

State Committee Communication Plan Template

July, 2015



GROWING STEWARDSHIP FROM THE ROOTS

Why do you need a Communications Plan?

Regular communications are important for Tree Farmers to understand the value and benefits of belonging to the American Tree Farm System. Additionally, these communications provide an opportunity for landowners to learn.

Beginning in 2016, each state Tree Farm committee is asked to complete at least four communications per year with Tree Farmers in their state. This could include e-mail, print publications and newsletters, postcards, etc.

In order to document and plan for these regular communications, all state Tree Farm committees are asked to have a written Tree Farmer Communications Plan in place by the end of 2015. This plan should outline annual goals and strategies for communicating to landowners in a cost efficient manner.

It is recommended that each committee have a designated volunteer to manage the development and implementation of these communications.



What is a Communications Plan?

A communication plan defines the approach that a program will use to communicate with communities. It helps ensure systematic information sharing and two-way communication. The seven steps in this template address the key aspects that programs should consider:

1. Identify your objectives.
2. Choose and assess your target audiences.
3. Design your key messages.
4. Select your communication methods and channels.
5. Establish your time frame.
6. Draft a budget.
7. Monitor the results and look for ways to improve.

Each step includes a series of questions to help you identify the best approach for the committee.



1. Identify Your Objectives

- What do you want to accomplish?
 - Think SMART: Strategic, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely.
- What do you need to communicate to priority groups in order to achieve your goals?
 - What do your priority groups need to know or do?
- Common objectives may include:
 - Increase attendance and participation at an event.
 - Improve stakeholder knowledge and understanding of key objectives and initiatives.
 - Motivate Tree Farmers to take action on their land.



2. Choose and Assess Audience

- Identify and develop an understanding of the priority groups you'd like to reach with your initiative.
- Who should know about this program or initiative?
 - Who will help you achieve your objectives?
 - Who are key to the success of your initiative or objectives?
- What should they know? Why should they care?
 - What's in it for them? (Also known as the “What's In It for Me (WIIFM)” statement)



3. Develop your Messages

- Develop and design messages that resonate with your audience.
 - Thinking about your key goals/objectives, what is the value you offer to your priority audiences?
 - Are there certain words that resonate with your audience over others (e.g., stewardship vs. conservation)?
 - Tell them what it is you want them to know or do.
 - Tell them what's in it for them.
 - Tell them in a way that makes sense to them.



4. Select materials and channels

- Identify the types of materials will you develop to disseminate your messages.
 - When deciding the types of materials, think about where you might encounter your priority audience, and what materials will help you reach them.
 - Material types might include: Postcards, brochures, posters, PSAs, advertisements, events, etc.
- Identify the channels where you most likely will reach them.
 - Similarly, the channels you use should reflect your audience's preferences.
 - Channels may include: mail, radio, television, newspaper, billboards, social media, Websites, community groups, etc.



5. Establish your time frame

- Plan your communication activities with key dates and milestones as well as responsible parties in mind.
 - What are the key milestones or dates for your initiative?
 - When might you need to start communicating with your priority groups in order to meet those dates?
 - How long will it take to develop messages and materials?
 - Always allow yourself more time than you think you need.
 - Who will develop the messages and execute the communications?



6. Develop your Budget

- Develop a list of priority activities based on your budget and the level of effort required.
 - What communication activities can you do within your budget?
 - What are your budget constraints?
 - What communication activities can you do for little or no cost?
 - For those activities with an associated cost, which do you think will give you the highest return on investment?



7. Success Indicators

- Use each outreach campaign to find what works and doesn't work, and then refine or incorporate successful tactics into your next campaign.
- Success indicators should be tied to the SMART objectives you set in step 1.
 - For example, increased participation may be measured by a percentage increase in attendance at events. Whereas improved knowledge and action can be measured by a survey or a visit from a forester.



Communication Plan

1. Objectives/Goals of initiative:
2. Priority audience groups:
3. Key messages:
4. Communication methods and channels:
5. Time frame:
6. Budget:
7. Success indicators:



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6a. Budget Worksheet

Total Budget:

Item	Cost per unit	Number of units	Total Cost	Notes



7a. Success Measures

Goal	Activity	Indicator	Change from Baseline

