

# FAPC- 100: An Introduction to Communications Planning

Solid communications planning and implementation helps our Nations and organizations to achieve our goals and maintain positive relationships with the many publics we serve. Communications plans are essential in managing the day-to-day pressures and helps the communicator to prioritize projects.

There are four phases of communications planning which can be remembered by using acronyms of including RACE or RPIE, which stand for **Research, Analysis, Communication, and Evaluation** or **Research, Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation** respectively.

Here is an overview:

- **Research:** Formative research deals with gathering and analyzing information about the public relations situation, the organization, and its publics. (Smith, 2021)
- **Analyze/Plan:** Development of goals, objectives and strategies
- **Communicate/Implement:** Carry out the plan
- **Evaluate:** Determine to what extent desired changes occurred

## RESEARCH

The research phase includes the following components:

- Gather information systematically
- Describe and understand the situation
- Check assumptions about publics/perceptions
- Determine public relations consequences

Common formative research methods include content/media analysis, focus groups, surveys, and interviews. Research may be formal or informal, complex or simple but it must not be skipped!

## PLAN/ANALYZE

Within the planning phase, be sure to align your plan's goals with the broad, overarching goals of the Nation, and then develop SMART objectives to achieve attainable targets. "SMART" objectives meet the following criteria: **Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant, Timed**.

Objectives may be

- Awareness based (ie. Increase member understanding by 30% about what a specific claim settlement is 6 months)
- Acceptance-Based (ie. To increase support for a specific claim settlement by 20% over 3 months)
- Action-Based (ie. To have 75% of members vote in favour of a specific claim settlement)

Objectives are outcome-based while tactics are output-based.

Examples of SMART objectives include the following:

- A total of 35 parents will attend two online community forums about expanding to full day kindergarten in 2022.
- At least 90% of Nation staff will rate communications as above average or excellent on the 2022 staff survey.
- The election code referendum in March 2024 will attract 60% of eligible voters and 70% of those who vote will approve it.

In general, a strategic PR plan includes 10 components:

1. Overall goals for PR
2. Target audiences or publics
3. Objectives for each audience (awareness, understanding, behaviour change)
4. Strategies
5. Tactics
6. Activities
7. Evaluation
8. Materials
9. Budget Items
10. Timetable and Task List

## COMMUNICATE/IMPLEMENT

Implementing the communications plan, making adjustments as you go.

## EVALUATE

The final phase, evaluation should be data driven, relate back to goals and objectives, align with mission and goals, and inform you as to what your next steps should be.

Many available resources can help you find the right fit for your plan. Create your strategic PR plan in a way that works for you. Just be sure that your plan meets the following overall framework:

**Communications Planning Overview, McKenzie 2022.** With files from Sandra Cokeley, APR, Director of Quality & Community Relations, Pearl River (NY) School District

- Be written in either grid or paragraph style
- Be comprehensive and/or focused
- Be aligned with your Nation's mission
- Be aligned with organizational culture
- Include details commensurate with resources
- Support your work - not burden it!