



Communications and Engagement Plan

Takeaway Template

Institute for Emerging Issues
Kidonomics 2018

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Communications and Engagement Overview

This document provides a template for organizing your communications and engagement plan, as well as some key things to consider during your planning process.

The objective of a communications and engagement plan is to promote your program, project, or initiative by defining what actions you will take to meet the needs of your audience. An effective plan should identify your audience, determine their information needs, and define the most effective channels and messaging strategies for meeting these needs.

Principles of Communications and Engagement

When planning your communications and engagement efforts, consider these guiding principles:

- **Rally around purpose.** Communications and engagement efforts should align with the underlying purpose of your program, project, or initiative. Your end goal(s) should always serve as beacon for decision-making in your communications and engagement efforts.
- **Adapt continuously.** A successful communications and engagement approach will include pivots and adjustments along the way. Key assumptions can change overnight. Schedules and plans can shift. Be ready to act on changes – responsiveness and flexibility is key.
- **Sweat the details.** Words matter, and so do perceptions. Picking the right points to communicate makes a difference. Be creative and particular in your communications and engagement efforts.
- **Measure always.** Continually ask yourself: “What is working, what is not working, and what could work better?” Measure the outcomes of your efforts – and respond to those findings.
- **Understand your audience.** The more you understand about your audience, the more effective you can make your words, messages, and methods.
- **Innovate.** Heed lessons learned from your experiences and the experiences of your peers. Do you research, and utilize available information – even observations from your everyday life – to help you think big.

Audience

To determine the best methods and strategies for communications and engagement, first define the audience that you'd like to connect with. If you have multiple audiences, they'll have different sets of needs. Seek to build relationships, and trust, with each group through communications and engagement targeted to their needs and preferences.

Audience	Description	Size	Level of Engagement	Preferred Channels
<i>Example:</i>				
Parents	The parents and families of the children that my program serves.	150-200	Regular, direct engagement	Email, in-person, and via mailers

Channels

There are a multitude of ways to share information with your audience. The communication “channels” you use should be selected based on the content and audience.

Due to the complex and varying needs of your audience, no one communication channel will be 100% effective. Often a combination of channels will be needed to achieve the required coverage. Consistent formatting standards should be used to produce all communications.

The chart below can be used to plan for your communications.

Channel	Purpose	Frequency	Lead	Audience
<i>Example:</i>				
e-Newsletter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program updates • “In the News” • Upcoming events 	Quarterly	Communications staff	Parents and families

Strategy

Once you define your audience and channels, you can begin outlining your strategy. This can be as simple as writing down what's important to your audience and your plan for providing them information, or as complex as formulating a multi-level strategy for continually engaging with your audience over a specific time period. Whatever you choose to do, it's important to always remember that consistency is key to understanding. Be sure that your communications and engagement efforts:

1. **Utilize templates.** Email templates, standard page design, etc.
2. **Take advantage of standard language.** Create and use standard language around what your program, project, or initiative is, and what its benefits are.
3. **Keep it straightforward.** Don't add extra language or frivolous graphics to "fancy it up". Keep it simple, straightforward, and consistent.
4. **Always document.** Document how you have done something, and reference it when you are doing it the next time.

Schedule

A schedule should be used to organize and track all communications and engagement efforts included in your strategy. Communications and engagement is an on-going process; it's okay to make changes as you go through the process.

Communication Task	Description	Delivery Vehicle	Approved by	Release Date	Status
<i>Example:</i>					
March 2018 e-Newsletter	The March 2018 edition will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content 1 • Content 2 • Content 3 	Direct email to parent and families mailing list	<i>Communications Director</i>	March 5	First draft completed

Measurement

As noted above, communications and engagement is an on-going process. An essential part of that process is measuring your results and adapting as needed. You can define your methods of measurement up front, which will allow you to adapt in an efficient and consistent manner.

Methods can include:

- **Surveys.** Survey your audience before, during, and after your project or initiative. Keep it short, simple, and on topic.
- **Tracking Program Trends.** For example, has your enrollment in your program increased following your efforts?
- **Tracking Awareness.** Has the number of clicks on your website increased, or have you added followers on social media?

Once you measure, you can consider things like:

- **Clarity.** Was your communication clear? Has your audience told you how it can be clarified?
- **Reach.** Is it reaching the right audience members? Are you using the right channel(s)?
- **Impact.** Are your efforts leading to the type of action or response expected?
- **Frequency.** Is your audience telling you that they want more, or that they're being overwhelmed?