

REGIONAL COMMUNICATION PLANS

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A. Purpose

This procedure provides guidance to the Region III staff on the development of Regional Communication Plans. This major revision incorporates updates to communication plan guidance issued by OEDO and references an internal NRC website devoted to the development of communication plans.

B. References

NRC Communications Plan Guidance is available at the NRC internal website on Communications: <http://www.Internal.NRC.Gov/Communications>

C. Discussion

Developing and implementing Communication Plans for projects in which stakeholder participation is anticipated and desired is an important means by which the NRC will reach the agency's goal of increasing public confidence. The scope and depth of each communication plan may vary in accordance with its subject, audience, and purpose.

One mechanism for obtaining feedback regarding draft communications plans from communications experts in the NRC is to submit plans for informal review and comment through the following internal NRC website:

http://www.internal.nrc.gov/communications/comm_tools/input.cfm

D. Definitions

1. Types of Communications Plans include Fast Breaking; Limited and Full. See http://www.internal.nrc.gov/communications/comm_tools/guidance.html# for details and examples:

NOTE: The current Crisis Communications Plan, which can be used to guide communications with the public during emergencies involving an NRC-licensed facility that require a coordinated Federal, State, and local response, can be found at:

http://www.internal.nrc.gov/communications/plans/active/Crisis_Communication_Plan.pdf

- a. Fast-breaking communication plans are a response to something that has just occurred or that is expected to occur soon. The emphasis on a fast-breaking plan is speed, so its contents are minimal and focused primarily on how the NRC will respond to questions from the media, public and Congress. A fast-breaking

plan usually consists of only key messages, a short background statement, and FAQ's. Concurrence of fast-breaking plans must be expedited.

- b. Limited communication plans are the type most often developed in Region III. These meet the criteria of a plan but in most cases do not require extensive coordination between offices and have a relatively short lead-time of three months or less. These limited communication plans are typically just a few pages long and may not need all elements of the template (enclosure 1).
 - c. Full communication plans are reserved for situations where there is a long lead time with multiple occasions for public/stakeholder interaction and in which coordination between offices is extensive. These plans often take many months to develop and many more to implement. Full communication plans are more likely to include all the elements in the template and to have longer, more complete background information.
2. Fast-Breaking and Limited communications plan elements are Goals; Key Messages/Talking Points; Background; and Questions and Answers (Q's&A's). For additional guidance, see http://www.internal.nrc.gov/communications/comm_tools/guidance.html#c
- a. Goals: The goal of every communication plan is essentially "to outline the strategy we will use to communicate (subject) to (audience)." Specific Goals can be articulated as well, such as "brief the Anytown Community Group on tritium Fact Sheets and related EPA information available."
 - b. Key Messages/Talking Points: A short list (three or four) main points, consistent with the Plan Goal(s), you want to communicate about your program or event to all your stakeholders, including the public, licensees, and the NRC staff. Make each key message a few sentences at most, and in plain language appropriate to the audience.
 - c. Background: A brief explanation and history of the program, event, or issue, as well as the reason for the communication plan. The background should contain enough detail to quickly orient a reader who is unfamiliar with the topic.
 - d. List of Q's&A's: Answers to a set of questions that are likely to arise that the staff answering the questions might need. The Q's&A's should be developed with the assistance of OPA and distributed to all NRC staff who may have to respond to inquiries on the specific project or event.
3. In addition to Goals, Key Messages/Talking Points, Background, and Qs and As, the following elements are generally part of a Full communication plan, although they may be considered for Limited or Fast-Breaking plans as well:
- a. Audience: Develop a list of internal and external stakeholders who will have some involvement or interest in your project, program, or event. The list of stakeholders should be as specific as possible and may include stakeholders' contact information.
 - b. Communication Team: A list of staff responsible for communication activities that

will prepare and maintain the communication tool once you confirm their participation. The communication team should consist only of the primary communicators.

- c. **Communication Tools:** Decide upon and document which tools will best communicate the intended message. The tool or tools that you select will be dependent on the message, the audience, and the resources available.
 - d. **Timeline:** A timeline is a good way to establish the sequence of communication actions and is necessary only when staff is planning proactive communication activities (as opposed to merely being reactive). Keep a list of all communications activities, including the dates they are planned for completion or have been completed. Remember that timelines should be kept up to date, so if plans change as time progresses, minor revisions should be completed.
4. **Communication Plan Close Out:** Once all the communication plan goals/objectives and planned activities have been completed, a plan can be retired.

E. Organizational Responsibilities

1. **Division Director:**

- a. Determines which issues or projects merit the development of a communication plan.
- b. Assigns a Branch Chief/Communications Team Leader to develop a plan.
- c. Approves communication plans prior to execution.
- d. Approves close out of communication plans.

2. **Branch Chief/Communications Team Leader:**

- a. Oversees development of communication plans and determines the appropriate level of internal coordination, review, and concurrence in consultation with the Public Affairs Officer and Regional State Liaison Officer.
- b. Ensures execution of communication plans and coordinates subsequent revisions or updates to keep the plan current until closed out.
- c. Recommends closure of communications plans to the Division Director upon completion.

3. **Public Affairs Officer:**

- a. Advises regarding plan content and plain language.
- b. Advises regarding external, non-governmental audiences that should be included in the plan's execution (e.g., citizen's groups, non-governmental organizations, media outlets)

4. **Regional State Liaison Officer:**

- a. Advises regarding the level of coordination necessary with the Office of Congressional Affairs, the Office of the Executive Director for Operations, and other NRC Offices.
- b. Advises regarding external, government stakeholders that should be included in the plan's execution (e.g., Tribal, State, and local government officials, other Federal agencies, etc.).

F. Implementation

1. Upon recommendation or his or her own initiative, the responsible Division Director will decide whether development of a Communication Plan is needed based on the ongoing and future activities within each division. At the time of assignment, the Division Director will determine whether the communication plan is Fast-Breaking, Limited, or Full.
 - a. For a Full communications plan, the Division Director will, in coordination with the appropriate management counterparts, consider establishing a formal Communications Team and Communications Team Leader to oversee development and execution of the plan in an efficient and consistent manner.
 - b. For a Limited or Fast-Breaking plan, the Division Director will assign a Branch Chief to oversee its development and execution.

NOTE: Formal Communications Teams and Team Leaders may be established for any type of communication plan.

2. The assigned Branch Chief/Communications Team Leader will:
 - a. In consultation with the Regional State Liaison Officer (RSLO) and Public Affairs Officer (PAO), identify other Offices/Regions that should be involved in creating the communication plan and/or reviewing and commenting on the plan. For issues having high public visibility, the Office of the Executive Director for Operations, (OEDO) the Office of Public Affairs (OPA) and the Office of Congressional Affairs (OCA) should be involved.
 - b. Prepare the plan and provide an opportunity for involved Offices/Regions to comment using the feedback and share webpage at http://www.internal.nrc.gov/communications/comm_tools/input.cfm or another equivalent tool. Obtain formal concurrences, if necessary.

NOTE: Due to the time-sensitive nature of fast-breaking communications plans, informal concurrence may be appropriate.

- c. Obtain input from the RSLO and PAO regarding the external audiences with whom the plan should be used.
- d. After responding to comments, obtain the Division Director's approval to execute the plan. Then, distribute the plan to those who will be responsible for its execution (RSLO, PAO, the communication team). Send a copy to the OEDO Communications Specialist.

- e. Place the plan in ADAMS Main Library in the folder entitled "Communications Plans." Ensure that the plan is designated as not publicly available.
 - f. Ensure proper implementation of the plan by following up with communication team members. Periodically review the plan for effectiveness and relevance and revise it as needed. Make sure the revised plan is distributed to the appropriate NRC staff.
 - g. Recommend closure to the responsible Division Director upon completion of planned communications. Inform the OEDO communication specialist when the plan is no longer active.
3. Examples of current NRC Communication Plans can be found at <http://www.internal.nrc.gov/communications/plans/active-plans.html>. Historic communications plans can be found in ADAMS Main Library folder entitled, "Communications Plans." Enclosure 1 to this Regional Procedure is a communication plan template that can be tailored to suit various communications needs.

Enclosures:

Communications Plan Template

Attachment 1

Communications Plan Template

[SUBJECT]

MONTH, YEAR

Key messages

A bulleted list of three or four main messages you would want someone to know about your topic (*more or less may be necessary depending on the issue*). Think of these as a sound bite or the headline you'd like to see on an article about your topic. Each should be no longer than two sentences (three at very most) and should be written in a conversational manner. They are NOT a duplicate of the agency's strategic goals nor are they operational/implementation goals. They are sometimes interchangeable with Talking Points.)

Background

This is a brief history of the issue and why the plan is needed. It should be as long as necessary to be helpful to people not fully immersed in the topic, but not so detailed as to be unwieldy and thus not useful.

Audience

Internal stakeholders involved or interested in your project.

External stakeholders involved or interested in your project.

List only those necessary rather than simply cutting and pasting from previous plans. The audiences you list should be targeted by some communication tool listed later in the plan.

Communication Team

List the names and numbers of the communication team, keeping in mind that the communication team may be different than the team responsible for the project or activity itself. Identify the team leader and back-up. The team should typically consist of: relevant individuals within a program; staffers from other offices/regions if the communication plan topic crosses boundaries; appropriate representatives from the Office of Public Affairs and the Office of Congressional Affairs; and an EDO Communication Assistant. Do not list people who don't know they are part of your team.

Communication Tools

The number and type of tools will depend on the message, audience, timing and resources.

They could include:

Meetings	Press releases	Q&As/FAQs	Brochures
Talking points	Backgrounders	Web pages	Speeches
Direct mail	Phone calls	NRC Daily Notes	NRC Reporter
Generic Letters	Reports	Paid ads	Newsletters
Posters/fliers	Videos	Transcripts	

OPA should be consulted about whether or not a press release is necessary.

Timeline

This is useful to ensure activities are well coordinated between different offices i.e. OPA and OCA, or with notifications of different stakeholders. The timeline should detail communication activities; not be the timeline of steps for the activity or project itself.

Challenges

An optional element that underscores specific challenges the plan should address, including potential controversies, pre-identified critical public groups, important timing elements, etc. Identified challenges should be linked to specific steps being taken to overcome the challenge.

Evaluation

An optional element that can attempt to identify what "success" would like look, keeping in mind that success in communication can be hard to define and quantitative results can be difficult to obtain. This section might be devoted to how "lessons learned" would be documented, and can include evaluation of whether the timeline for communicating was adhered to.

Q's & A's

While not necessary for all plans, if OPA or OCA believe they will get questions, these should be developed. The OPA team member can develop the questions – including some hard questions the team may not be inclined to want to answer. Program experts on the team develop the answers. The answers should be written in plain, conversational language, a kind of "sound bite" that summarizes our position. Additional technical or supporting information can be provided in separate sentences or bullet points as background.