

Strategic Communications Plan Outline

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- II. Goals
- III. Communications Objectives
- IV. Communications, Strategies
- V. Communications Tactics
- VI. Partnerships
- VII. Evaluation
- VIII. Time Line
- IX. Budget

STEP-BY-STEP Strategic Communications Plan Development

STEP 1: State the Plan's Overall Goals and Establish Communications Objectives

- Begin your plan by broadly defining the overall issues or problems your communications plan will address.
- Clearly list the goals your communications plan is designed to accomplish for your state. These goals should be in line with, and in support of your state's policies and programs.
- Your communications objectives are the intermediate steps needed to achieve your overall goals and may be tied to increasing awareness or knowledge, changing attitudes, changing behavior. Objectives are specific, achievable and measurable within a defined period of time.

STEP 2: Define Target Audiences and Communications Strategies for Reaching Them

- Research and data help define whom your primary audience(s) should be.
- Try to define segments of your audience(s) by the 10 points of segmentation: age, sex, location, race, education, income, occupation, vehicle type, behavior type and media preferences.
- Then, identify your secondary audience(s). This might be a smaller target demographic needing to improve its highway safety behavior or those who can influence the primary audience.
- List your strategies for reaching each audience and affecting behavioral change. For example, strategies to affect behavioral change for a "risk taker" audience type would be to communicate that impaired driving is cowardly, irresponsible and/or immature; it's a threat to your career and financial success; it's a negative risk with nothing positive to be gained.

STEP 3: Develop Year-Round Tactics

- View the NHTSA Communications Calendar, then develop your own complementary state communications calendar and share it with your state partners. Your goal is to create a year-round plan of sustained action. Tactics might include paid media, media relations efforts, a kick-off event, partnerships, and other promotional activities.
- For paid media, develop a media planning guide. The guide should outline specifics of each media effort: budget, which mediums/media outlets, reaching what areas, over what length of time. You also should outline whom you are going to reach and what level of communication you want the campaign to achieve with your audience.
- For earned media, develop a detailed earned media plan for each major audience. Describe

any supplementary materials that need to be developed based on the types of earned media activities you plan. For example, if you plan to generate media coverage, consider the need for a press kit or other media materials.

STEP 4: Identify Partners

- Consider working with outside organizations and individuals who can help extend the reach and credibility of your messages. List all your potential partners in your plan (e.g., local government agencies, business or industry organizations, transportation groups, consumer and civic organizations, advertising and public relations agencies, local media).
- Describe suggested roles for your partners (e.g., provide in-kind services, donate free airtime, distribute communications materials) and how you plan to seek their involvement and continued support for your initiatives. This will include highlighting specific messages and materials, and emphasizing benefits to specific partners, ideas for involving them throughout the year (e.g., conducting regular meetings), and methods/tools to measure their participation (e.g., the level and content of their activities in support of the effort).

STEP 5: Determine Evaluation Plan

- Assessing your plan's effectiveness is critical to its continued success. A strong evaluation will help you to determine if your plan has met its goals and objectives; demonstrate that your effort is effective; guide adjustments to your plan; and support future funding.
- Your plan should describe:
 1. an approach for reviewing existing research;
 2. a plan for gathering new information that explores your target audiences' current knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as formative research to test your concepts and materials;
 3. a process evaluation that assesses the development, management, and effectiveness of your communications plan implementation; and
 4. a strategy for conducting an outcome evaluation that measures whether your plan achieved its goals and objectives.

STEP 6: Develop a Timeline

- Develop a step-by-step timeline to keep your communications plan, staff, and partners on track.
- Make sure to build in reasonable review time for all products and activities.

STEP 7: Create a Budget

- List all anticipated expenses using the tactics and materials listed on your worksheet as a starting point. Refine your tactics at this point to fit your budget.
- Seek creative ways to fund un-funded tactics, perhaps through partnerships.