



## Communications Planning

*If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail*

### **Why planning is important**

- Helps keep communication focused.
- Assures that all opportunities will be fully captured.
- Helps prevent unwanted surprises.

### **Thinking Strategically**

Communications planning should be undertaken with your core group as part of the larger strategic planning process. The core elements of communications planning are explained here.

- *Survey your potential audience and develop key messages.*

Research on how to best discuss increased funding for wildlife conservation can help ensure your communications efforts are successful.

The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and The Nature Conservancy have completed polling and developed messages for the Teaming with Wildlife Coalition at a national level. This research is available in the [Wildlife Action Plan Message Kit](#) at [www.teaming.com](http://www.teaming.com).

Polling specific to your state will help define the best messages, but may not be in your budget. The [Wildlife Action Plan Message Kit](#) contains a message triangle with the most important points to communicate about your wildlife action plan: the wildlife action plan will benefit both humans and wildlife, is an investment in future generations, and is a cost effective way to work together to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered.

- *Define your goals.*

Your goals may be as broad as support for implementing the wildlife action plans through increased state and federal funding for wildlife conservation, outdoor recreation, and conservation education or as specific as passing a particular piece of legislation or ballot initiative.

- *Define objectives that will help you reach your goals.*

Brainstorm what will help you reach your goal: for example, more coalition members, a greater public awareness of the wildlife action plan, speaking with key decision-makers. Work the list up into concrete and measurable objectives that dovetail with your goals.

The national objectives for the Teaming with Wildlife coalition are embedded in the [Teaming with Wildlife Timeline](#).

- *Define your target audience*

Your target audience should be the groups of people who will help you meet your objectives.

Look at your list of measurable communications objectives. Now think about who can make them happen: for example, coalition members; the general public; members of Congress. List them as distinct interest groups or by profession, age or geography. Think about what you want them to do and what will encourage them to do it.

In communicating your key messages, put yourself in the shoes of your target audience. Think about what you can say that will make them do what you want and how to position that message so that it is interesting and relevant to them.

By defining your target audience, you can begin to decide on the type of media you want to get and which reporters to contact.

- *Tools to reach your audience*

There are many ways to reach your audience. They include web pages, presentations at meetings, news releases, fact sheets, photos, newsletters, e-alerts, personal letters, field trips with wildlife biologists, TV coverage, etc. There is no need to reinvent the wheel here. The most successful PR events are old ideas with a new twist, for example a wildlife release event to show the successful recovery of a species once in trouble.

### **Creating a Press Plan**

If you decide that media coverage is the best way to reach your target audience, you may want to develop a press plan. Elements to include in a press plan are:

- **Goal**

List one goal you defined during your strategic thinking session.

- **Objective**

List the objectives that will help you meet the goal.

- **Target Audience**

List the audiences that will help you meet the goal.

- **Target Media**

Define the media and news outlets that will help you reach your audience. Consider where your audience lives and what type of media they read or watch. Once your list is complete, find the contact information for reporters and other communications professionals who will be interested in your story. One great resource for this is [www.bacons.com](http://www.bacons.com), though a paid membership is required.

Different reporters cover different types of stories. Some reporters are assigned to specific areas: wildlife features, hunting & fishing, or the outdoors. Others may know nothing of wildlife but write about environmental pollution—wildlife may be a new angle for writing about this topic.

- **Theme, Hook, Angle**

The theme is what you want to say. The hook is that juicy bit of news that keeps people reading- often you can tie your news in to a larger story that is already getting lots of coverage. The angle is how you shape the news to your target audience.

Decide what will resonate with your audience and motivate them to take the actions you desire. Look at the key messages you wish to convey and be sure to include them in your press release and any follow up interviews. Consistent messaging—wide exposure with the same clearly communicated messages—is how the public will begin to remember your state wildlife action plan and Teaming with Wildlife.

- **Next Steps**

Taking into account budget and timing, decide who will do the work. This person should be well-versed in the messages and not use technical jargon when discussing the wildlife action plan. The time involved will depend on whether the news requires a large-scale press event vs. a simple press release.

### **Track & Communicate your Success**

Tracking and communicating your press will help energize your coalition. It will also help you assess how effective your communications efforts are.

- Keep and share clippings with the coalition.
- Keep photos and video recordings of any Teaming with Wildlife events.

- Look at the press clippings that mention your organization. Do they put across the messages you want? Are they in papers and magazines which are read by the target audiences you identified earlier? Think about how contact with journalists could be improved.

### **Tried and True Communications Concepts**

- Tie your news to a bigger story
- Consistent messaging—wide exposure with the same clearly focused messages.
- Keep track of media interests—get to know reporters and the types of stories they work on.

### **The Importance of Internal Communication**

- Keep your key communicators up-to-date regularly. Make sure they are among the first to know of any new developments.
- Keep your core group informed. It's demoralizing to hear about what's happening from someone outside the coalition.
- Solicit ideas that will strengthen what you want to do.
- Encourage discussion and comments throughout the entire process. The more people who own the plan, the better.
- Check if your core group is using the same definition when describing Teaming with Wildlife to the outside world. Make sure that they know about the communications plan and how their work contributes to it. Find out their ideas for how to improve communications.