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Developing a Strategic Communications Plan

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By W.K. Kellogg Foundation: Jan 10, 2008

Developing a strategic communications plan will be less overwhelming if it is viewed as a series of steps. Here are some questions to ponder before you create your plan. If you know the answers to these, the creative process should be smoother.

- What is the mission/vision of this organization? Where are you today as an organization, and where do you want to be in three years? (Be specific.)
- What is the overall goal(s) of this organization? Do our current communications efforts support our goal?
- What barriers must be overcome to reach overall goals? What are the benefits of reaching the goals?
- How visible is our organization now? Do the people we need to reach know we exist?
- What are the current skills of the staff? Do we have the resources to bring in new people with communications expertise? Can our budget support a consultant?
- What does the annual budget for our organization look like? Does our budget align with our priorities? Does our budget sufficiently support communications efforts?
- Are we familiar with what similar nonprofits are doing with strategic communications? What do we admire in others?

Plans can be organized and created with more detail, but a communications plan should include the following six components:

[Objectives](#)

[Audiences](#)

[Messages](#)

[Timetable](#)

[Budget, Staff Skills, and Hiring Consultants](#)

[Top Management Buy-In](#)

Resources

Strategic Communications for Nonprofit Organizations: Seven Steps to Creating a Successful Plan (Nonprofit Law, Finance, and Management Series) by Janel M. Radtke is a comprehensive, hands-on [guide](#) that helps nonprofit organizations get their messages across.

The National School Boards Foundation, through their Institute for the Transfer of Technology to Education, has created an Education Leadership Toolkit. This Toolkit includes information on [creating a communication plan](#).

The Huron River Watershed Council (HRWC) documented their efforts to develop a communications plan, which is [reprinted here](#) with permission from the HRWC and the Environmental Protection Agency.

[The Health Communication Partnership \[PDF\]](#) offers an approach to strategic communications that they call the "P-Plan." Its principles apply to anyone seeking a method for creating a communications plan. Their five steps are analysis, strategic design, development and testing, implementation and monitoring, and evaluation and replanning.

The SPIN Project offers an [electronic strategic communications plan generator](#). They have a guide to help you understand how to answer questions about your organizational and communications capabilities. With the help of the guide, you input information into the electronic fields and then submit the plan. There is also an option to have a SPIN strategist look over your plan. Check out the generator for more information on the plan's uses and to take a look at the form.

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