

Blueprint: Communication Plan



A **Communication Plan** is a road map for getting your message(s) across to your audience and will help you improve the way you communicate with your stakeholders to achieve desired outcomes.

Need

- Organization has a newly-delegated person responsible for communication.
- Organization needs and wants to scale up communications.
- Organization is not reaching as many people, or the right groups of people or has been inconsistent in its communication.
- There are a lot of last-minute, ad-hoc demands from staff and members

Challenges

- Identifying the primary audiences and understanding their needs and expectations.
- With abundance of communication options it can be challenging to choose the most effective ones and then stick to the decision.

Objectives

- To have a comprehensive and detailed communication plan for the next year.
- To ensure regular and accurate communication with all main stakeholders throughout the year.

Contents of a Communication Plan

A good communication plan includes:

- Goals
- Target Audiences
- Messages to different audiences
- Communication channels and tools
- Detailed plan for 12 months with timeline including measurable milestones for the communication manager

Keys to Success

- The prerequisite for doing a communication plan is that there is a **dedicated person** in the organization who can carry and execute the plan
- Work closely together with the everyone who will be doing the actual execution of the plan.
- Understand the resources available and the current status of communication when creating the plan.
- Know your audience. The better you understand their priorities, concerns and issues the better you can communicate with them.
- Keep it simple! Do not plan to undertake too many activities through too many channels.

Communication Plan Step by Step

| Evaluate Current Situation | Define Objectives | Identify Audience | Create Messages |
|--|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find out what every staff person is doing in the way of communication What each communication activity is designed to achieve, and how effective each activity is. Brainstorm with communication staff, talk to other departments, host focus groups, talk to communication committee members, interview the board, query nonmembers. Ensure that the org has branding guidelines doc and evaluate it to check if rework on it is required. | <p>Armed with information from your audit, define your overall communication objectives. These might include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better awareness for the organization influence on government, media, consumers, and other audiences. Excellent service to members, Member loyalty, Centralization of the communication effort, Increased employee teamwork, | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and list the different groups of target audiences in two groups: those who will support your effort, and those who will be against it. Be sure to have strategies that address those who will be barriers to success Delineate them into sectors (public, private, nonprofit, etc) and different levels (local, regional, state) Analyze what their needs and expectations are. A stakeholder survey can be conducted to receive accurate feedback and information (see Network Worksheet | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define what you want your audience(s) to know, think or do after receiving the message(s). Create appropriate messages for each group of target audience to meet the objectives. The content is equally important to the tone and language being used. What kind of feeling do you want to give to the audience? Do you want to be authoritative, respectful, friendly or emotional in your communication? |
| Identify Channels | Create Plan (1) | Create Plan (2) | Implementation |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aspects that need to be considered are: What media does the target group mainly use? How are they reachable? What resources are available? How will you ensure that the message was understood? (feedback/ follow-up) Different channels can be periodic print publications; online communications; meeting and conference materials; media relations and public relations materials; marketing and sales tools; certificates and awards; annual reports; signage etc | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A realistic time horizon for a strategic communications plan is three years. However, the communications plan should include immediate-, short-, and long-term goals and strategies. For each goal and strategy, there will be a series of communications activities, or tactics, identified. Each activity/tactic should have a clear timeline, communications vehicles, people assigned to them, and a budget Time and cost will be the main decisive factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set timings for your communication: How often will you update your website, social media pages? How often will you send out a newsletter? How often will you meet them? etc. Consider how often target audience would like to be contacted as well as what is feasible. Crisis communications – The communications plan should include how to manage and communicate about any crises that might arise. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create, or assist in creating, materials for the future communication activities (templates for newsletters, annual reports, emails, presentations etc.) Monitor the implementation of the plan on a regular basis. It may be in the form of a monthly report on work in progress, formalized department reports for presentation at staff meetings, periodic briefings of the chief staff executive and the department heads, and a year-end summary for the annual report. |