

Communication and Public Relations

Making a plan

What is it and why do you need a communication plan?

A communication plan is a written document that focuses your organization's efforts to deliver its core messages and communicate with its audiences—potential members, nonprofits, the business community and the public at large. The plan—

- Organizes what you are going to do, who will do it, and when it will be done
- Is reviewed and approved by your board so that everyone owns it.
- Is a part of your annual budget. Naturally, since Impact 100 likes every dollar of a membership donation to be included in a grant, you will opt for free or low-cost techniques that can be funded by additional, non-membership donations.

Impact 100 members tend to be very busy people—already over-committed with work, family and other organizations. Those who are board members will serve, in most cases, for three to four years. During that time they will acquire a great deal of very valuable experience. They learn what works and what doesn't—in member recruitment, in the grant process, and in building public support. *Effective communication is critical in all of these efforts.*

But when boards change, all this valuable expertise can be lost. A communication plan can prevent that from happening. A plan allows the hard work of one group to serve as a platform for new ideas and new approaches of the next. And it assures that wheels that don't need to be reinvented keep turning.

We recommend establishing a **Communication Committee** to draft and implement an annual plan. Although the committee membership should be open to all members, there are some important skills to look for. You need a writer, a photographer, a graphic designer and, if possible, someone with a working knowledge of HTML (hypertext markup language).

One of the **tenets** of the Impact 100 model is mentoring. This is important for the workings of the Communication Committee as it substantially reduces the learning curve for new committee members. The handout we have provided gives you a general outline of a communication plan for an Impact 100 organization.

What communication tools work for Impact 100

These items are not listed in order of importance. They are all interdependent and work together to reinforce your messages. But, we are concentrating first on the principal methods we use to communicate today—using our computers, tablets and smart phones.

Branding

Branding is one of those terms that people bandy about and use to mean whatever they want it to mean. It's not marketing, which is tactical—it's strategic. It's your promise to your audience—your visual identity. It's not just a logo— it's style, colors, spatial relationships, perhaps a tag line that positions your organization.

Nike—just do it

L'Oreal—because you're worth it

BMW—the ultimate driving machine

This is one of those things you need professional help with. Once your logo is designed you need standards for its use including a color palette, complimentary fonts.

Your brand is your public image and the more it is reinforced the stronger it will be.

Talking Points

We all know that most women join Impact 100 because someone *asked* them to. Everything we've talked about today is in support of the "ask."

The Impact 100 concept can be difficult to define. If you provide your members with the words that best describe the mission, how the grants system works, and the impact on the community, they will be better equipped to recruit new members.

Photography

This really shouldn't be a separate section because images are an important part of all the other communication techniques. You need good images to tell your story on your website, on social media, in email marketing and in presentations. It's not necessary to hire a professional photographer. A member with a camera and an eye for composition can do the job. Then you need a way to organize and store the images so they are accessible to those who need them. I use Dropbox and Google Drive.

DIGITAL MEDIA

Website

In today's world a website is almost a necessity for an Impact 100 group. People who hear the name "Impact 100" for the first time are naturally going to Google it. Potential members, nonprofits interested in grants and the general public expect to have a place where they can get information about an organization. I know that some of your groups are structured as part of a community foundation, and perhaps you have a page on the foundation's website. But, if possible, it's good to have your own URL.

I like Wordpress as a platform for nonprofits. Wordpress is a content management system which means it allows "editors" and "contributors" to add, edit and delete content on the "front end", while the structure and design, the "back end" is controlled by an "administrator".

Do have a professional designer create your site. It doesn't have to be elaborate—but should be ruled by your branding standards and contain the following: a clear statement of your mission, an explanation of your grants process, profiles of your grant winners and a list of your members. And, your site should be "responsive" which means that it will reflow to fit any size screen. This is important because in 2015 51% of internet use was done with a smart phone. So, if you're not able to reach your audience through mobile search or display, you are missing out on a major means of communication.

Email Marketing

I think email marketing is one of the best communication tools for Impact 100. It's a low-cost way to communicate with your membership and other groups. Constant Contact's fees start at about \$20/month for 500 subscribers, and Mail Chimp is free for up to 1000 subscribers. I am currently using Emma for my clients which is a little more sophisticated and we believe has better delivery success. My firm has an agency account that allows five subaccounts for one monthly fee. Four of those are our clients, and one is the Impact 100 Global Conference. So, we have unlimited messages for no cost.

All of these programs work with mail lists imported from spreadsheets—first name, last name, email address. The great thing is that you can see who opened the message, who didn't open and which addresses are not good. All provide reports on each message and allow links to post the message to a website and to save as a PDF.

Once again, make sure the format is consistent with your branding. Some of the templates provided by these applications are not very attractive, but can be customized by someone with HTML knowledge, or experience with the program.

Online Surveys

Surveys are another useful email communication tool that can help you engage your audiences. There are many free services available but the one I am familiar with is Survey Monkey. It's very easy to use and can give you important insights about your membership. Northwest Florida wanted to know how our members felt about a number of things. Among them, what could we do to recognize members who renew their memberships. We were surprised to learn that an overwhelming majority thought this was not even an issue.

Collateral, Other—Barbara

Remember, it all starts with branding. All your print materials—brochures, flyers, banners, signs—need to follow your branding standards. The same goes for T-shirts, mugs and other materials. Your brand is your public image and the more it is reinforced, the stronger it will be.

Print materials, although not as important as they once were, will always be needed. For all print materials you will need professional help. This is not a time to settle for "good enough." I strongly recommend that you have an experienced graphic designer prepare the printing files. I don't recommend asking printers to print brochures for free (you get what you pay for), but a member who buys printing for a business may be able to get a reduced price. Using digital printing can mean an enormous savings in cost, and printing small quantities allows you to make updates.

Presentations

Powerpoint presentations can be very helpful—but also very boring. When your audience is reading the screen, they are not listening to you. And, many PowerPoint or Keynote presentations are very badly done—with way too much information on one slide. This has a negative affect on the viewer. If people in the back row of the room cannot read every word on the screen you are not making a favorable impression.

But PowerPoint and video presentations can be very effective marketing tools when they represent your voice. Running an automatically-timed presentation at an event while nobody is talking, or a video on your website—good ways to reinforce core messages.

And sometime you need an outline. Simple bullet points that keep the audience (and the presenter) on track. But be careful about the number of bullet points on one slide—no more than 5, 6 at the most, and best if introduced one at a time.

The talking points can be reinforced by a PowerPoint or video presentation when the situation allows. If a PowerPoint is used, it's a good idea to develop a script for the presenter.

