

Public Relations Toolkit



Telling the Community Development Story




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How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to build the marketing and public relations capacity of the members of Ohio CDC Association. It provides guide posts for talking in public about community development work, including a working definition of our field, framing language for setting the terms of public discussion, tips for target audiences, and do's and don'ts for using mobilizing and inclusive language. The tips in this document will help you work through communications planning and marketing.

Below is a description of some of the major sections.

Communications Planning 101

A step-by-step guide to help you create a basic communications plan for your organization.

Marketing 101

Key concepts to consider when developing marketing materials.

Website Checklist

Guidance on how your website should be structured and the types of content that should be featured. Your website is like a billboard that many will see when they interact with your organization, so it should always be up to date and easy to access!

Event Planning Checklist

A checklist of items to consider for event planning. The items it includes should streamline the amount of time needed to plan and throw an event and aid in providing a consistent level of quality for the event itself.

Grand Opening Press Release Template

Sample language for a press release regarding a grand opening event. It has an outline of the general format of a press release for grand openings and corresponding sample language for each portion of the press release, which should help reduce the time it takes to create a press release of this type.

Ground Breaking Press Release Template

Sample language for a press release regarding a ground breaking event. Like the Grand Opening Press Release, it has an outline of the general format of a press release for ground breakings and corresponding sample language for each portion of the press release, which should help reduce the time it takes to create a press release of this type.

Introduction and Background

Community Development Corporations have been active in Ohio since the mid-1960's, following President Johnson's "War on Poverty" campaign. Established to address the needs of underserved communities, these non-profit organizations are dedicated to revitalizing neighborhoods, block-by-block.

In 1983, Ohio established its own statewide association, the Ohio CDC Association (OCDCA). Local CDCs have provided resources to nurture healthy urban, rural, and suburban communities, both economically and socially, through public and private partnerships. These local heroes play a crucial role in the revitalization of neighborhoods by quietly contributing to the health and wellness of our state's residents and properties by creating economic opportunities and improving social conditions. Some initiatives include affordable housing, financial empowerment, community economic development, community engagement, and food access.

Since its inception, the OCDCA has assisted over 240 association members throughout the state. But after 30 years, most Ohioans don't know what a CDC is or does. Today, with the decrease in government funding and the "alphabet soup" of non-profits competing for scarce dollars, this identity crisis has become critical. It is time to tell Ohio's elected officials, potential financial supporters and the public about the impressive and extensive accomplishments that CDCs contribute to Ohio's continuing prosperity.



In 1985, Governor Dick Celeste addressed the public at Gordon Square Arcade, after awarding Detroit Shoreway a grant to rehabilitate the Arcade at the intersection of 65th and Detroit in Cleveland.

Introduction and Background

Goals

By uniting the CDC industry's collective voice, we can improve the power and clarity of our language to make all of our communications more effective. The challenge is to tell our story so well and so consistently that our listener is able to tell the same story to someone else. That means our story isn't always about CDCs, but about our audience. OCDCA's member organizations must be able to see themselves from the outsider's perspective - as a part of the economic and civic life of their communities - in order to tell stories that resonate with their audiences. We tell these stories, which will ultimately help us achieve three goals:

Goals

- + Increase the awareness and understanding of the value and impact the CDC industry brings to Ohio communities.
- + Raise credibility by substantiating the amount of change/opportunities that CDCs bring to Ohioans.
- + Unite the voice of Ohio's many CDCs in a non-partisan way to create a collaborative force.

What is community development?

Development means finding opportunity to increase the value of our land and our places.

Community means a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common. This definition also includes the feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.

Community Development is the work of increasing the value of our neighborhoods, towns and cities for those who live and work there. Community development work is done by engaged members of the community – residents and neighbors, employers and employees, private and public property owners, and private and public institutions of every kind. Community development means people making decisions about, and making investments in, their block, town or region, to build opportunity for people to prosper.

Community Development Corporations (CDCs) are non-profit organizations incorporated to provide programs, offer services, and engage in other activities that promote and support a community. CDCs usually serve a geographic location such as a neighborhood or a town, with a focus on serving lower-income residents or struggling neighborhoods. They can be involved in a variety of activities including economic development, food access, community organizing, financial empowerment, and real estate development. Across the US, they provide the expertise, experience, and practical tools that get this work done.

Introduction and Background

Messaging for Community Development Corporation Activities

For 50 years, Community Development Corporations (CDCs) in Ohio have empowered communities to take local action to generate economic opportunities and improve the quality of life in underserved neighborhoods. These non-profits provide a wide range of initiatives that have revitalized and stabilized disadvantaged communities throughout the state. Most CDCs engage their communities through at least one of the following five program activities:



CDCs revitalize distressed communities by building, rehabilitating, and preserving affordable, safe homes and rentals for Ohio families, senior citizens and veterans. Housing development and counseling help Ohio families and communities become stable.



CDCs provide education and asset building tools so low and moderate income families can become financially independent, improve credit, reduce debt and foreclosure risk, and contribute to community stability.



Community economic development creates jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities, builds individual and community wealth, and attracts capital to disinvested communities.



Through local engagement, residents can take ownership of their community and are empowered to make lasting changes through grass roots efforts.



CDCs strengthen local food systems, which improve access to healthy foods and benefits the community, its economy, and the environment.

Check it Out!

- + Ohio CDC Association created a video to talk about community development in Ohio. Share this video to help tell the story of the work that you do!
- + [Click here](#) or go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNsnKS5U7yw>

Setting the Terms of Discussion

Setting the Terms

Setting the terms of public discussion means building communications from a simple perspective based in values, assumptions, and relationships that are widely shared by our audiences. This is a challenge – to look at our work and our organizations from different perspectives and then to internalize those perspectives – to make them our own operating assumptions. Once we do this, we can create an infinite range of communications and messages that reinforce each other, and frame the issues in ways that support our objectives.

We build the frame for our messages about economic development on a foundation of core values: Opportunity, Prosperity, Security, Connection, Participation, and Fairness.

We apply these values to two key perspectives, or contexts, for telling our stories:

“Development is driven by opportunity.”

Community development is like private development. Both depend on identifying places where there is opportunity to increase assets and property value, applying capital to build and improve those places, and creating on-going economic activity. Communities are working to develop their existing assets and attract new assets. As they succeed, the people who live and work there will have more access to opportunity to increase their own wealth and contribute to the well-being of the community as a whole.

Private developers assess opportunities in terms of their own risks and rewards. Community developers assess opportunities in terms of the public’s risk and reward. The purpose of our organizations is economic progress. We help focus public and private investment on improving the places where people live, work and visit. New and expanded businesses, better places to live, safer and more appealing streets and buildings, transportation and access to jobs, schools, and recreational sites – these are among the tangible results of successful community development.

“Our work is driven by aspirations.”

Position the work of our organizations as the means that communities use to meet their aspirations. No matter their location, people are working toward the same goals: making sure their kids can get a good education; having a safe, stable place to live; cleaning up the streets and cleaning the air so that they can enjoy their neighborhoods in good health; finding jobs; keeping their jobs local; and having a chance at a better job.

Always put the people of the community – the residents, business owners, civic organizations and other institutions – in first place, as agents acting on behalf of their own actual (and named) aspirations to improve their lives and surroundings. CDCs should be putting the community first as active participants in development, actively rewriting current communications and social constructs that depict neighborhoods and their populations as passive recipients of services. Depict the people who live, work, and operate businesses in the community as the active leaders in building new homes and businesses, increasing aesthetic and social assets, and developing new opportunities.

Setting the Terms of Discussion

One simple way to do this is with intentional grammar: construct sentences that have citizens (and, whenever appropriate, specific, named citizens) as the subject of the sentence, not as the object. Describe your organization as a resource that citizens and neighborhood groups turn to for advice, access to capital or grants, and technical support.

We often describe our organizations as nonprofits that strategically redevelop economically depressed areas. We talk about our programs, a wide range of activities to enhance the lives of low-to moderate-income residents and stimulate local economies.

Instead, say this: *"Small business owners and residents in low to moderate-income neighborhoods work to redevelop their neighborhood and create jobs by using the resources of community development corporations, such as access to investment capital, relationships with and knowledge of city government, experience in land use and design options, and training and support for increasing citizen engagement."*

Every community, rich and poor, has unmet opportunity. Investments in older or disadvantaged neighborhoods may offer smaller or slower financial return, making them less attractive to private developers. Community developers specialize in putting opportunity to work. They help develop social resources by fostering broad public participation, engaging community members in planning and decision-making on their own terms and in their shared interests.

Community development benefits the area as a whole – not just the immediate neighborhood. When a neglected or abandoned home on the block is fixed up, all the other properties on the block gain in value. In the same way, as neighborhoods improve, they become more attractive to new visitors, new residents, new businesses, new jobs, and to new relationships with surrounding areas. As a result, community development increases both regional and local prosperity, and increases the region's economic competitiveness.



Troy Community Works rehabilitated the East Gate building into productive use.

Setting the Terms of Discussion

Values

We build the frame for our messages about economic development in a certain context based on a foundation of core values: Opportunity, Prosperity, Security, Connection, Participation, and Fairness.

Opportunity and Prosperity

Talk about current and near-term economic conditions and talk about creating employment. Especially now, with expanding income inequality, it is vital to talk about individual opportunity in terms of the broad interest in creating jobs and increasing economic vitality.

To have a strong future, our cities must have strong neighborhoods. In partnership with other public and private institutions, we engage in work that is vital to that core strength: increased housing and economic opportunities and programs and services that sustain families and good jobs.

Security and Connection

Security and safety are always key values in the minds of our audiences in discussion of the built environment and are closely linked to issues of race and poverty. Leading with the value of security, in any or several of its many meanings, helps lessen concerns not far from the surface of every listener's mind. These are very uncertain times; we can make decisions now that will increase the safety of our neighborhoods, the economic security of renters and home owners, and our ability to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead.

In today's economy, the values associated with economic security are especially important. These include maintaining and increasing property value, market stability and predictability, and family stability. Security applies to issues of housing, transportation, education, services to the elderly and disabled, and all issues pertaining to the built environment.

For example, affordable housing can be described this way: A family cannot resolve its most serious woes – joblessness, a lack of education and training, poor mental or physical health, or addiction – from unsafe, expensive, substandard housing; a dirty motel room; or even in a friend or relative's home. Stability and growth require security.

Security also applies to connection among people within a place. People who are isolated are, by definition, in a less secure and safe position than people who are connected to others. This work is not just a matter of putting up buildings. It's always about improving our communities to make them better places to live and work. Community development serves the aspirations that all people share: to have a safe, appealing, and successful place to lead their lives, raise a family, conduct their business, know the people around them, and participate in the civic and cultural life of their communities.



People Working Collaboratively performs repairs to provide safe access to homes.

Setting the Terms of Discussion

Participation and Fairness

Because this work is driven by the aspirations of people in the communities we serve, evoking the important value of their participation should be an explicit or implicit part of every communication. Developing communities means increasing participation, not just by selected members of the community, but by all.

Democracy means that the public has meaningful participation in public decisions. Even voters – let alone those too disaffected to engage in this minimal form of participation – are skeptical that their participation is welcome or will actually make any difference in the outcome of many public decisions. But Americans believe in democratic participation, and no one can publicly refute this value. Voters believe that when public officials and private developers listen to the people whose lives will be affected by development decisions, better decisions are made. When groups of people are left out of decision making about the use of public resources, America's core values are violated.



Stockyard, Clark-Fulton and Brooklyn Center neighborhood residents participate in a community festival.

Community development is based on decisions and processes that benefit the community as a whole by including the interests of all. Community development organizations are the means by which foundations, local governments, civic organizations and individuals can engage citizens in improving their physical surroundings, creating stronger local economies, and improving opportunity for individuals living and working in those communities.

Like democratic participation, the value of fairness in public life is irrefutable. No one can publicly defend government decisions that are unfair. Fairness applies any time public resources are at stake. These resources include land, zoning and tax subsidies, but also importantly include the air and the water, the siting of transportation and other infrastructure, and the democratic resources of public officials and government.

Ask critical questions. Who is included, and who is left out of the benefits resulting from this public investment? What is the return on investment to the taxpayers whose money is supporting this? Public investment should result in benefit to the community as a whole, not to some to the exclusion of others. Too much of current policy provides access to opportunity, prosperity, and connection for only some members of our community. Sometimes by virtue of being in a different zip code, those same policies reduce your access to a job, a home, and an education. Working together, we can change these policies, and put an end to unfair exclusion of people because of their race or economic status.

Be Strategic

Every communication, in any medium, should be conceived in terms of moving someone to action. While many of our communications appear to be aimed at many audiences (press releases, web site articles, brochures, etc.), they are most strategic if written for specific targeted audiences – the individuals who ultimately can take the actions desired.

This is most obvious when thinking of policy advocacy work. Many communications to members and allies are ultimately aimed at the legislators themselves. Broadly, such communications serve two strategic purposes: to demonstrate to the key legislators that these issues are in public discussion, under the terms of discussion that the advocates are setting; and to recruit constituents to act as strategic messengers, communicating to their representatives about the issue and how it affects the district.

Begin every communication by thinking through the answers to these questions:

- + What do we want to have happen?
- + Who can take that action?
- + What story do they need to hear to take that action?
- + Who should they hear it from?
- + How can we deliver the message?

Among our most important target audiences are elected officials, funders, and community members. In every case, talk about benefits, results, and impact, more than needs, methods, and programs. Tell stories that are about your audience and their interests, not about your organization and its interests. Identifying your target audience is a critical step in establishing these relationships and partnerships. Building awareness among these audiences will increase the likelihood of securing the resources needed to revitalize and sustain Ohio's communities. Messaging will be tailored to incorporate benefits for each audience as they will want to know, "Why is this important to me?"

Funders

Financial supporters would like to be aware of your initiatives and how these opportunities are impacting their communities. By investing in local CDC projects, local supporters can have a voice in community development decisions, keep their funds close to home, and share in the positive results.

With both philanthropic and corporate funders, it is vital to establish the two key perspectives of our work: that it is driven by opportunity, as opposed to being driven by need; and that it is an outgrowth of people's aspirations to improve their lives and communities. Community development is proven as the best way to leverage scarce public and private dollars to achieve maximum impact on the lives of residents in low-income neighborhoods. In the process, it lessens social and economic disparities and creates vital new markets for the region's economy.

Community development organizations fill a critical gap in the region by working on projects in areas that private developers find too risky. They establish a solid development foothold that will eventually attract private developers into the area.

Strategic Messaging

Language for Funders	
Area of Service	Message
Financial Empowerment (Education & Asset Building)	We provide education and asset-building tools so that low and moderate income families can become financially independent, improve credit, reduce debt and foreclosure risk, and contribute to community stability.
Affordable Housing (Development & Counseling)	<p>We revitalize distressed communities in Ohio by building, rehabilitating and preserving affordable, safe homes and rentals. This reduces decay and repurposes vacant and abandoned properties, empowering communities to thrive and create an environment for future investment.</p> <p>We provide housing counseling to low and moderate income families, senior citizens, and veterans to improve housing conditions, reduce foreclosures and build financial independence.</p>
Community Economic Development	Community economic development creates job and entrepreneurship opportunities, which anchor financial and social capital within Ohio's communities. This stabilizing effort brings basic amenities to communities and improves the quality of life for residents
Food Access	Locally produced food creates jobs and businesses, boosts local income, and improves access to healthy foods.
Community Engagement	We empower residents to efficiently use community resources to address local needs and improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods. Often, nominal funding leads to significant results.

Elected Officials

These elected officials would like to be informed about the grass roots initiatives happening in their jurisdictions, as well as the progress and results of these efforts. These positive results can be added to reports to government bodies to build awareness with legislative groups that may have funding to distribute. Emphasize return on investment and the successful track record of your organization in leveraging public funds to spur private (including philanthropic) investment. Use multipliers and specific examples familiar to the individuals targeted to illustrate the economic effects of strategic public investment. This should be measured in terms of job creation, and in terms of effect on property values and tax base.

Every communication to elected officials at any level of government should be built around a story that features that office holder as the main character – preferably as a hero or leader whose actions will be appreciated by his or her constituents.

In an unfriendly political environment, it is more important than ever to lead with widely shared and irrefutable values of prosperity, security, participation and fairness. Look for statements from the target audience that can be interpreted to mean they agree with you about these values, and build the case for specific initiatives from there. Publicly repeat statements made by the target audience as widely and as often as possible. For example, use all available media (including social networks) to say “Councilwoman Y showed she understands the importance of job creation, when she said “{this}.” That’s why her constituents expect to see her strong support for {initiative}.”

In 2015, the Ohio Housing Trust fund was threatened to be cut in half by state lawmakers. It was important to counter this attack with language that demonstrated the values and impact of this resource. COHHIO led the charge, working with OCDCA and others, to stop the change by appealing to these irrefutable values:

“COLUMBUS - The Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO) reacted with disbelief over a Senate amendment in the state budget bill that would strip half of the Ohio Housing Trust Fund proceeds, return them to counties, and create 88 county bureaucracies to fund housing.

“It is a terrible idea to have certain government offices unfamiliar with housing administration suddenly begin allocating housing dollars,” said Bill Faith, COHHIO executive director.

The amendment requires that the county auditor, county recorder and county commissioner or their delegates determine by majority vote how the funds are to be used.

“They’re creating 88 county bureaucracies where county auditors and recorders have little or no knowledge or experience administering housing programs,” he said. “These bureaucracies will require huge administrative costs to get up and running. At a time of very scarce resources, this would dismantle - for no good reason - an effective policy that has been serving critical housing needs across Ohio for nearly 25 years...”

“...The Trust Fund supports a range of projects and programs to help address homelessness and support the development of quality affordable housing options around the state. It leverages federal and private resources in public/private partnerships as much as 9 to 1 to help stretch state dollars to meet the housing needs of our military veterans, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and working families...”

“...This rogue amendment is bad public policy and should be removed from the state budget. It’s an ill-conceived notion that would create housing dysfunction across the board,” he said. “Our most vulnerable populations would be hurt the most, and that’s the exact opposite of what the citizens of Ohio voted for 25 years ago.”

Don’t neglect your allies – quote them widely. And, when dealing with representatives ideologically opposed to your initiatives, quote them in their opposition, and ask them to explain themselves in terms of participation (“Is she listening to the people who live here, or ignoring them?”) and in terms of fairness (“Who is included in the benefits of the bill she supports, and who is left out?”)

Always recruit constituents as messengers. Include the front line beneficiaries, but make sure to include others – business owners, residents of near-by neighborhoods or communities, elders, major employers, financial experts, realtors, construction workers, etc. Recruiting these individuals of course includes getting them to write a letter for publication, to make a phone call, or otherwise speak out directly. But you can also recruit them by asking them their view on narrow questions (e.g., Is there opportunity for revitalizing this neighborhood? What would it take?), clarifying that you want to publish their comments, and then quoting them repeatedly in communications aimed at the legislative targets.

Strategic Messaging



Language for Elected Officials	
Area of Service	Message
Financial Empowerment (Education & Asset Building)	We provide education and asset-building tools so that low and moderate income families can become financially independent, improve credit, reduce debt and foreclosure risk, and contribute to community stability.
Affordable Housing (Development & Counseling)	<p>We revitalize distressed communities in Ohio by building, rehabilitating and preserving affordable, safe homes and rentals. This reduces decay and repurposes vacant and abandoned properties, empowering communities to thrive and create an environment for future investment.</p> <p>We provide housing counseling to low and moderate income families, senior citizens, and veterans to improve housing conditions, reduce foreclosures and build financial independence.</p>
Community Economic Development	Community economic development creates job and entrepreneurship opportunities, builds personal and community wealth, and improves the quality of life for all Ohioans.
Food Access	Locally produced food creates jobs and businesses, boosts local income, and improves access to healthy foods.
Community Engagement	We encourage community ownership by empowering residents to take local action and create lasting change to improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods.

Community Members

This audience would like to be informed about the positive changes in their community and who is responsible for improving the quality of their lives. They may be inspired to get involved to better their community.

The strength of communications from the national and state associations, like OCDCA, depends on the communications from local organizations, which in turn depends on the communication with the people in the areas they serve – not only participants or residents in the programs they run, but with the neighbors, businesses, civic leaders, and other organizations and institutions. Because public participation is so central to the mission and operation of CDCs, it is essential that they are seen to be “listening” organizations.

For this reason, individual CDCs should strive as much as possible to “step away from the microphone” when engaging community members. They should engage in strategic, systematic listening, in individual interviews as well as group meetings, and with community leaders outside of the already existing circle of people familiar with the organization. As this intentional listening continues, CDCs will be in a position to equip other members of the community to speak about the work of neighborhood redevelopment. Citizens, in particular



Strategic Messaging

secondary or indirect beneficiaries of the work, should be quoted widely in talking about how the neighborhood has improved, and could improve further, through available and potential resources and professional support.

These statements should be an active and widely shared archive, forming a communications bank for the industry as a whole, while embodying the perspectives and values outlined previously. In this way, we demonstrate the perspective of our work being driven by aspirations, and demonstrate the shared value of participation, by letting people speak for themselves.

Language for Community Members or the General Public	
Area of Service	Message
Financial Empowerment (Education & Asset Building)	We provide education and asset-building tools so low and moderate income families can become financially independent, improve credit, reduce debt and foreclosure risk, and contribute to community stability.
Affordable Housing (Development & Counseling)	We revitalize distressed communities by building, rehabilitating and preserving affordable, safe homes and rentals for Ohio families, senior citizens, and veterans. Housing development and counseling helps Ohio families and communities become stable. Repurposed vacant and abandoned properties increase property values and improve neighborhood safety. These revitalized communities attract new jobs and businesses which make neighborhoods thrive.
Community Economic Development	Community economic development creates jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities, builds individual and community wealth, and attracts capital to disinvested communities.
Food Access	We strengthen the local foods movement which improves access to healthy foods and benefits the community, its economy and the environment.
Community Engagement	Through local engagement, residents can take ownership of their community and are empowered to make lasting changes through grass roots efforts.

Why Make a Communication Plan?

All types of organizations benefit from a communication plan, which allows for efficient, measurable processes to fulfill the organization's mission. A communication plan is basically a work plan organizing your audiences, messages and the methods for delivery. It creates a living document that articulates accountability and the hopeful deliverables. It allows for planning for the future and understanding the necessary resources involved.

Don't Be Overwhelmed

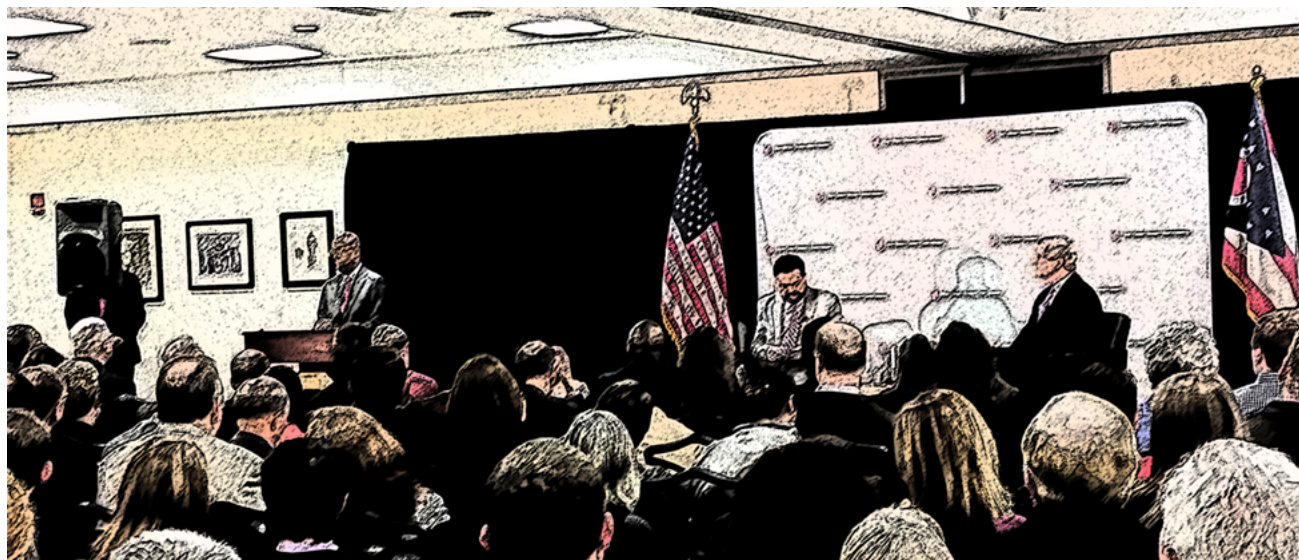
The following worksheets may seem tedious, but even thinking about these items a little bit will save you time, money, and increase the likelihood that you will be successful.

Also Remember

Communication plans need to be revisited and evaluated to ensure that the action plan is working. Not everything works for everybody all of the time, and evaluation allows us to discontinue ineffective measures and better utilize our limited resources. Further, finding out that something works can help us do those activities more often, or better.

Basic Checklist

- + Statement of Purpose
- + Communication Objective
- + Analyze Your Current Situation
- + Describe Your Audience
- + Communications Audit
- + Communication Channels
- + Considerations for Implementation
- + Evaluation



Getting Started

Before you actually write up a plan, you have to consider the overall purpose of what you plan to do with your communication strategy. What are your goals and objectives? Taking time to articulate these will help you craft your messages and determine the best way to reach your audience.

Statement of Purpose

This is a useful thing to start with, as it helps explain the whole reason you are putting together a strategy for communicating. This does not have to be very detailed or specific; but rather, an overview of what you want to accomplish.

For example, in the communications plan, an organization might say, "Our organization actively promotes principles and practices that create regions, downtowns and neighborhoods that are attractive places to live, work, play, learn and visit." Use the space below to brainstorm elements for your own statement of purpose. Your notes do not have to be complete statements, but identify the key elements that you would consider a part of your organization's purpose. You can find ways to organize them into a purpose statement when you put together your plan.

Brainstorm: *Use this space to brainstorm the key elements of your organization's purpose.*

Communication Objective

These objectives should be in alignment with the organization's mission, vision, and strategic plan and not independently added on. The defined objectives should support the outcomes and key messages you wish to achieve.

For example, in a communications plan, an organization might say, "Our organization's communications objective is to play a key role in the community development industry as a quality source of information about placemaking."

Brainstorm: *Use this space to brainstorm the key elements of your organization's purpose.*

Communications Planning 101



Analyze Your Current Situation

These exercises are important to help identify a path for action with important considerations as to what differentiates you from others, factors that might help or inhibit your communications, and other areas that might be utilized that you had not previously considered. It helps you to proceed with educated and thoughtful insights that will help you best communicate your messages for successful results.

PEST Analysis

Consider the political, economic, social and technological factors that could affect your organization's work. This tool is similar to the SWOT analysis, but looks more at the big picture factors that might influence a decision. This tool might help identify new opportunities and shape the direction of change within the organization so you work with the changes rather than against them.

Political: Who is currently in office and how does it affect our work? When is the next election? Are there any political factors that are expected to change?

Economic: What is the current economy like? What is the unemployment rate? What does the current workforce development situation look like in the community?

Social: What are the current demographics of our local population? Ohio population? What are current employment patterns, job market trends and overall attitudes toward the economic climate? What are the current attitudes toward your community or the work you do?

Technological: What are the technology capabilities of your target audience? What are the technological capabilities of staff? What resources are available? What partnerships are available to expand reach?

Exercise: Identify factors for each category that are relevant to your organization's work.

Political	Economic
Social	Technological

SWOT Analysis

Consider the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for your organization. Similar to a PEST analysis, this exercise is utilized for a program or product during strategic planning. The SWOT analysis should complement some of the findings in the PEST analysis.

Strengths & Weaknesses: These are internal factors, such as resources and experience available to you. Consider the availability of things like funding, staff, experience, and equipment. Also consider the office location (or if you don't have an office) and accessibility to resources and target market.

Opportunities & Threats: These are external factors, either direct or indirect, and references things that you may not be able to control. These include things like market trends, competing services, economic trends, legislation, and funding.

Note: Assume that there might be overlap from your PEST analysis. This is okay, because while the PEST analysis is designed to consider the big picture, all identified attributes fit into what your overall plan of action will look like.

Exercise: Identify factors for each category that are relevant to your organization's work.

<p>Strengths</p>	<p>Weaknesses</p>
<p>Opportunities</p>	<p>Threats</p>

Communications Planning 101



Describe Your Audience

Your audience is the group of people you wish to receive your message and do something with it. Examples include encouraging people to participate, donate, spread the news, and learn. Your audience may actually be several groups of people because each group may have unique action items and be inspired by different messages. You cannot reach everybody at the same time, the same way, and get them to do the same thing.

A nonprofit organization will have at least three audiences: the clients they wish to serve, funders, and the media. A fourth potential group would be general interest or the public. For example, you wish the funder would contribute to help you serve your clients, so the messages you construct for them will likely contain more numbers and results. Alternatively, when discussing the same program, the clients you wish to serve need to know where you are and how to access service and may not care about an annual report.

Make a List

Identify each audience. You may have multiple audiences for the same goal.

For each audience, list:

- + Where are they located? (e.g. geography, neighborhoods, industry)
- + What is the base knowledge that the audience currently has about you and your goals?
- + What do you want them to think, feel or do because of the communication?
- + What are the key messages for this audience?

Example:

Goal: A small-budget nonprofit organization seeking funding for a financial empowerment program	
Audience	Funders
Located	Our funders are banks located across Ohio or local foundations. Some funds are allocated for specific projects while others help with our daily operations.
Base Knowledge	They know about and participate in the free tax preparation programs in Ohio and have funded other programs for your organization before.
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donate money to help fund a financial empowerment program • Understand the importance of financial empowerment for neighborhood citizens
Key Messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty is a direct result of the lack of financial education • The financial empowerment program is a replication of successful models across the United States • Access to financial education provides the tools for real change • Nationwide, there has been a reduction in credit card debt by 23% by those who have taken advantage of this type of program (or speak more specifically to your already existing program!)

Communications Planning 101

Brainstorm: Use this space to create a list for a goal (or separate goals) for two different audiences.

Goal:	
Audience	
Located	
Base Knowledge	
Action	
Key Messages	

Goal:	
Audience	
Located	
Base Knowledge	
Action	
Key Messages	

Communications Planning 101



Communications Audit

Describe the communications channels that you currently use:

Communication Channel	Person(s) Responsible	Frequency	Types of Content and Information	Cost*/ Effectiveness
Ex: Facebook	Program Director	Daily	Upcoming Events, News Briefs, Stories	Staff Time, \$25/ week to boost the post to reach more followers. 300 Reached

*Cost can mean a lot of things. It can equate to ongoing fees for subscriptions and staff time. It can also involve hardware, software, and training required. The purpose of thinking about this is to understand the investment something may require, even if it is something like Facebook, which is free. You may be understaffed or lack equipment or skills making it inappropriate.

Communication Channels

There are a variety of ways for people to communicate their message with varying levels of cost, skill, and time required. Before deciding to use certain applications, it's important to assess the relevance and applicability of each so you make choices that are efficient, useful, and helpful for you.

Website

Today, everybody should have a website and it should be as up to date and comprehensive as possible. Everything that goes out from your organization should link back to the website. No matter where people find you, they will always look to your website when they want to reference something. If it is not accurate or updated, you lose credibility. Consult the [Website Checklist](#) section for more details.

Traditional Media

This includes television, radio, newspapers, magazines, newsletters, and other print publications. These can be more expensive and should be well planned. The best approach is to work with a professional to produce a limited quantity of high-quality materials that have a longer lifespan. Quality over quantity and thoughtful design will get you a better return on your investment and make you look good.

Public Relations

This involves working with media to help inform the public about an organization's mission and activities in a positive way. Establishing trusting relationships with professionals who produce the news and other content designed for the public can be helpful and you are more likely to be featured accurately and often.

Social Media

Social media enables you to actively engage your audience by providing provide up-to-date information, stories, and photos, through an online community. For some paid services, there is a non-profit rate. This is particularly beneficial for advertising services and even software (www.techsoup.org)

+ Most popular platforms:

- + Facebook
- + Twitter - Share information snippets, articles, press, and polls.
- + LinkedIn - A professional networking platform. This can be a great place to share news releases, blogs, job postings, and more professional related information.
- + YouTube - The most popular video sharing site.
- + Blogs - A great place to aggregate items in real time that could end up in a monthly newsletter, such as your take on recent press coverage, public policy, program updates etc.

+ Growing in Popularity for Nonprofits & Government:

- + Instagram - Works best for real-time photo sharing.
- + Pinterest - Create a bulletin board where people post things they like. For example, a pinterest board for a creative placemaking project where residents can post ideas of what they'd like to see.

+ Others:

- + Google+ - similar to Facebook, but not as popular.
- + Vimeo - video sharing

Considerations for Implementation

Now that you've considered your existing situation and identified your audiences, it's time to put all of that information together to decide how and what you are going to say and when you are going to say it.

Create a Strong Brand

All content should tie back to your organization. This helps to build the trust and validity of your organization and people will know where the information came from. Everything that you do should have a similar look and feel with consistent colors and fonts. Your logo, contact information, and website should be evident and accessible everywhere. Messages should be consistent and clear. In general, people may be introduced to a topic and want to know more. Strong branding helps people recall enough information to find what they are looking for. Inconsistency and lack of clarity leads people to guess and search without necessarily finding what they are looking for.

Your Website as a Hub

Your website serves as the main hub for your organization and validates your brand. Like everything else, it should be updated, accurate, and include your mission statement, contact information, logo, and all ways to connect with you. Be sure to include links (or linked icons) to all of your possible contact outlets, including any social media or newsletter sign-ups. Ideally, these items are prominent on your homepage. The user should be able to navigate easily and find what they are looking for quickly.

Direct People to the Website

Communication channels (especially social media) push out the "now" hoping for you to act immediately (or soon). The website serves as the anchor that houses all of the information available for people to access. This means that all content produced should ultimately live on the website, unless you are sharing partner information or live reporting (such as tweeting during an event).

How to Use Each Media to Direct People to Your Website

- + **Traditional Media** - Include website and contact information and minimal information to promote an spark interest. The website can list more details, photos, and requests for volunteers. This type of media can be archived off of the website when no longer relevant.
- + **Media Relations** - Post links to positive media coverage on designated pages of your website that remain active for long-term. Share externally on social media.
- + **Social Media** - The posted links to blog articles, photos, event registrations, and media should link to designated pages on your website with this information. All social media connection opportunities should be visible on the website.
- + **Other Considerations**
 - + **Frequency** - How often will you put out new content or share partner content? Some organizations use communications calendars, in which they plan communications from 1-12 months in advance.
 - + **Accountability** - Who is responsible for each task?

Evaluation

Once you've identified and implemented your action plan, you have to establish an evaluation process. While it's easy to implement a strategy and forget about it, you must revisit it periodically to discover if it is working.

Online

There are a lot of ways to evaluate your progress, and online applications make it even easier. Below are a few that are free and fairly easy to do.

Tools to Evaluate Communications

- + **Website Analytics** - Count the number of visits to web pages to discover which are most popular. Note the length of time spent on each page and if they are new or returning visitors.
- + **Social Media Analytics** - See if the number of followers or "likes" increases after posts with certain content or styles are posted, as well as which posts are most popular and shared with others. Also, monitor how many times people comment on blogs or posts.
- + **Email Analytics** - Use email analytics (through CRM applications like Constant Contact) to find out how many people opened your email and clicked on the links. Use this to determine what subject lines or content is most popular.
- + **Quick Polls** - Consider using a poll on your website asking people how they found you

Offline

This is your chance to be creative and engage with your constituents. If you host an event or talk with people at a function, ask them for direct input. This can include how they found you, what content they prefer, what communication channels they utilize most and how often. There's nothing wrong with engaging in interesting conversation with people to find out what they like (or don't like) about what you are doing. You can also find out if there are other similar organizations they participate in or follow. These organizations also have evaluation tools and may be willing to include your group in their own surveys or polls when they seek information. Partnerships are a great tool to leverage your message and get a bigger picture of what is (or isn't) working.

Evaluation Process

- + How often do you plan to check the statistics for each communication channel?
- + Who is responsible for doing it?
- + What will be the process for reporting and convening about the results?

Sometimes it Works and Other Times Not

If a particular method isn't working, find a way to either make it better or focus your efforts on something else. If a method is really well-received, do it more and strive to do even better. Consider whether or not you put forth your best effort to utilize the communication channels in the way they are designed. Maybe you created a video, but didn't share it, so it has very few views. That doesn't necessarily mean that the video was a flop, but rather your implementation was not as effective as it could be. You should also consider if the content and methods you thought were of interest to your audience are indeed as such. The communication plan and strategy is an evolving process that may change in stride to the needs of the objectives.

This section explains some basic principles of good marketing, as adapted from the Marketing and Communications Planning Guide made by the Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM). They have divided the marketing process into four simple steps: Listen & Learn, Assess the Current Situation, Finesse What Exists, and Develop a Strategy.

Basic Definitions

Putting these items together successfully will yield successful programs and help fulfill your mission. To get started, you need to start from the beginning.

Marketing – The action taken to promote your organization or program.

Promotion – Using a variety of methods (or channels) that help deliver your message to your target market and inspire action.

Outreach – Using a variety of methods (or channels) that help deliver your message and provide services to those who may not otherwise have access and inspire action.

Brand – The articulation of a set of values, goals and promises a group represents and hopes to portray to the rest of the world.

Brand Identity – How the rest of the world interprets your group or organization.

Step 1: Listen and Learn

Understand Your Organization

It is a lot easier to make thoughtful choices that maximize both your organization's dollar and efforts if you take time to figure out your starting point. This can also help eliminate internal misunderstanding of your message, improve collaborative effort, and set a foundation for the evaluation of success.

Ask Yourself...

- + What is the organization's mission?
- + What the organization's vision?
- + What programs exist within the organization?
- + Who do these programs aim to serve (who is the target population)?
- + How is the organization currently reaching its audience?

Step 2: Assess the Current Situation

Evaluate the Existing Marketing and Promotional Tools in Place

This means taking an inventory of what marketing, promotion, and branding items your organization currently has, auditing them, and asking yourself certain questions.

Some essential, basic marketing pieces include (but are not limited to):

- + A logo
- + Consistent letterhead, fonts, colors and other style elements
- + An updated website
 - + When was the last time it was updated? Is the information still relevant?
 - + Does it contain the organization logo, contact information, and mission statement?
 - + What other information does it contain and is it important?
- + Brochures or flyers
- + Business cards
- + Email Signature
 - + Which should contain links to your website and to your social media
- + Social Media Presence
 - + Which platforms are you using?
 - + Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter are common because of the size of the audience. Others such as Pinterest, Instagram, and Snapchat can be useful tools as well. Google for Non-Profits and LinkedIn often have free tools just for non-profits, so be sure to explore!
 - + What information do you put out there?
 - + Are you posting regularly? You should be! Develop a consistent schedule!
 - + Who is your following (audience)?
 - + Is it who you want to reach (your target audience)?
- + Alternatively, these platforms are great for keeping up to date with partner organizations that may be of interest to you and your organization

It's not enough to simply have some marketing materials. It's important to have a strategy for the use of them. You should continually consider:

- + Are they used consistently throughout the organization?
- + Are they filling a need or serving a purpose?
- + Are they accurate and up-to-date?
- + What opportunities are available for improving our ability to communicate through our marketing materials?

Step 3: Finesse What Exists

Start With What You Have and Make it Better

Get rid of obsolete or irrelevant materials and update what is potentially still helpful by making sure that it is within the brand standards of the organization. If you don't have brand standards, establish some! Revise your marketing and messaging for these elements:

Accuracy

It looks unprofessional to have materials that are full of errors or staff that is uninformed. While it's okay to not have all of the answers, you need to be able to easily direct your clients to them.

Concise Messages

Your messages should be clear, concise, and direct. Make sure that your messages are reflective of your mission statement and the values of your organization. Your messages are apparent throughout how you answer the phone and write emails; your interaction with clients and the public; and in your printed materials, website, and social media.

Brand Consistency

Everything that your organization produces should be void of ambiguity and point directly back to the organization. This helps remind people about your organization and reinforces the trustworthiness and reputation of your organization. This means including information on your materials that help people identify you or how they can learn more information about you. Always include your logo and website!

Website

More important than anything, the website should contain a comprehensive compilation of everything related to the organization. All promotions, social media posts, printed collateral and everything produced should direct people to the website. This reinforces a brand and gives the organization one location for people to consistently return to for updated information.

Design

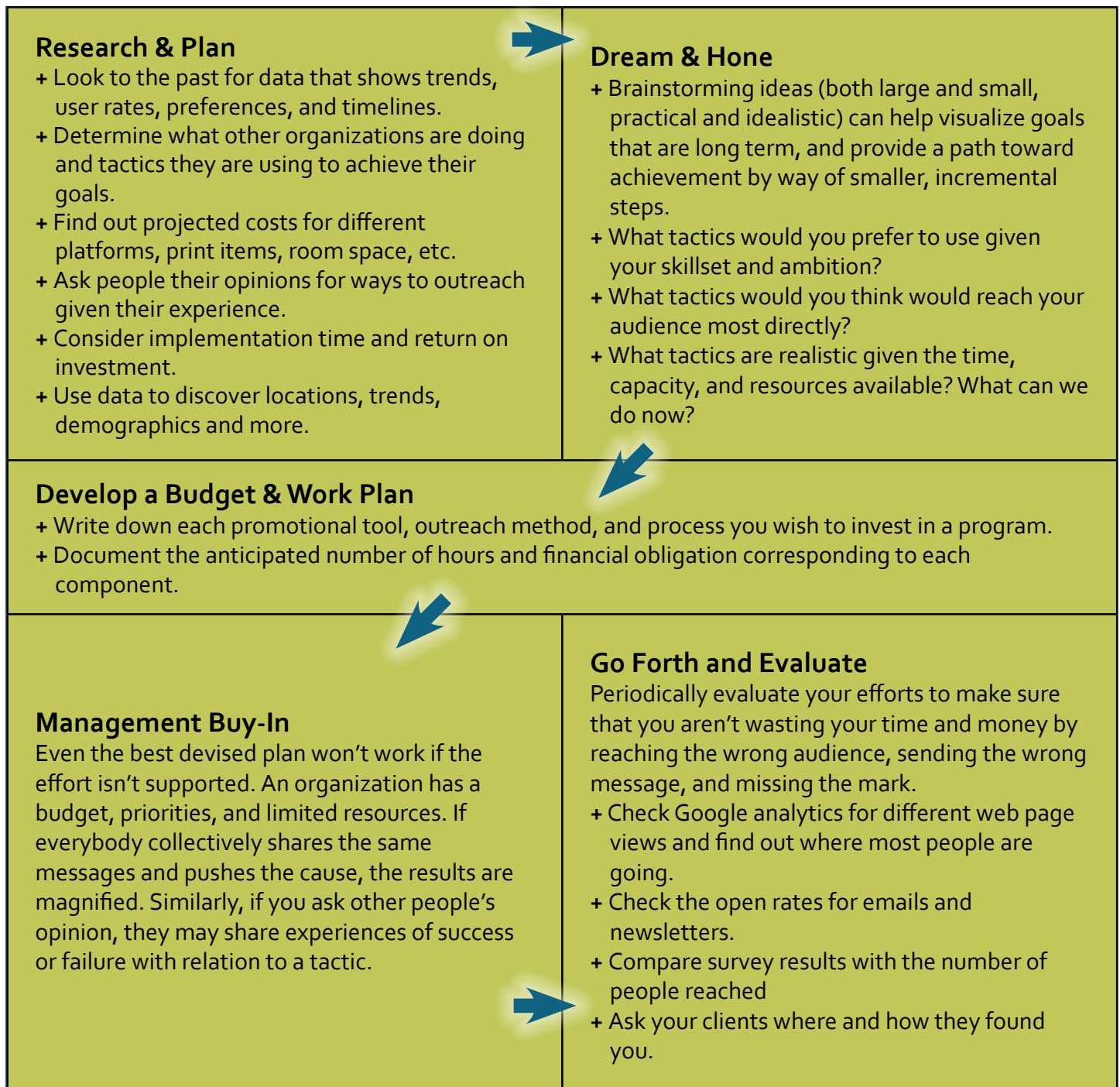
Not everybody has a graphic designer on staff or access to one. If you are doing it yourself and you do not have the training, do not try to become one overnight. Keep these principles in mind, and consult [Creative Market's 10 Basic Elements of Design](#).

- + **Limit the number of fonts** – it can be confusing to read.
- + **Information Hierarchy** – Start with the most timely and critical information at the top.
- + **White space is your friend** – Do not try and cram too much information into your printed materials. Keep them simple, organized, and direct people to the website if they would like to find more information.
- + **Color** – Use sparingly and with consideration to the general psychology of color.

Step 4: Develop a Strategy

What Else (if Anything) Will Help You Accomplish Your Goals?

This might not happen right away, but instead, as needs arise or situations develop. However, when you do consider your wants and needs, it is critical to respect the boundaries of what is possible and to plan for the future in a collaborative, unified way.



Tips and Advice

Many of these processes will be repeated as your organization forms ideas, events, and programs. Sometimes it will be overwhelming and other times it will snap into place. However, with all things considered, here are a few tips.

Thoughtful Design

Design can be expensive and colorful brochures can be pricey. However, more costly or colorful is not always better. Instead, it's better to invest in strategic, well thought-out design for more impactful results. When designing these pieces or working with a consultant, consider:

Size - There are a lot of ways items can be designed that maximize your dollar. Think about how much space you actually need.

Quantity - For items that are quick to become obsolete, only print a small amount.

Color vs. B&W - If it is going on the website, use color more freely to attract people. Otherwise, use color sparingly and consider how reproducing it in black and white will look.

Quality - Quality is more important than anything. Chances are, your message is more widely received if it is done well!

Partnerships

Partnerships are fabulous methods of collaboration and can save time, resources and amplify the message's reach. Different ways you can partner include:

- + Cross-promotion on each other's websites
- + Ask to post a flyer in their office
- + Join forces to share the workload and host an event together

Potential partnerships:

- + Local units of government
- + Similar nonprofit organizations or companies that offer a complementary program or service
- + Local library or other cultural organizations
- + Universities or other anchor institutions

Remember the 3 C's

Control - You cannot change what you cannot control; be it time, skillset, money, software, or support. Work with what you can in the best way possible.

Consistency - Present yourself professionally and consistently. The organization develops a reputable and professional brand identity when all items produced (be it oral, verbal, digital, or print) are consistent, clear, and accurate. Proof-read your work and remember that these communications and field work are representations of your organization, which can help build or refute a reputation.

Challenge yourself - It's easy to get swept up by the status quo or discouraged by a hectic work schedule or limited resources, but innovation can be a key driver to success. Think outside of the box, experiment with ideas, and remember that your goal is serving the organization's mission. This does not necessarily equate to expensive campaigns or lots of time!

Checklist for Event Planning

Below is a list of items to consider when planning your event. The following page is a checklist/form that you can fill out while planning the event.

	Has a date, time, and location been determined?
	Have speakers been determined?
	Is the invitee mailing list complete? Did you invite local officials, politicians, or area representatives?
	Have invitations been sent?
	Have the press been notified (media release and phone call)? Have press releases been prepared?
	Is the agenda completed and printed? Are there supplemental materials that need completed and printed?
	Have any refreshments, decorations, and nametags been ordered and scheduled for delivery?
	Have accommodations been prepared for bad weather if the event is outside?
	Is someone scheduled to take photos?
	Is there appropriate signage to direct people to the event location?
	Is there a stand or podium for the speakers? Do you need a microphone?
	Has someone been scheduled to meet and greet attendees/staff information table/nametags?
	Does the venue have all of the appropriate technology (laptop, speakers, projector, etc.)?

Event Form



General Information

Date	
Time	
Location	

Speakers

Speaker Name		Speaker Name	
Phone		Phone	
Email		Email	

Invitations Check if invitations sent. Check if nametags and registration list printed.

Special Guests to Add to the Mailing List	
Individuals from our Organizations Contacts	
Local Officials/Representatives/Politicians	
Media/Press Contacts	

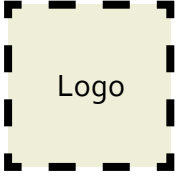
The Event

Agenda Completed?	
Supplemental Materials Completed and Printed?	
Refreshments, decorations, and nametags been ordered and scheduled for delivery?	Name: Phone: Email:
Photographer?	Name: Phone: Email:
Technology	
Stand or Podium	
Microphone	
Laptop with Powerpoint and an internet connection?	
Speakers	
Projector and Screen	
Other:	

Website Checklist

	Home Page is clean and uncluttered .
	Home Page prominently features statement of purpose (NOTE: this need not be the organization's formal Mission Statement. The purpose of the organization can be stated in numerous ways, all of which should emphasize the key perspectives and values).
	Visuals feature people , not just buildings.
	Your Address! (A simple method, preferably a map, to find your organization.)
	Features your most recent spotlight press release/aggregates your news mentions.
	Prominently includes descriptions of, and links to partner and allied organizations, and puts the community first, reflecting the perspective that the CDC is community-focused.
	Populated with real people , whose pictures and words reflect the benefits that result from the work. (See http://hcdnnj.wordpress.com/ for a vivid example of what can be done through systematic listening.) This also includes individuals who are indirect beneficiaries, not program participants.
	Targeted to decision makers. Legislators, corporations, neighborhood institutions, or other strategic targets of the organization should find themselves, or find people they care about, on the website. This may take the form of quoting them on some shared interest, or quoting citizens who are not direct beneficiaries of CDC programs, but who are strategic messengers to these targets. The web site should always include examples of people talking in public about the issues facing their community.
	Current. As implied by including material targeted to decision makers, the content of the web site has to change fairly often. Take down out of date material, and use the web site as a strategic tool.
	Check the appearance and functionality of your website on multiple browsers and devices. (Browsers like Internet Explorer, Microsoft Edge, Google Chrome, Safari, Opera... devices like a Desktop or Laptop, Smartphone, Tablet, etc.)

Grand Opening Press Release Template



For Immediate Release

Date of Release

Media Contact

Name

Email

Phone

Local Community Leaders Celebrate Grand Opening of New Apartment Complex

CITY - Local, state and federal officials today joined staff, development partners and residents of "Happy Homes" to celebrate Tree City's newest apartment community.

Mayor XXXXXX kicked off the ceremony by talking about the impact this complex will have on the community. "Insert quote here."

(The first two paragraphs must answer the five W's: who, what, where, when, why. Why can sometimes be a tough question to answer. Why is this news? Why do they care?)

Happy Homes consists of xxx apartments located on xxx acres at the corner of Elm Road and Main Street. The units are x and x bedrooms, and are currently accepting tenants. The units are available to residents who earn up to xx% of the area median income. (List any prominent amenities, etc.)

"Insert quote from official or high ranking development team member."

Many local organizations, financial institutions and government leaders played a role in developing this project. Partners in the project include: Ohio Development Services Agency, Ohio Housing Finance Agency, ABC local nonprofit, Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing, ULoanToUs Bank and I. Build Architects.

The apartment community was partially financed by equity raised from the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program of the Ohio Housing Trust Fund. This federal program provides a dollar-for-dollar reduction in income taxes for developers of affordable housing in exchange for providing below-market rents for at least 15 years. The tax credits are then sold to investors, who provide equity to the project.

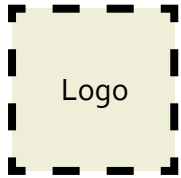
"Insert quote from someone on development team or resident."

Close with information on parent company, background, etc. A mission statement is typically good for this.

The Ohio CDC Association is a statewide membership organization that fosters vibrant neighborhoods and improves the quality of life in all communities through advocacy and capacity building of our member agencies. OCDCA's vision is the creation of a community development environment that comprehensively improves life opportunities for all residents.



Ground Breaking Press Release Template



For Immediate Release

Date of Release

Media Contact

Name

Email

Phone

Local Community Leaders Celebrate Ground Breaking of New Apartment Complex

CITY - Local, state and federal officials today joined investment and development partners to celebrate the ground breaking of "Happy Homes"—the newest "type of project" apartment community in City, State.

Mayor XXXXXX kicked off the ceremony by talking about the impact this development will have on the community. "Insert quote here."

(The first two paragraphs must answer the five W's: who, what, where, when, why. Why can sometimes be a tough question to answer. Why is this news? Why do they care?)

Happy Homes will consist of xxx apartments located on xxx acres at the corner of Elm Road and Main Street. The units will be x and x bedrooms and will be available to residents who earn up to xx% of the area median income. (List any prominent amenities, etc.)

"Insert quote from official or high ranking development team member."

Many local organizations, financial institutions and government leaders played a role in developing this project. Partners in the project include: Ohio Development Services Agency, Ohio Housing Finance Agency, ABC local nonprofit, Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing, ULoanToUs Bank and I. Build Architects.

The apartment community was partially financed by equity raised from the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program of the Ohio Housing Trust Fund. This federal program provides a dollar-for-dollar reduction in income taxes for developers of affordable housing in exchange for providing below-market rents for at least 15 years. The tax credits are then sold to investors, who provide equity to the project.

"Insert quote from someone on development team or resident."

(Close with information on parent company, background, etc. A mission statement is typically good for this.)

The Ohio CDC Association is a statewide membership organization that fosters vibrant neighborhoods and improves the quality of life in all communities through advocacy and capacity building of our member agencies. OCDCA's vision is the creation of a community development environment that comprehensively improves life opportunities for all residents.

Tips

- + It is important to illustrate how this is news. Highlight the local connection.
- + Reporters need to be objective, so do not use adjectives. Use “its” as a pronoun to refer to your organization—not “our.” Use periods only.
- + Do not send the press release out as an attachment. Copy the text into the body of an email or send a link.
- + It is generally recommended to be around 400 words. Links can be in a press release.
- + Ensure that you time the release appropriately. Know deadlines for your media outlet so that the news isn’t old before it reaches them.
- + Close with three spaces and “###” which is an outdated, but still used way to indicate that the release has ended.
- + To think best like a reporter, it may be useful to get a copy of the AP Style Book to keep around the office.