

## I. GOALS & INTENDED OUTCOMES

What does your communications and outreach plan ultimately seek to do/change in your state? These goals can be broad (to broaden statewide support for the college- and career-ready education agenda policies) or specific (to get 50% of all high school students enrolled in a college- and career-ready course of study).

**List the goals of your communications and outreach strategy:**

## II. STRATEGY

### INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

When putting together a communications strategy, a critical first step is assembling a team of people you will need to develop, gain support for and promote the college- and career-ready reform agenda. Ensuring this team – which will likely involve actors from different public agencies and, potentially, from both inside- and outside-the-government – is well informed, engaged, and on-message is crucial to having a successful external communications campaign.

There are some common strategies to ensure strong internal communications, such as:

- Sharing key documents with internal supporters (e.g. the communications plan, campaign charter, important research about college and career readiness)
- Setting up a listserv to facilitate internal communications
- Holding regular meetings

**Identify what mechanisms you will adopt to ensure good internal communications:**

[See “Putting the Pieces in Place for a Statewide Communications Strategy” & “Communicating Internally and Externally” for more information]

## TARGET AUDIENCE(S)

You should focus first on speaking to your supporters and understanding what messages and tactics move them to champion the agenda. This will enable you to both grow your base of support and increase the intensity of your supporters. Then, you can spend more time on targeted outreach to those not fully sold on the college- and career-ready agenda.

### Audiences include:

- Key legislators / legislative committees
- The head of education agencies (K-12 and postsecondary)
- Key business and workforce leaders
- Educators and administrators
- Key community groups in your state (e.g. parent, civil rights, religious, non-profit groups)
- Students
- The media (While the media is often considered a target audience, you are not really looking to gain or maintain the support of the media. The media is actually a vehicle by which you can reach and influence your target audiences; thus, it should be included on your list.)

Once you have identified the key audiences who have a stake in the college- and career-ready agenda, it is a useful exercise to create an “audience map” that explores what level of awareness and/or support each group has around the agenda. An audience map can be as simple as rating your audiences according to a numeric 1-5 scale. This assessment can help you better target your outreach. For example, audiences that have low awareness/high support (“soft supporters”) can undermine your campaign’s credibility if they speak out without knowing the full story, while audiences that have high awareness/low support (“aware skeptics”) pose a different challenge because they can be formidable (and vocal) opponents. Each of these groups requires a different tactic for engagement.

After completing this exercise, it is worthwhile to identify your priority audiences – those you feel are crucial to making progress on the agenda and without whom, the agenda cannot succeed. You should also identify those who appear to be politically or philosophically opposed to the college- and career-ready agenda, namely those who appear to have very low “support” in your audience map. While you may not be able to win them all over, knowing the opposition – and their particular messages, stakeholders, and influencers – is extremely important when crafting your own communications and outreach strategy.

[See “*Communicating Internally and Externally*” & “*Audience Mapping: The Why, How and What to Look For*” for more information]

AUDIENCE	AWARENESS	SUPPORT
<b>Policymakers</b>		
The Governor		
State Board of Education		
State Legislature (overall)		
Legislative Leadership, including key education and appropriations committee chairs		
<b>K-12 Audiences</b>		
K-12 Superintendent/State Chief		
District Superintendents		
High School Principals		
Teachers		
Guidance/Career Counselors		
<b>Higher Education Audiences</b>		
Higher Education Chief		
College Presidents		
Faculty (2- and 4-year institutions)		
<b>Community Audiences</b>		
Parents		
Students		
Civil Rights Organizations		
Philanthropic Organizations		
<b>Business Audiences</b>		
Business Leaders/Executives		
Business Coalitions		
Labor/Workforce Organizations		
<b>Media</b>		
Mainstream Media (print, radio, broadcast)		
New Media (blogs, etc.)		
<b>OTHER:</b>		
<b>OTHER:</b>		

**Identify your highest-priority audiences:**

**Identify your opposition:**

**MESSAGING**

First of all, you should be able to boil down what you want to communicate to three central messages – the “key three.” Typically, the first message will define the issue; the second will outline the problem; and the third will explain the solution. The “key three” should be distributed to all internal team members and communicated consistently, without variation, at all times.

**Identify your key three messages:**

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Next, for each of the priority audiences selected above, you should identify sub-messages that you think would best resonate with them, drawing from the key three core messages

**Targeted Sub-Messages for Priority Audience 1: ( \_\_\_\_\_ )**

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**Targeted Messages for Priority Audience 2: ( \_\_\_\_\_ )**

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You may also want to create sub-messages that address common concerns of the college- and career-ready agenda, still drawing from your core, key three messages.

**Targeted Sub-Messages for Common Concern 1: ( \_\_\_\_\_ )**

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**Targeted Sub-Messages for Common Concern 2: ( \_\_\_\_\_ )**

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See “Communicating Internally and Externally” for more information]

### III. BUDGET & RESOURCES

Once you have identified your budget – including existing resources, in-kind services and any money that has been raised – you need to allocate it based on where you want to have the greatest impact. It is important to identify early on how much you are willing to spend on different resources or materials.

Common expenses include:

#### **Communications Channels & Activities**

- Paid media (print, broadcast or radio ads; media outreach; etc.)
- New media (social networking sites, blogs, web-based outreach, etc.)
- Events (i.e. space rental, refreshments, AV equipment, travel expenses, etc.)
- Campaign website
- Printing and mailings

#### **Talent**

- Staff (full-time, part-time, shared-time staff)
- Outside consultants (e.g. communications experts, graphic designers, advertising firms)

#### **Research**

- Focus groups and polls

Once you understand how much money you have to work with – and how much your desired activities cost – you can begin to identify the mix of high-, low- and no-cost activities you will use to get your key messages out to your targeted audiences.

You should set up a simple budget in an Excel worksheet. You should detail your overall budget and what you have allocated to each category of expense. You should then include line item estimates for different activities. Then, as you spend money, you should account for the actual amounts and work against the estimates. A sample budget is below.

[See “*Communications Channels for Every Budget*” for more information]

<b>PROGRAM BUDGET</b>		Updated as of: <b>MM/DD/YYYY</b>		
	<b>Budgeted</b>	<b>Current Estimate</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Est</b>
			<b>Sep 09</b>	<b>Oct 09</b>
<b>Paid Media</b>				
Print ads				
Broadcast ads				
Online ads				
<b>Events</b>				
Press conference				
Media roundtable				
Annual meeting				
<b>Talent</b>				
Staff				
Consultants				
<b>Research</b>				
Survey				
Focus groups				
<b>Management Fees and Expenses</b>				
Fees				
Travel				
Expenses				
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL:</b>				

#### IV. COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS & ACTIVITIES

Now that you have identified your key audiences and messages, you need to begin thinking about how you will reach them.

##### EVENTS

For each of the events, you should include who would be invited; who would present or speak; what materials need to be developed in preparation; and what media (earned, paid or new) you could leverage before or after the event to ensure it had a successful turnout and a positive impression.

**Statewide events** such as a statewide press event, Governor’s meeting, etc. are particularly well suited as a launch or kickoff of a major campaign and should feature prominent spokespeople for the college- and career-ready agenda.

***Describe any planned statewide events:***

Event Name \_\_\_\_\_ (Targeted Audience \_\_\_\_\_)

The event will consist of (presentations and presenters, any video or other multimedia, Q&A, invited guests, introduction of materials or campaign, etc.)

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Media with this event will consist of (before and after the event):

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Event Name \_\_\_\_\_ (Targeted Audience \_\_\_\_\_)

The event will consist of (presentations and presenters, any video or other multimedia, Q&A, invited guests, introduction of materials or campaign, etc.)

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Media with this event will consist of (before and after the event):

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[See “Communications Channels for Every Budget” & “Hosting a College- and Career-Ready Roundtable” for more information]

**Local events**, such as regional forums and roundtables, town hall meetings at local high schools, etc. Local events are good to host after at least one or two statewide events in order to bring the messages down to the grassroots level and to engage in targeted outreach. These meetings can either be stand alone or built around existing meetings like county commission meetings, school board meetings, and rotary club meetings.

**Describe any planned local events:**

Event Name \_\_\_\_\_ (Targeted Audience \_\_\_\_\_)

The event will consist of (number of events, presentations and presenters, any video or other multimedia, Q&A, invited guests, etc.)

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Media with this event will consist of (before and after the event):

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Event Name \_\_\_\_\_ (Targeted Audience \_\_\_\_\_)

The event will consist of (presentations and presenters, any video or other multimedia, Q&A, invited guests, introduction of materials or campaign, etc.)

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Media with this event will consist of (before and after the event):

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**COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS**

While certain communications outreach activities cost money, many do not. There is a plan for all budgets. You can do a lot with very little, and if you have more, you can augment your efforts with smart investments in communications channels that will give your education reform agenda greater exposure. Knowing what you can and cannot do, and thinking through a few key issues before you start to spend, can help you make the most of the dollars you have.

The three major categories of communications channels include:

- **Earned media** is news coverage/exposure you earn rather than pay for (e.g. coverage of a press conference, press releases, circulating a newsletter, pitching story ideas to state and local reporters, etc.)
- **Paid media** is news coverage/exposure you pay for (e.g. print, broadcast or online ads; writing and running advertorials, etc.)
- **New media** includes Social networking sites and other Web 2.0 activities (e.g. creating a social networking page, through Facebook or mySpace, hosting web chats and webinars, creating a blog with an RSS feed that notifies supporters of updates, etc.)

**Planned Media Activities:**

Activity #1 \_\_\_\_\_

- Description \_\_\_\_\_
- Targeted Audience(s) \_\_\_\_\_
- Expected cost \_\_\_\_\_
- Related activities \_\_\_\_\_
- Release Strategy \_\_\_\_\_

Activity #2 \_\_\_\_\_

- Description \_\_\_\_\_
- Targeted Audience(s) \_\_\_\_\_
- Expected cost \_\_\_\_\_
- Related activities \_\_\_\_\_
- Release Strategy \_\_\_\_\_

Activity #3 \_\_\_\_\_

- Description \_\_\_\_\_
- Targeted Audience(s) \_\_\_\_\_
- Expected cost \_\_\_\_\_
- Related activities \_\_\_\_\_
- Release Strategy \_\_\_\_\_

Activity #4 \_\_\_\_\_

- Description \_\_\_\_\_
- Targeted Audience(s) \_\_\_\_\_
- Expected cost \_\_\_\_\_
- Related activities \_\_\_\_\_
- Release Strategy \_\_\_\_\_

[See “Communications Channels for Every Budget,” “Hosting a College- and Career-Ready Roundtable,” “Engaging the Media,” & “Talking to the Media 101” for more information]

### DEVELOPMENT OF MATERIALS

As you consider the different resources you want to develop, you should always consider first the reasons you want to undertake them. It is a good idea to consider a mix of resources to get your message out through various communications channels; you want your target audiences to see your messages in various news and public sources.

Commonly developed campaign materials include:

- A campaign website – be it through a state agency, a coalition in support of the reform, or a stand-alone site.
- Brochures
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
- PowerPoint Presentations (given at state/local events)
- Fact sheets
- Posters
- Resource guides (e.g. information about college planning for students and parents; information about new requirements and standards for educators).

#### ***Potential Materials to Develop:***

Material #1 \_\_\_\_\_

- Description \_\_\_\_\_
- Targeted Audience(s) \_\_\_\_\_
- Expected cost \_\_\_\_\_
- Release Strategy \_\_\_\_\_

Material #2 \_\_\_\_\_

- Description \_\_\_\_\_
- Targeted Audience(s) \_\_\_\_\_
- Expected cost \_\_\_\_\_
- Release Strategy \_\_\_\_\_

Material #3 \_\_\_\_\_

- Description \_\_\_\_\_
- Targeted Audience(s) \_\_\_\_\_
- Expected cost \_\_\_\_\_
- Release Strategy \_\_\_\_\_

Material #4 \_\_\_\_\_

- Description \_\_\_\_\_
- Targeted Audience(s) \_\_\_\_\_
- Expected cost \_\_\_\_\_
- Release Strategy \_\_\_\_\_

**TARGETED OUTREACH**

In addition to the events and materials described above, you may need to host specific events or develop additional resources for targeted audiences, often your “soft” supporters, who generally support the agenda, but are not entirely on board yet.

Some targeted activities could include:

- Small group discussions with key groups
- Partnerships with organizations with members representing your target audience (e.g. your state’s chapter of Council of Teachers of Math, Association of Career and Technical Education, or Association of Secondary School Principals)
- Developing targeted tactical plans for individual audiences

<b>TACTICAL PLAN</b>	
<b>Target Audience</b>	Define the target audience with specificity: •
<b>Objectives</b>	Define the outreach objectives: • • •
<b>Key Target Messages</b>	Outline the tailored messages for this target audience: • • •
<b>Channels/Vehicles</b>	Identify the kinds of earned, paid and new media channels to reach this audience: • • •
<b>Measuring Success</b>	Define what actions the target audience could take to show success: • • •

## RESEARCH

While you might not initially think you have a need for research or the budget to do it, many campaigns evolve to a place where it becomes necessary. Knowing a few basics will help you determine if, and what type of, research is right for you and help ensure that you get the results you want.

In a communications campaign there are typically two kinds of research you can conduct:

1. Internal quantitative and/or qualitative research to test your messages; and
2. External quantitative research on a particular issue, the results from which you would typically release to generate earned media coverage.

### ***Planned internal research activities:***

Activity \_\_\_\_\_

- Goal/Intent of Research \_\_\_\_\_
- Targeted Audience \_\_\_\_\_
- Considerations \_\_\_\_\_
- Cost \_\_\_\_\_

Activity \_\_\_\_\_

- Goal/Intent of Research \_\_\_\_\_
- Targeted Audience \_\_\_\_\_
- Considerations \_\_\_\_\_
- Cost \_\_\_\_\_

### ***Planned external research activities:***

Activity \_\_\_\_\_

- Goal/Intent of Research \_\_\_\_\_
- Targeted Audience \_\_\_\_\_
- Considerations \_\_\_\_\_
- Cost \_\_\_\_\_

Activity \_\_\_\_\_

- Goal/Intent of Research \_\_\_\_\_
- Targeted Audience \_\_\_\_\_
- Considerations \_\_\_\_\_
- Cost \_\_\_\_\_

[See “Communications Research” for more information]

## V. TIMELINE

Communications and outreach plans offer include various phases of work to ensure a smooth roll out of messages, materials and targeted outreach.

### ***Phase I [DATE – DATE]***

Events Planned:

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Materials to be Developed:

- 

Media to be Explored:

- 

Any Other Planned Activities:

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### ***Phase II [DATE – DATE]***

Events Planned:

- 

Materials to be Developed:

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Media to be Explored:

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Any Other Planned Activities:

- 

### ***Phase III [DATE – DATE]***

Events Planned:

- 

Materials to be Developed:

- 

Media to be Explored:

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Any Other Planned Activities:

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### V. MEASURING YOUR IMPACT

As your college- and career-ready campaign progresses, you will want to measure exposure, awareness and understanding of your messages among your target audiences. You will want to know how deeply your reform agenda is penetrating and what kind of traction it is receiving. As with communications activities, the metrics you choose can range from no- to high-cost.

Tactics for measuring success include:

- Manual earned media tracker
- Professional earned media tracking system
- Web Presence and Campaign Effectiveness Tracker
- Survey of Intended Audience(s)

**Planned evaluative tactics:**

Tactic #1 \_\_\_\_\_

- Identified Inputs \_\_\_\_\_
- Identified Outcomes \_\_\_\_\_
- Cost \_\_\_\_\_

Tactic #2 \_\_\_\_\_

- Identified Inputs \_\_\_\_\_
- Identified Outcomes \_\_\_\_\_
- Cost \_\_\_\_\_

[See “Measuring a Communications Strategy’s Success” for more information]