

GRANTEE COMMUNICATIONS KIT
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PAL
PEOPLE AND LAND

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Crafting a Communications Strategy 3

The Words We Use 7

Getting the Message Out: Pathways to the Public . . . 9

Working with the Media 9

Earning Coverage in the Editorial Section . . . 10

Supporting Your Earned Media Efforts 11

Developing a Plan That Works for You 13

Writing for the Media 15

Media Releases 15

Media Advisories 16

Template and Example 17, 18





INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on receiving a People and Land (PAL) grant—you are taking an important step forward in promoting the land-use discussion.

To successfully accomplish your mission, effective communication is critical. This communications kit is designed to save you time and resources, and it will help you make the most of your grant funding.

This kit will help you:

- Clarify goals and objectives, and develop a plan of action
- Better understand your target audiences
- Speak and write in terms people can relate to
- Make the most of media opportunities
- Evaluate the success of your initiative

Special thanks to the Biodiversity Project, a national environmental nonprofit group, which allowed PAL to use parts of its message kit, “Getting on Message: Making the Biodiversity-Sprawl Connection,” to develop PAL grantee communication guidelines. The Biodiversity Project’s mission is to advocate for biodiversity through design and implementation of innovative communication strategies that build and motivate a broad constituency that protects biodiversity. Visit www.biodiversityproject.org for more information.

PAL also extends gratitude to Food Routes Network, which allowed PAL to use sections of its book, “*Where Does Your Food Come From? Recipes for Communicating Effectively about American Agriculture.*” Food Routes Network is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing strategic communications and evaluation tools and information to on-the-ground advocates who are working to build awareness of and support for sustainable farming and local food systems. To learn more, visit www.foodroutes.org.



CRAFTING A COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Crafting a communications strategy around an issue requires patience, discipline, and some creative thinking. The challenge is to convey the seriousness of the issue without overwhelming your audience with too many facts or a sense of despair. There are a number of basic steps that should be completed before a phrase is uttered or a single pamphlet is distributed.

1. MAKE A PLAN

No communication should take place without a well-thought-out plan. It will guide you through your program and help you focus on your desired outcome. When developing an initiative, keep in mind a four-step process: research, planning, action, and evaluation. Research helps you learn where you've been and where you need to go. Planning lets you map out how you're going to get there. Action is implementing the plan, and evaluation lets you see if you arrived successfully.

A typical communications plan includes an overview of the initiative; research (both planned and already completed); communication goals, objectives, strategies and tactics; audience identification and rationale; messages; and evaluation steps. A customizable outline is included in this handbook (see page 13).

2. SET YOUR GOALS

Before you are ready to write a message, you need to define what you are hoping to accomplish. Be it broad-based education, public policy change, fund-raising or changing the behavior of the public, a communications effort has a better chance of being successful if you:

- Are clear and specific about your goals
- Know what you are trying to accomplish within a given timeframe
- Set objectives that can be measured
- Tie into the People and Land Strategic Plan

3. IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE

Your goal should help you determine with whom you must communicate to accomplish the task. Sometimes you need to reach multiple audiences. For example, if your goal is to shape public policy, you probably have three audiences: voters, key constituents, and decision makers. Some communication efforts may need to target women voters, or parents of young children, or seniors; other efforts may be more focused on influential civic leaders or the media.

It is sometimes helpful to determine whether your audiences are internal or external to your organization. Tactics to reach these people will likely be very different. Make sure you have a rationale for targeting each audience that ties into not only your communication goals, but your overall strategic plan for the initiative you're promoting.

4. DO YOUR RESEARCH: LISTEN TO AND LEARN ABOUT YOUR AUDIENCE

Before deciding what to communicate to your audience, it is extremely helpful to step back and listen to the concerns of those you want to reach. The learning process can be as informal as having conversations with members of your audience to gain a more in-depth understanding of their feelings and beliefs. Or, if resources permit, public opinion research, conducted by an experienced professional, can be a valuable tool. This is a more scientific form of listening to audiences to help determine the most appealing messages and identify key segments of the public (sympathizers, opponents, and those in the middle).



5. MORE RESEARCH: IDENTIFY VALUES AND CONCERNS

As you investigate your audience, listen for the core values its members bring to the issues at hand. Core values are those deeply held beliefs that form the foundation of attitudes and behaviors. In a 1996 Biodiversity Survey, when people were asked to choose their most important personal reason to care about protecting the environment, three values were the most widely held:

- A desire for one's family to enjoy a healthy environment
- Responsibility to future generations
- Nature is God's creation

In addition to values—the lasting framework through which people view particular issues—it is important to be aware of the more immediate concerns an audience brings to the issue: current or chronic worries people have about their own or their families' health, economic status, quality of life, and the future. What is imminent or significant about the issue's impact on the audience that will make it appear on their radar screen?

For example, in past surveys by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Michigan constituents have identified crime, traffic increase, overdevelopment, education, quality of life, and government's dealing with land use as key concerns.

“In the information age, no organization of any significant size or purpose should lack an active communications plan. The private sector has known this for years, saturating society with advertising and public relations campaigns to bring in customers, improve its market share and boost sales. But in the nonprofit sector, where the bottom line is harder to measure, the need for good public communication is often sidelined or neglected as incidental to the greater cause.” Kathy Bonk, Henry Griggs, and Emily Tynes, *Strategic Communications for Nonprofits*.

6. KEEP UP THE RESEARCH: DO YOUR HOMEWORK ON ISSUES

Once you have identified your communication goals and audience, it is important to determine the facts and figures that best fit with your message. At the initial stages, compile as much relevant information as you can, triple-check it for accuracy and hone it to the essentials that will have the greatest impact on your audience(s). Developing fact sheets is an excellent way to identify the most convincing and relevant pieces of information. A fact sheet is also handy for dealing with the media and for helping your spokespeople stay on message when they talk to the public.

7. DEVELOP YOUR MESSAGE

Your message is a paragraph that provides the basic template for all your specific communications. Your message paragraph should be clear, compelling, and short, and it should do three basic things:

- Give your audience a reason to care about your issue by appealing to values.
- Describe a threat and who is responsible for the problem.
- Provide a solution. Describe what action will address the need and the threat. Whenever possible, give people something to do—an action that will allow them to respond to the threat.





A slogan and a sound bite can easily be lifted from your message. A slogan might be: “Development is forever.” A sound bite might be: “We must protect our families’ quality of life. If Smith Marsh is destroyed, it will be gone forever.” These are shorthand applications of your message that can be useful as taglines in communications, but they are not a substitute for a thoughtful, well-constructed message paragraph.

8. USE LANGUAGE THAT SPEAKS TO YOUR AUDIENCE

Sometimes what we say is not what our audience hears, because different audiences bring different perspectives on issues. For instance, a logger in the Pacific Northwest may have a different attitude toward “government regulation” than does a suburban mom in New Jersey. No one set of “preferred” words or phrases will be appropriate for all circumstances. Be sensitive to your audience.

9. BE READY WITH ANECDOTES

Having a human story that illustrates and amplifies your message is absolutely critical to a successful communications effort. Often the side that first presents the most compelling human story wins, because the other side never recovers. It is essential that the human story be lined up before you begin communicating.

10. USE IMAGES

Pictures tell a story, evoke emotions, and appeal to values. They need to be front and center of a communications effort, and they should be chosen very carefully. An image that is too harsh may offend or be seen as extreme. One that evokes only beauty may send a message that all is well and no action is needed. Images should reflect the message, which will include a positive appeal to values (via images of what is worth protecting) and a description of the problem (via disturbing images).

11. WHEN USING FACTS, BE SPECIFIC

Your message and images must be backed by specific facts. Journalists and the public have become increasingly skeptical of information presented by advocates, so facts should be specific, not general, in order to be credible. For example, it is better to provide the number of acres of forest that will be lost due to a certain action by government or industry, than simply to say “vast amounts of forest.” Simplify statistics; say “three out of four” instead of “75 percent.” Use facts that relate to people’s daily lives or experience, such as “the water we drink every day” or “the air our children breathe.”

12. REPEAT! REPEAT! REPEAT!

Once a message is decided upon, make it a consistent mantra that is repeated over and again. Do not assume anyone has heard the message, even if you are quoted in the media two or three times. If your core message is different from one week to the next, your audience will not comprehend any one thing. A diversity of messages results in a lack of clarity. Instead, you should decide on the most effective message and repeat it until it makes you crazy.

13. CHOOSE APPROPRIATE MESSENGERS

Your choice of a messenger for a communications effort must depend on the message you want to convey and the audience who will receive it. One of the biggest mistakes an organization can make is to decide on a messenger before it knows the audience and message for communication. Messages are typically most credible when they come from people affected by an issue or problem, like a landowner or conservation officer.



The credibility of the messenger is just as important as the message itself; choose wisely. For example, environmental organizations supporting tougher EPA clean air standards to curb smog and ozone worked with physicians and asthma sufferers. Doctors and patients were the best messengers for a story about health threats.

14. KNOW THE OPPOSITION

The best-laid communications strategy can go awry if it does not take into account the opposition's messages. Anticipating how the opposition will attempt to counter your campaign and define its side of the issue puts you one step ahead and could be decisive. Knowing your opposition will allow you to be ready with a defense, or raise the issue first and defuse any attacks.

15. EVALUATE YOUR RESULTS

In order to determine if PAL's objectives were met, your results must be measured. PAL is already committed to evaluating its activities as a whole, but communication objectives require their own vigilance. The following measurement strategies are recommended:

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MEDIA COVERAGE

In addition to counting clips of print and broadcast coverage (quantitative), careful attention should be paid to the content of each clip (qualitative). Were your messages prominent? Were your goals communicated clearly and properly? Were the media outlets in which the coverage occurred appropriate for your target audiences?

ATTENDANCE AT ROUNDTABLES, EVENTS

Goals for number of participants in each PAL-related event should be set as a benchmark for evaluation. Whether the goal is exceeded or not, you should determine why and identify opportunities for enhancement the next time around.

Your organization should also analyze the makeup of attendees to determine if they were members of target audiences.

ONGOING SURVEYS OF TARGET AUDIENCES

Participants in your events should be surveyed to determine their satisfaction with the event. Did it meet their expectations? Did they understand the mission? Were they moved to any kind of action? How did they hear about the program? Basic, one-page survey forms can be very useful in planning future programs, both for PAL and your organization.



RESOURCES

Dempsey, Dave. *Life. Nature. The Public. Making the Connection*. Madison, WI: Biodiversity Project, 1999.

Denman, S., Safe Energy Communication Council. Presentation at seven regional message development workshops conducted for the Biodiversity Project. May 1996 through June 1997.

Market Strategies Inc. Michigan Land Use Statewide Survey. 1999.

Russonello, J., Belden & Russonello. Presentation at seven regional message development workshops conducted for the Biodiversity Project. May 1996 through June 1997.

Starrett, Ben, Funder's Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities. Communications Summary Paper. 2001.

THE WORDS WE USE

Using consistent language helps us advance a consistent message on land use that will resonate with the public and avoid confusion. For example, several terms the land-use community uses tend to have negative connotations for the public, such as “density” and “cluster development.” We will reach more people if we use more accessible language for these critical concepts.

The following recommendations were initially developed by the communications team of Smart Growth America and are based on extensive public opinion research. People and Land has modified a selection of the text to incorporate its own terminology of land use.

TALK ABOUT...	AVOID...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land use • Responsible land use • Planning for better growth • Better planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The term “land use” by itself, without a label • Slowing development • Slowing growth • Stopping sprawl
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convenient • Walkable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Density • Cluster development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities with variety and opportunity • A blend of shops and housing • Work and shop where you live • Convenient, family-oriented communities • Specific regional examples: e.g., Annapolis, Maryland • Specific characteristics of the community being targeted • Neighborhoods with sidewalks and porches • What small towns used to be like 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed-use development • Traditional (this word means different things to different people) • Neo-traditional development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zones for green space/open space—describe the payoff, not the restriction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban growth boundaries

WORDS THAT WORK IN OUR FAVOR

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Balance | Heritage |
| Community | Neighborhood |
| Green space or open space | Productive farmland |

ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE TIPS

- While you want the public to become familiar with the term, land use is still unclear and means conflicting things to people. Define it in manageable terms, talking about one issue at a time. Include other words in your definition that the public might be familiar with, such as sprawling development and open-space development.
- Recognize that to most of your audience, growth is good. You need to talk about what's bad about out-of-control, poorly planned growth, and what's good about smart or sensible growth.
- Avoid jargon, such as infill, brownfield, mixed-use or conservation easements.
- Green space and open space are both good terms that resonate equally well with the public.
- Better land use is not a clear or positive term for many people. It can sound rather technical and bureaucratic and does not necessarily conjure up images of what people want.
- Regulation implies restriction and a loss of rights. Instead, it may be better to focus on what will be gained by a particular regulation.
- The term “subsidy” is not always negative. People may support subsidies that promote the kind of development they want.

RESOURCES

Belden, Russonello & Stewart. *Choices Between Asphalt and Nature: Americans Discuss Sprawl: Analysis of 20 Focus Groups Across the U.S.* Washington, D.C.: Belden, Russonello & Stewart (for the Biodiversity Project and The Nature Conservancy), February 1998.

Belden, Russonello & Stewart. *Personal Choices and Public Priorities: Understanding Americans' Attitudes Toward Suburban Sprawl.* Washington, D.C.: Belden, Russonello & Stewart (for the National Trust for Historic Preservation), August 1999.

Market Strategies Inc. Michigan Land Use Statewide Survey. 1999.

National Smart Growth Coalition Communications Team Meeting. Convened by the National Smart Growth Coalition and the Biodiversity Project, Washington, D.C., June 26, 2000.

Starrett, Ben, Funder's Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities. Communications Summary Paper. 2001.



GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT: PATHWAYS TO THE PUBLIC



There is more than one way to reach any given audience, and a successful communications initiative usually involves multiple methods of outreach.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

To reach your target audience, you'll want to target the media contacts you have, and think strategically about how to approach them. Start by identifying the journalists you want to reach, making sure the story you're pitching is newsworthy, and preparing yourself with professional communication materials.

CREATING MEDIA LISTS

The best way to begin developing a list of media contacts is to pay attention to who reports on issues relevant to yours. Then, you can supplement that list using an online media directory such as Bacon's (www.bacons.com). Most important, do your homework to get the correct contact information, and keep your media lists up-to-date.

Not every release you write should go to every contact on your media list. Think strategically about who would be interested in covering your story, and think creatively about how your story might be approached. For example, along with pitching a local agricultural reporter about your story, think about how the topic might be relevant to a business audience and pitch it to the business editor.

FIRST CONTACT: GETTING TO KNOW THE MEDIA

Ideally, you should introduce yourself to reporters covering your issues before you need to pitch to them. Send them background information, such as a media kit or fact sheet, to orient them to who you are and what your organization is doing. You may not hear back from journalists when they receive your kit, but in most cases, your information will be kept on file for later reference. Later, when you contact journalists to pitch a story, remind them of the kit you sent and mention its useful information.

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE NEWS TO SHARE

Before you start writing a press release, and before you pitch an idea to a journalist, ask yourself if your story fulfills at least three of the following:

- Something new, that no one has ever said or heard before
- Something timely—yesterday's news is old news
- Something that affects a large number of people
- Something visual (for television or a photo opportunity)
- Something that centers around an event or happening
- Something with a human interest angle
- Something that is a variation of a theme already receiving media attention
- Something unusual or ironic
- Something that represents a threat or danger to the community
- Something that involves a public figure, a celebrity or a well-known organization.

PITCHING YOUR STORY

Most reporters have personal preferences for how they like to be contacted when you are pitching a story. As you talk to reporters, ask them whether they prefer to receive information via mail, fax, e-mail, or phone.

- Make sure you have a news release or media advisory on hand before you call them. Most reporters need to check with colleagues and editors before working on an assignment, and it's difficult to "sell" an idea internally without something in writing.

- Be available to reporters when you send information. If you send out a press release, you should be available to take calls from reporters on the date of the release and the following couple of days.
- As a rule, call reporters by their first names and relate to them as peers (unless you are dealing with someone who is renowned in some way). Do not be intimidated by reporters.
- Always be completely honest. Know your facts and stick to them. If you don't know the answer to a question, admit it. Tell the reporter you will find the answer and call him or her back. Find out the reporter's deadline, and make sure to call back within that time frame.
- When being interviewed, avoid saying, "no comment." You can explain confidentiality issues or refer the reporter to another spokesperson, if appropriate.
- Do not talk "off the record." There is no such thing.
- Feel free to make friends with reporters, but always honor their professionalism first. Never take advantage of a friendship by asking them to write a story as a "favor."
- Always remember to thank reporters when they write a story on your organization or quote you in an article.

EARNING COVERAGE IN THE EDITORIAL SECTION

One of the most effective ways to educate the public about land use and agricultural issues is by engaging the editorial section of your local newspaper. Editorials, columns, and "op-eds" that appear in the local paper are likely to be read by most of your key audiences.

EDITORIAL BOARD VISITS

Every newspaper has an editorial board that convenes to decide the publication's position on issues of the day. This board, which may consist of editorial writers, editors, and key reporters, regularly invites issue experts, citizen groups, and community organizations to educate its members on issues of importance to the community. To arrange an editorial board meeting, contact the editorial page editor by phone to explain the newsworthy topic you'd like to discuss, and then try to schedule a meeting. The editor might set up a meeting right away or ask for more information. When you go to the meeting, take your best spokesperson, along with anyone else who will speak positively and knowledgeably to the importance of your issue. Also bring along pertinent background information to leave behind.

WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Don't wait for local reporters to feature your issue in a story or column. Look for newspaper articles that relate to your issues, and then write a letter to the editor in response. Letters should be short, timely, and to the point. Enhance your letter by including relevant facts and statistics. Check out the "letters to the editor" section of your local newspapers to get a sense for what kinds of letters are published.

COMPOSE YOUR OWN COLUMN: OP-EDS

You can start the discussion about issues related to land use issues by writing an op-ed (opposite the editorial page) for one of your local papers. An op-ed can reintroduce the issues to the community and demonstrate the important work your organization is doing, as well as what you are trying to accomplish. Requirements vary from paper to paper, so before you start writing, check with the op-ed editor for interest in your subject and length requirements.

SUPPORTING YOUR EARNED MEDIA EFFORTS

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

PSAs look like paid advertisements and commercials, but in this case, the media outlet donates the time or space to help organizations spread socially relevant messages.

If they are created effectively and with your audience in mind, PSAs can be great message carriers. You can produce and design the PSA yourself, but if you have no experience, you should seek the advice of a professional who specializes in PSAs. Even though the time or space is donated, you do not want to waste it by producing an ad that is ineffective or irrelevant to your audience.

The downside of PSAs is that competition for unpaid advertising space can be fierce. Most outlets have a PSA director who chooses and places PSAs, and some smaller outlets use their advertising director for this role. Your best bet is to make your appeal in person; however, if it is not possible to make personal calls, send the PSAs with a cover letter to the contact person emphasizing why your messages are important. Then follow up with a phone call.

PSAs can be printed on grocery bags, posted on neighborhood bulletin boards, placed in theater playbills, and shown at movie theaters, just to name a few options. Think creatively about where you can place your message.

BROCHURES AND SUPPORT MATERIALS

Brochures and support materials need to be targeted to specific audiences with a goal or purpose in mind.

Consider these tips for writing great brochures:

- Explain your issue in simple, compelling terms. Don't assume your audience knows all the acronyms, jargon, and history.
- Keep your major messages in front of you while you write the brochure. The brochure should use and support these messages, as should all of your written materials.
- Use specific facts, figures, and statistics to support your arguments, but be sure to cite your sources. Charts and graphs can help convey information quickly in a brochure.
- Use photographs or drawings of people to put a human face on your issue.
- Give specific examples of what your target audience (zoning officials, local residents, etc.) can do to take action.
- Be sure to include ways in which people can make a donation or become involved. Include a form for donors to request more information.
- Always include your contact information: mailing address, phone number, e-mail and Web site addresses.
- Remember that less is more. Writing should be tight and to the point.
- A clean, uncluttered layout makes information easy to find. White space, rules, and careful use of color make organization easy.
- Don't fully justify text. Fully justifying your text can lead to awkward spacing problems. Spaces between words may be too big, and other lines may be too scrunched.
- Use italics sparingly—for book/magazine titles and occasional emphasis *only*.

- Repeating elements and colors adds continuity to a design, but don't go overboard. Too many art elements can interfere with the text.
- Use sidebars and pull quotes to emphasize important information.
- Get more color for your printing dollar. Tints of color and screens of black can fool the eye into seeing more than two colors.
- U.S. Postal Service regulations specify that most mailing pieces over 5 inches and under 6½ inches on the horizontal address length, and under 3 ounces in weight, get the same rate as normal business mail.

BE CREATIVE IN DISTRIBUTING MATERIALS

Think about when and where you want to distribute your brochure. We have all been at public events where people just hand out brochures—but how many times have you actually kept and read them? Distribute brochures and other materials where you have a captive audience; for example, before a concert or lecture.

ORGANIZING

No news coverage will replace networks of people who understand the issue and the decision making process and are actively involved. The fundamental statement on organizing is attributed to Cesar Chavez, but every good organizer knows it: first you talk to one person; then you talk to another person; then you talk to another, and so on.

The strategy is to build local organization, which fosters power and influence at the community level. Building organization is critical, because it develops relationships. A good organizer not only introduces new information, but also cultivates knowledge and skills in the local political process, access to decision making arenas, and a sense of shared ownership in the decisions.

OTHER MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

There are all kinds of other ways to reach your target audiences besides the tactics outlined here—public speaking engagements, community presentations, direct mail letters and newsletters, listservs, Web sites, and others. We encourage you to think creatively about how to communicate about your PAL grant. Draw on your strengths, learn about what has worked well for other grantees, and challenge yourself!



DEVELOPING A PLAN THAT WORKS FOR YOU

People and Land (PAL) is requiring its grantees to communicate their results to both PAL and the grantee's target audiences. PAL believes this communication will be most effective if planned and managed as part of the grantee's overall initiative.

The following outline is meant to guide each PAL grantee's communications planning process. It is written from the grantee's perspective and asks basic strategic questions that should be answered. Feel free to modify the plan outline with content you feel is more closely aligned with your organization; however, PAL strongly suggests grantees use this outline as a foundation for consistency.

I. OVERVIEW/SITUATION ANALYSIS

- A. Who we are and what we're doing
- B. How we're connected to PAL
- C. Other funders/supporters
- D. Define need for communication
- E. Mission/Outcome statement

II. COMMUNICATION GOALS

- A. What is our overall desired outcome?
- B. Goals are not usually measurable (i.e. quantifiable); objectives are (see Objectives section of outline).
- C. Are we in alignment with the PAL Strategic Plan?

III. AUDIENCES

- A. Who are we talking to?
 - 1. Internal: funders, PAL Advisory Group, employees, board of directors, etc.
 - 2. External: media, policymakers (legislators, state agencies and staffers, local government leaders)
- B. Why are we talking to them (rationale for each audience)?

IV. RESEARCH

- A. What do we need to know to construct messages, set goals, etc.?
 - 1. How much does our audience know about our subject matter or our organization?
 - 2. How do they define land use?
 - 3. Have they participated in similar initiatives in the past?
 - 4. Who are our competitors?
- B. Primary
 - 1. Focus groups, surveys, one-on-one interviews
- C. Secondary
 - 1. Review of articles, other primary research, past initiatives (included in the Grantee Communications Kit)

V. MESSAGES

- A. Now that we've done our research, what do we want to say?
- B. Is it different for each audience?



VI. OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES (BY AUDIENCE)

A. Measurable objectives (quantifiable)

1. Include specific outcome desired, audience from whom it is desired, degree of change and the timeline in which this outcome will be achieved.
2. For example: Recruit 200 legislators and/or their staffers (degree of change, audience) to attend annual environmental conference in July (desired outcome and timeline for achievement).

B. Strategies

1. State how objectives will be achieved.
2. For example: Develop relationships with legislative staffers.

VII. TACTICS (BY AUDIENCE)

A. Media relations, roundtables, workshops, etc.

B. Timetables, responsibility

VIII. EVALUATION

A. Measurement of communication objectives

1. Content analysis of media coverage
2. Attendance at roundtables, workshops
3. Evaluations by program participants



WRITING FOR THE MEDIA

MEDIA RELEASES

Media releases (also called press releases or news releases) are an important vehicle for communicating with media outlets. Media releases are written:

- To issue a statement or take a stand on an issue that is already in the news
- To provide background information or to supplement late-breaking news
- To announce other news, such as the findings of a study, results of a poll, recommendations in a report, or a special event

Media releases always include who, what, when, where, and why, and should be no longer than one or two pages. If you need to, supplement releases with a fact sheet—a one-page bulleted document explaining the background on the issue or event.


FORMAT AND STYLE

You have a better chance of getting your release read by the media if it is formatted and written properly.

See media release template on page 17.

- Use your organization's letterhead.
- List a contact person and his or her office and home phone numbers in the upper right corner of the page.
- Write "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" in the upper left corner of the page.
- Title the release in 10 words or less.
- Summarize the most important point in the first sentence—show why your story is timely, relevant, and worth reading.

- Use the inverted pyramid to write your release (see page 16).
- Write in the active voice and use short sentences and paragraphs.
- Use quotes to make an emotional point or state an opinion.
- Include background information about your organization in the last paragraph. This is known as a boilerplate; it may include the major purpose of your organization, campaigns, membership size, and nonprofit status.
- Be brief—one to two pages.
- Type "MORE" at the bottom of every page if your release is longer than one page. Type "###" at the end of the final page.
- Proofread your release. There should be no typos or misspellings; also double-check to make sure names, dates, places, numbers, and quotes are accurate.



LEAD
MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION
Who, What, When, Where, and Why

- BODY**
- Elaborates on Lead
 - Quotes
 - Background Information

**Least Important
Information
and
Boilerplate**

MEDIA ADVISORIES

A media advisory is like a short news release, but rather than provide an entire news story, the media advisory is used to alert the media of an event or photo opportunity. A media advisory clearly states who, what, when, where, and why, and enough information to tell reporters where they should go and whom they should call if they want to cover the story. The same rules of format for releases apply to advisories; however, an advisory is one page only.

See example media advisory on page 18.

MEDIA KITS

The purpose of a media kit (also called a backgrounder kit) is to help give a reporter background information and context for doing a story about your project or issue. You should always have media kits on hand for press conferences, media interviews, and events.

A media kit can be as simple as a two-pocket folder with your organization's logo on it, containing:

- A history of the issue or project you're describing.
- A brief backgrounder about your organization.
- Facts and figures about the issue or project, including reliable statistics and other "hard" facts.
- References to other sources of information about your issue.
- Past news clippings or press releases related to your issue in your community and nationally.
- Contact information for your organization and short bios of staff members who can be contacted as "experts" for comment.
- Photographs, charts, and other graphics to help demonstrate your points.

Since facts and trends are constantly changing, update your kit at least once a year.

MEDIA RELEASE TEMPLATE

[Organization Logo]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**CONTACT: XXXXXXXXXX
555-555-5555**

[Name of Organization] Receives \$00,000 Grant to Promote [Issue] in [County]

DATE—CITY, MI—[Name of Organization] was recently awarded \$00,000 to [brief description of project goal], by People and Land, a funding source for organizations advocating land-use education and decision making in Michigan.

[Quote from executive director or project manager about the importance of your project, the positive outcomes expected, and/or how your grant ties in to the overall mission of PAL]

[One or two paragraph(s) summarizing your project and its background]

More information about [name of project] is available at [Web site or phone number].

[Organizational boilerplate]

The mission of PAL is to enable people to live in diverse, healthy communities that are environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and socially equitable. People and Land is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and administered by Public Sector Consultants (PSC), a Lansing-based public policy research firm. The PAL Advisory Group is comprised of representatives from several statewide business, environmental, and community organizations. More information about PAL is available at www.peopleandland.org.

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EXAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY



Media Advisory

“Growth Management, Urban Equity, and Land Protection”

- WHEN:** Wednesday, October 3, at 10 a.m.
- WHERE:** Bengel Wildlife Center in Bath, Michigan
- WHO:** People and Land (PAL)
and the Michigan Land Use Funders (MLUF)
- WHAT:** This is a statewide land-use networking conference to promote discussion among nonprofit leaders about land-use reform, farmland protection, urban revitalization and related issues.

Panelists at the conference include:
Jim Barrett, Michigan Chamber of Commerce
Executive Director
Dr. David Skole, Michigan Land Resource
Project Researcher
Bill Rustem, PAL Project Manager and
Senior Vice President of Public Sector Consultants
Pat Noonan, CEO of the Conservation Fund

The program will last until 3:15 p.m., with a legislative reception at the Lansing City Club from 3:30-5:30 p.m.

Lunch is included. Please RSVP to Jennifer Wolfin at 800-825-7223.

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Contacts:

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