



Quick Guide:
Outreach and Communications for



Spring, 2011





Introduction

Communications and outreach are essential to increasing public awareness, involving new voices and demonstrating transparency in your Heart & Soul Community Planning initiative. Using messages carefully framed to reach diverse audiences can have a surprising impact on how residents react to your efforts. Relevant language and effective outreach invite new discussions, relationships and discoveries.

Successful community project leaders are able to communicate with residents strategically, consistently, and inspirationally using the full range of communications tools available. They combine local media, networks and relationships to spread the word about the project. From snail mail and e-mail, local radio and the morning paper to Facebook and Twitter, different people rely on different methods to stay informed.

Getting Ready

Set Your Goals

One of the main goals of every Heart & Soul Community Planning project is to provide opportunities for diverse people to come together to discuss, deliberate and take action to protect and enhance those community values and aspirations that they have defined as important. Providing these opportunities is the first step, but you must then ensure that all community members are *aware* of the opportunity. To achieve awareness, you'll need to be deliberate and diligent about reaching out to all of the members of your community.

Create Your Identity

Once you've identified the overall goals of your Heart & Soul project, you'll want to come up with a project title and tagline or logo. Including this in all of your outreach efforts will help residents become more familiar with the project and encourage them to take notice when they see information in passing.

- Show your new logo to someone who doesn't know anything about the project, and ask if they can guess what the project is about based on the logo.
- Read your tagline to a kid. If they get it, you're good; if not, consider simplifying.





Know the Lingo

- **Target Audience:** The people whom you want to reach with your messages. It's possible (and ideal!) to have many target audiences, as long as you prioritize them. Sample target audiences may be:
 - o Homeowners and renters
 - o Business owners
 - o Volunteer and civic organizations
 - o Students and parents
 - o Retirees

Since Heart & Soul Community Planning focuses on increasing the number and diversity of participants in planning, pay careful attention to identifying people who are not typically part of the planning process and those who are particularly hard to reach. For more ideas on how to think about these different voices, check out our resource on Community Network Analysis (http://www.orton.org/resources/hs_handbook/network_analysis).

- **Message:** The essence of what you'll say to your audiences. Get creative and make them actionable; the best messages appeal to people's personal interests and give them something to *do* with their interest. Using verbs and short sentences can help:
 - o Join us for an event!
 - o Post a comment on our Facebook page!
 - o Vote on your priorities for the future!

- **Say what?** Remember to talk to people on their level. If they don't understand the technical terminology, adjust your explanation.
- **Why should I care?** It's more effective to consider how your project connects to what people already care about instead of telling people that they should care about.
- **Gone in 60 seconds.** Practice describing your work to other people in one minute or less. What is essential to your description? What words make people's eyes light up? What could be left out until a later conversation?

- **Channel:** Any method of reaching an audience. Some examples are:
 - o Local newspaper (articles, event calendars, editorials, letters to the editor)
 - o Local radio station
 - o Town or City website
 - o Social media sites & blogs (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.)





- o Newsletters (organizational, chamber of commerce, etc.)
- o Direct outreach (mailers, phone calls, door-to-door, etc.)
- o Promotional materials (posters, flyers or signs)

Making It Happen

Form Your Strategy

A good communications strategy links your high level goals with actionable tactics. The form it takes should reflect what's most useful to you, but should clearly establish:

*What you will say
To whom you will say it
What tools you will use to deliver it
How you will know that you're successful*

First, look back at your goals. You'll need to break them apart into concrete, specific and measurable objectives that will help you achieve your overarching ambitions. If your goal is to increase the diversity of participants in your project, for instance, you might decide that your objectives are to see a discernable increase in new voices at every event, build an email listserv of at least 20% of residents, and target a different audience for every event.

- **How do most people in your community come by information?** If everyone stops at the coffee shop in the morning, consider placing a large sign or poster there. If your community isn't particularly Internet-savvy, avoid placing crucial messages solely online.
- **Consider creative ways to reach your audiences.** For instance, are you trying to reach parents? Ask to make an announcement at a PTA event, or ask the school to include a flyer in the papers that go home with kids. Trying to reach teenagers? Get teens to create a super-cool, teens-only Facebook page that gives them an opportunity to lead and participate.
- **People can be channels.** Every community has a few people who always seem to know everything about everyone, or who provide invaluable access to different groups. Find those people, and enlist their help early.

Now, you can start to think about how you'll meet those objectives. As you drill down on each objective, ask yourself:

- Who is your target audience for this objective?
- What is the best ways to reach them?
- What messages will you use to inspire/motivate/engage them?
- What are your resources? Remember, resources can be time, skills and people as well as money.





- Who will provide the staff support for your communications work?

Always circle back after asking yourself those questions, and confirm that the overarching goal is clear. Repeat the process for each goal and objective you've set; you should end up with a list of audiences, channels, messages and resources necessary to achieve your goals.

- Be sure to consider what methods will reach **most** people versus what methods will reach **different** people. Since one of your goals is to engage new voices, you might need to make a targeted effort to reach those individuals. Ask yourself:
 - o Who will be the easiest to reach and how will we do it?
 - o Who will be the most difficult to reach and how will we do it?

Make an Action Plan

Once you have strategically addressed your goals and objectives, it's time to get down to making it happen, including developing a budget and timeline.

To develop a plan, ask yourself:

- Who is responsible for producing the content for each communications channel?
- What is the timeframe for production to make sure the content gets to the channel on time?
- How will you use each channel (e.g. for all event announcements, for project updates, for soliciting feedback, etc.)?
- Who is the contact person for each channel?
- How much does it cost to produce the content for each channel?

Your communications plan will be unique to your goals, channels and resources. You'll want to create a matrix that allows you to chart out the nuts and bolts of sending your messages out the door. Here's a sample to get you started:

Channel	Message	Audience	Contact Person	Production Person	Channel Deadline	Cost of Production	Evaluation Metric





Evaluate Your Success

By creating actionable messages, you'll be able to measure your success in terms of the number of people who take a particular action (e.g., the number of comments on the Facebook page, number of attendees at an event.). It's imperative, however, to keep your overall goal in mind and evaluate **which combination of channels generates the broadest level of community engagement.**

The best way to evaluate your outreach efforts is to ask a quick set of questions at your events as part of a feedback form. Asking these questions consistently will help you understand which target audiences you're reaching through each channel, and to assess whether you're meeting the goal of broad community engagement.

Here are some examples:

- How did you hear about this event?
- How old are you?
- In which neighborhood do you live?
- How long have you lived here?
- How would you describe your level of involvement with this project so far? (Response options: A lot, Some, Not much, A little bit, or I'm a first-timer.)

The true measure of success lies in combining the responses to these key questions. Let's say you host an event, and you learn that 85% of the people there heard about the event via a poster at the coffee shop, and they're all ages 50-65, live in a nice neighborhood, are longtime residents and have been very involved in the project so far. That tells us that you've got a very committed group of people representing a reasonably similar viewpoint. Every community effort needs this core of committed people.

If, however, you learn that 50% of people heard about the event via a sign at the entrance to the mobile home community, and your age groups, neighborhoods and level of involvement are more varied, you know that you're starting to cook with gas! The next time you plan an event, you might consider adjusting your communications efforts to support this change in representation.

- **'How did you hear about this event?'** is the million-dollar question. This will help you know which of your channels are reaching your audiences.
- **'How would you describe your level of involvement so far?'** is the second-most important question. This will help you understand whether you are reaching new voices through your efforts.

