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## Communications Strategic Planning for Social Impact Program/Organization Plan Assessment & Communications Plan Outline

### I. ASSESSMENT

#### Program/Organization Plan Assessments

The program or organization operating plan is the foundation upon which a communications plan is built. All good advocacy and communications plans fully integrate with the operating plan of the organization or program they are designed to amplify.

Before strategic communication planning commences, the program or organization operating plan should be assessed for strengths and weaknesses that may impact the success of communication activities.

#### Operating Plan Assessment Outline

1. **Program/Organization Objectives & Activities:** Are the program/organization objectives SMART (i.e., Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Resourced and Time-bound)? Are they practical and actionable? If they are missing SMART components, what additional information does communications require to build communications strategies and tactics around each goal?
2. **Target Audiences:** Has the program/organization defined the high priority decision-makers in enough detail for communications to identify them, know where and how to engage them and create key messages that will motivate them to take desired actions? Are the target audiences defined too broadly? Has audience opinion research been performed? Have key messages been tested via surveys or focus groups? NOTE: If no opinion research and message testing has been performed, the program/organization brand narrative and key messages are **ASSUMPTIVE** and when deployed, they must be closely measured for impact (i.e., their rate of success for engaging targets and convincing them to take desired actions).
3. **Timeframe:** By what point in time must goals be achieved? If the date for achieving goals is several years into the future, does the operating plan reflect annual efforts designed to achieve incremental progress toward meeting the objectives? Separately, what are the program's/organization's planned key events and activities over specified periods of time?
4. **Resources:** Does the program's/organization's human and financial resources appear adequate for achieving its objectives? Would a reasonable person conclude the objectives can be accomplished within the specified timeframe and via the available resources?

## II. SOCIAL IMPACT COMMUNICATIONS PLAN OUTLINE - EXPLAINED

### 1. Introduction/Context

- Explain the purpose of the communications plan
- Briefly describe the organization or program the communications plan is designed to amplify
- Summarize the contents of the communications plan

**2. Communication Objectives:** Since the organization or program plan is the foundation upon which a communications plan is built, the best way to present communications objectives is alongside the organization or program objectives they are designed to support (e.g., a two-column table with the organization or program objectives on the left and the corresponding communications objectives on the right). The communication objectives must be tied to the tangible/measurable outcomes they should create. This section is best presented as a two-column table with the program goals on the left and the corresponding communications goals on the right. **The goals should articulate the OUTCOMES (the tangible changes in policies, business systems, human behavior, etc.) that they are designed to achieve.**

**3. Identify the audience:** To WHOM do you need to communicate? What are their job titles? Where do they live and work? What communication channels do they use? What existing research can you gather about their opinions and influencers?

**4. Resources:** Determine the human and financial resources available for performing communications activities.

**5. Messages:** What clear and concise messages will motivate target audiences to change their behavior or support policy changes that will achieve program objectives? Can you discover any existing target audience opinion research and message testing that relates to your issues and objectives? If not, can the organization, program or program and partners find the resources to complete some amount of opinion research and message testing? Some amount of target audience opinion research and message testing is strongly recommended. Otherwise, messages may be based entirely upon UNVERIFIED ASSUMPTIONS made by program and communications team members.

**6. Strategic Approach:** What are the marketing approaches that will be used to achieve communications objectives? A strategy may be defined as a general direction set for the organization or one of its programs to achieve a desired state in the future. Strategies turn goals into actions. For example, if the goal is to boost climate change resilience in the top 10 U.S. cities where climate change impacts threaten vital urban infrastructure, nonprofit A's strategy might be to partner with the leaders of businesses that implement common urban resilience projects. **Three commonly used strategies for gaining advantage are leadership, differentiation and focus.**

**7. Tactics:** A tactic refers to the specific actions taken to reach the set goals in line with the strategy. *If the strategy is the long-term plan, tactics are the short-term steps that help you hit smaller goals. Tactical planning is the act of breaking down your strategic plan into short-term actions.*<sup>1</sup> What communication activities, tools and communication channels will effectively disseminate key messages and motivate targets to take desired actions? (News

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<sup>1</sup> <https://asana.com/resources/strategy-vs-tactics>

story placement; networking meetings; community events; speaking opportunities; publication of new research reports; and much more.) Are your tactics affordable and practical? Is each tactic measurable? If not, why (with limited resources) perform the activity?

- 8. Evaluation:** Valid results can only be ascertained from proven measurement processes. What measurement techniques have you integrated into each tactic to determine if it helped achieve or make incremental progress toward achieving the goals?
- 9. Determine Key Dates:** What events and actions have been scheduled to take place during the period of time the communication plan addresses?
- 10. Implementation:** Create an integrated program and communications calendar of activities, a matrix that can be shared with everyone involved.