exist to bring messages to life. Messages should be audience-specific and answer the all-important question, "What's in it for me?" Effective messages are memorable, connect to the big picture, and address big-picture concerns. They should provide a sense of urgency, be simple, use data wisely, and have a clear call to action. The call to action is simply what you want the audience to do. Much of the work that is completed during the audience analysis will help inform this section. During the economic development process, the messages may address some key themes such as:

7 Questions on Knowing your Audience

1. What are they like?
2. Why are they here?
3. What keeps them up at night?
4. How can you solve their problem?
5. What do you want them to do?
6. How can you best reach them?
7. How might they resist?

~ Duarte.com 2008;
Taken from book *Slideology*

- Why the time is right for economic diversification and why the region needs to act now;
- Identify the benefits of diversification and the region’s activities, as they are specific to the community or intended end-user; and
- Connect the end-user to key take-aways – or why and what they will see in terms of change in their community.

These are some preliminary message themes, but specific messages will be unique. For example, if the region needs to address the need for a more highly-skilled workforce, you may want to build on key messages, such as the gap between supply and demand for educated workers or that most new jobs will require higher skills. The call to action may be intended for community college or higher education programs to deliver education and training differently or to call on the community to use resources in the region to advance their skills.

There are many different ways to develop and organize messages. Through these steps, users should be able to identify concerns as overarching, informational, or challenging. Grouping these concerns into “buckets” to better organize and prioritize messages is an effective way to get to core issues.

Messaging and communications planning in general is often done with a group of knowledgeable stakeholders who come together to brainstorm. At a minimum, the team should include any subject matter experts, a communications professional, any policy or legal experts, and a facilitator.

Below is a sample Message Map that can be used to communicate key messages.

Note: Map template will be populated with examples.

MESSAGE MAP: STAKEHOLDER: QUESTION:		
Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
Supporting Fact	Supporting Fact	Supporting Fact
Supporting Fact	Supporting Fact	Supporting Fact
Supporting Fact	Supporting Fact	Supporting Fact

IV. Summary of Strategies and Tactics

Identifying and developing strategies and tactics is a natural progression of the communications planning process. Leadership Group Strategy and tactics constitute the plan to achieve a particular goal (strategy) and communications vehicles or activities that will be used to disseminate messages (tactics).

Not every strategy will have equal weight. It is normal to accord varying emphasis to different strategies depending on the audience's need and where the regional leadership is in terms of the broader initiative. Strategies could include:

- Legislative strategy – These are activities related to advancing the organization's needs through local or state policy changes;
- Partner development strategy – How and who to engage to maximize success;
- Public relations strategy – How to use media, events, and public service announcements as part of outreach and awareness;
- Social media strategy – How to engage citizens through active and existing social networks; and
- Research – Identifying information needs and having baseline data from which to measure progress.

These strategies are not all-inclusive. Core strategies can go beyond “buckets of communications” and can also be made broader through strategies such as “understand attitudes of community around a

topic X.” Each region may choose different types of strategies to advance their efforts with different audiences.

Once a solid set of strategies has been identified, regional teams will need to get specific with smart and achievable tactics. Leadership committees should look to combine tactics that have proven to be successful in other community initiatives with new ideas that may be effective based on having clear messages and a strong call to action. Public relations strategies may include garnering more press attention for the initiative. The tactics could include press releases, news conferences, briefings for reporters, op-ed placements in newspapers, speaking at local events, or other activities as fit the organization. Similarly, if the strategy is to better understand citizens’ concerns, the tactics may include research, briefings, meetings, etc.

To pull it all together, many regions may want to develop a format that merges strategies, tactics, and outcomes. Using a table like the one below may also help identify gaps and areas that are not covered.

Goal:	Audience	Strategies	Tactics	Measures of Success
Create a regional brand associated with innovation, job creation, and quality of life	Residents, Business Owners	Better understand the characteristics residents and business leaders associate with community	<p>Host focus groups with varying community members and business owners</p> <p>Conduct interviews with key stakeholders, partners and community leaders to understand attributes of community</p> <p>Complete an environmental scan looking at how the region has been historically portrayed in media (TV, newspapers, etc.) to understand perceptions and attributes.</p>	<p>Broader understanding of region’s attributes and outputs</p> <p>Research and information to drive rebranding and creative</p>
	Residents, Leadership Group, new and existing business owners	Use research to develop or evolve regional brand	<p>Develop name (if necessary) for region</p> <p>Develop logo and complementary brand assets</p> <p>Create visual associations between positive regional attributes and new brand</p>	Measure awareness and retention of new regional brand or initiative by audience

V. Work Plan

Many communications activities require time and resources to achieve. When developing strategies and tactics, it is important to be aware of the resources available to accomplish activities. As such, a practical work plan is a good finishing step in any communications planning process.

The work plan will help align time and other resources to the communications process. Many regions may find it helpful to phase communications strategies to best manage time and other resources.

No organization will have all the answers from the beginning. The earliest stages of formulating a work plan entail developing a roadmap of key roles and responsibilities, timing of activities, who will be responsible for those activities and any partners involved.

Communications activities will likely evolve naturally.

Many regions undergoing economic transformation will start with easy-to-manage activities that engage partners, residents, and other key stakeholders broadly, in order to get them informed and excited about the initiative or to engage them to participate in the leadership group or specific activity.

Phase 2 (The Planning Phase) usually involves the process of collecting information from stakeholders and disseminating information on the goals, objectives and vision.

As the organization and initiative matures into the implementation phase, communications activities will unfold and expand naturally. It is important to develop a communications mechanism that keeps all audiences informed and engaged throughout the process.

Note: Sample work plan tool below will be populated with example content.

Major Activities	Partners Involved	Roles/Responsibilities	Timing

