

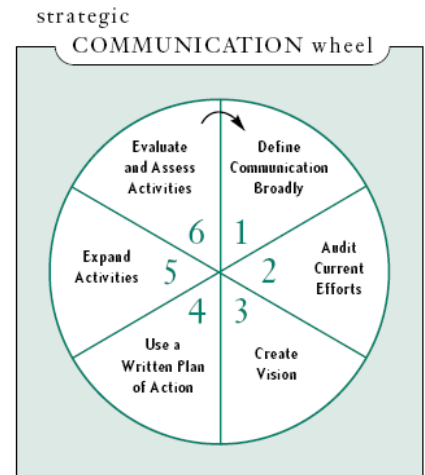
Strategic Communication¹

I. Communication defined

- The use of a variety of tools or methods to create and sustain a conversation about specific goals
- A planned process with participation for local leaders, communications specialists, and residents; this process will determine what the local leaders need to know and say, whom to include as partners in the conversation, and how to frame the dialogue.
- Thinking about how to convey and share information among partners from the beginning of an initiative; this strategic communication plan will influence how the Foundation communicates with its grantees, how grantees communicate with one another, how communicate organizations communicate with neighborhood residents, and how they all participate in a common agenda.

II. Strategic communication wheel

- *Define communication broadly:* There are numerous ways to communicate and spread ideas. Mainstream media is often the default strategy, but communication will mostly likely be a diverse and comprehensive process. Options will change according to specific issues.
- *Audit current efforts:* It is helpful to start by assessing a community's current capacity and materials. What is already being communicated about the initiative? Who is doing it? Is it effective? How is it determined? Are the right people reached? What materials and back-up support exist? Are they up-to-date? Accessible? Visually interesting? Are the messages on target? Do they tell stories? Are there any other communication campaigns going on in the community? What resources do you have for communication? What is the capacity of the community to support communication – are there local printers, writers, designers, etc?
- *Create vision:* The vision ties communication activities and products to the goals of the initiative. In order to do create this link, community leaders may want to consider the following questions. What are the substantive goals of the initiative/neighborhood? Who needs to be engaged to achieve the above substantive goals? What actions do these “target audiences” need to take that are different from what they are currently doing? What messages will motivate the target audience to get involved and join an effort to find solutions? What communication activities and products will help reach and involve each of the target audiences?
- *Use a written plan of action:* It is important that organizational leadership participates in and supports the goals and activities in the plan. Whenever possible, develop activities that can be measured. Estimate resources needed to do the job. Form a communication working team and build a permanent chain of activities. Focus, prioritize, set deadlines, and make sure someone is responsible. Create supportive materials and field test these materials. Go slowly so you can learn along the way. Prepare a crisis communication plan so you will know what to do in an emergency.
- *Expand activities:* Full implementation will likely take several years.
- *Evaluate and assess activities:* Because all communication activities should be tied directly to the substantive goal of the initiative/neighborhood, success of the communication agenda is tied to the success of the overall initiative. Evaluate both quantity and effectiveness. Reassess audiences and messages.



¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation (n.d.). Using Strategic Communication to Support Families: A Guide to Key Ideas, Effective Approaches, and Technical Assistance for Making Connections cities and site team. Retrieved April 17, 2007 from www.aecf.org.

tips for FRAMING

EFFECTIVE MESSAGES

- + Effective messages are clear, consistent, and free of jargon.
- + Effective messages include stories about people and issues. Spokespeople are good storytellers who bring in the policy implications and community context of every personal story.
- + Effective messages are realistic and truthful. Spokespeople don't promise more than they can deliver, and they are prepared to talk about what doesn't work as well as what does—and the lessons learned from both.
- + In preparing effective messages, communicators identify target audiences and survey them early on to get their understanding of the issues. Listening is as important a skill as lecturing.
- + Effective messages are specific and local. Different messages will be needed for different audiences.
- + Effective messages are spread through materials that are varied and visually interesting. Core messages are repeated over and over again.
- + Effective messages start with a noncontroversial head-nodder with which everyone can agree, and then move to the more controversial elements.
- + Effective messages include logos, web addresses, and phone numbers on every product, even things like refrigerator magnets.

SOURCE: Jason Salzman and Paul Klite, media consultants.

III. Potential opportunities and challenges

- *Is a comprehensive communication strategy expensive?* Activities need to be funded adequately from the beginning in order to do the job. But it need not always be expensive to communicate effectively. Materials should be visually attractive and well presented, but they don't have to be fancy productions. Street banners can be painted by children as part of an art project. Music, art, and journalism students can offer time and effort to community projects. Residents can do local video interviews that can be aired as mini-documentaries at community events.
- *Who implements a comprehensive communication plan?* This process is labor-intensive. Recruitment of a communication team and involvement of parents and youth in developing products and staging events have a multiplying effect: engaging them at the same time they are building their capacity to communicate. Who is the best storyteller in the neighborhood? Some of the best overall communication efforts pull together people interested in public relations, photography, graphic design, and match them with skilled professionals for workshops or apprenticeships. Messages must be owned locally, and this is more likely to happen if they are generated locally.
- *What is the role of the media in a strategic communication plan?* More and more local media have reporters that focus on children's and family issues. However, mainstream media are still better at documenting bad news than they are at presenting discussions of complex problems and solutions. Train a small cadre of spokespeople to reach out and talk to these journalists. Take a proactive stance and use media selectively via letters to the editor, op-ed essays, talk shows on local radio and TV, and writing for a community newspaper. Use local weeklies and biweeklies, radio, and cable access television.
- *What is public engagement?* This term refers to a process of listening, mobilizing deliberation, building trust, and reaching consensus around social change. Public engagement employs some traditional communication tools – audience identification and message development, brochures, and flyers. But what makes it different is that these tools are used to promote discourse. Public engagement stresses large and small meetings or forums where “communication as conversation” takes place. It is particularly useful for building ownership among local partners. Public engagement, when successful, results in an ongoing dialogue about complicated issues; it gives

participants important information and allows them to air their worries and misconceptions. It helps keep the agenda alive over time by dealing honestly with obstacles.

- *What challenges might neighborhoods face?* Challenges may include a) diffused responsibility – if communication is everyone’s job, it is easy for it to be no one’s responsibility. Counter this challenge with coordination, teamwork, and adequate technical assistance; b) risk of overselling – community organizations are sometimes accused of spinning a story and overselling reform. This can happen when communication staff are uninformed or pull ahead of community leadership. Or it can be the unintended result of genuine enthusiasm. Because the life of the initiative is many years, neighborhood leaders will need to be prepared to communicate their lessons, their mistakes, and their victories along the way; c) turf battles – competition is likely to happen. A good communication plan should help neighborhoods deal with the results of turf conflicts. Particularly if organizations have agreed on an agenda and a consistent message, there is less likelihood that one or two disagreeable quotes in the newspaper will carry much weight.

IV. Ways and means of communicating

Branding	Fortune cookies with targeted	Slide presentations
Walking tours of the	messages	Databases
neighborhoods	Tree plantings	Chat rooms
Art festivals	Speakers	Puppetry
Tote bags	Training	Improvisational theatre
Public access cable shows	Coffee breaks	Job fairs
CD-ROM	Press conferences	Promotion of hotlines
Yard signs	Focus groups	Local and citywide summit
Bumper stickers	Games	meetings
Potluck dinners	Local television news	Public education campaigns
Night lights	Documentaries	Annual reports
Testimony at public hearings	Dancing	Study guides
Websites	Neighborhood maps	Videoconferences
Press releases	Magazine articles	Night at the movies
Listservs	Theatre	Business roundtables
Photo exhibits	Street rallies	Community radio
Letters to the editor	Debates	White papers
Storytelling	Holiday celebrations	Walk-a-thons
Logos	Community sing-a-longs	Community newspapers
Town forums	Telephone trees	Take a legislator to lunch
Paid advertising	Door hangers	Memos
Videos	Tee-shirts	Groundbreaking ceremonies
Book clubs	Books	Brown bag lunches
Conferences	Outreach to reporters	Street and park clean-ups
Door-to-door surveys	Study/family circles	Neighborhood asset mapping
Flyers	Editorial board meetings	Polling
Internet	Information packets	Canvassing
e-mentoring	Speakers’ bureau	Sports events
Oral histories	Awards ceremonies	Murals
Posters	Media literacy	Block parties
Refrigerator magnets	Street fairs	Computer classes
Op-ed essays	Materials in different languages	Street banners
Sermons	National Public Radio	Buttons
Talking	sponsorships	Subway and bus ads
Block parties	Television talk shows	Display booths at fairs or
Open-mike poetry slams	Radio talk shows	conventions
Press briefings	Billboards	School newspapers
Brochures	Special events	Ads in programs
	Press kits	Key rings

Family suppers	Best practices	Neighborhood directories
Bus shelter ads	Conference calls	Web video
Photos projected on buildings	Mailing lists	Utility bill inserts
Messages on grocery bags	Postcards	Pencils and pens
Word of mouth	Street literature	Petitions
Sound bites	Calendar of community events	Legislative receptions
A “Tell a Friend” button on your website	Marketing plans	Letter-writing campaigns
Community screenings of documentary films	Bulletin boards	Tag lines
Spiritual revivals	Video diaries	Business cards
Internet broadcasting	Placemats	Whistles
	Telephone surveys	Window signs in stores
	News conferences	

V. Appendixes and Resources

- Appendix A: Communication Brief, UM-Technical Assistance Center
- Appendix B: Community Outreach and Engagement Strategies, Skillman Foundation
- Promising Approaches and Resources, Annie E. Casey Foundation

*Communication:
A Brief Highlighting Ideas and Examples*

*The University of Michigan, School of Social Work
Technical Assistance Center*

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Best Practice Brief for Communications

Goal: To provide multiple ways and venues to communicate what has been done in the Good Neighborhoods Initiative, what will be done, and share ideas, concerns, perspectives, and resources both formally and informally to as broad a representation of each neighborhood as possible.

This brief describes communication strategies that might be useful for the Skillman Good Neighborhoods Initiative (GNI), most of which were taken from descriptions of other comprehensive community initiatives. Some of these are already being done by members of the GNI team. The list is not meant to be exhaustive or final, but can provide a starting point for considering a set of communication activities.

Ideas and Options:

1. Public forums
 - An opportunity for residents to interact with elected officials and the heads of public agencies. It will be a venue for the guest to share information and plans, but there should also be time allotted for the audience to respond and ask questions. These could be regularly scheduled events where GNI activities also are shared or be organized specially when there are concerns or issues for which residents desire an official response.
2. Strategic planning sessions
 - Regular opportunities for residents to respond to new directions and offer ideas for the initiative. These sessions may be a repeat of the solution-focused ‘miracle’ or ‘dream’ visioning sequence that was introduced in Meeting 4 of Brightmoor and Osborn. Or they could be scheduled as a precursor to opening each new set of small grants. This way fresh thinking and creative ideas can be solicited throughout the process.
3. Health/Information Fairs
 - An opportunity for agencies to share information about their programs and resources. There can be information booths as well as places where services and check-ups can be delivered. It might also provide a venue to have a keynote presentation around an issue of relevance to the community.
4. Resource sharing around specific tasks
 - A broad invitation can be offered for those interested in a particular issue or area (i.e. early childhood, housing, business development). This can be a time for those working in these areas to meet to share information and perhaps inform particular aspects of the initiative. It might also provide a venue to jointly plan for specific funding opportunities that become available.
5. Annual celebratory events
 - Once a year, throw a community-wide celebration to acknowledge the accomplishments and successes of the initiative.

6. Scheduled chats with community organizer
 - An opportunity for those not actively engaged in the ongoing work of the initiative to receive updates and learn about activities. It can also be a time to share information about next steps and upcoming developments with the intention of bringing more people into the process.
7. Official challenges
 - Based on the goal and strategies selected during the 5 large community meetings, each neighborhood could be issued a challenge that would encourage ongoing engagement. These would be tied to specific incentives. For example, if a strategy is to create a functional block club system, a challenge might be to hold 20 different block groups meetings in a given month to discuss GNI with attendance of at least ten people. If this goal is met, the community might earn a prize such as a new kiosk or a printer for copying or funding for a new priority.
8. Email/Newsletters
 - A regular source of information and announcements about the initiative. It might be primarily sent by e-mail, but those interested in paper copies could be on a mailing list or sites could volunteer to post copies as they are released.
9. Skillman website
 - This could serve a variety of purposes, but might include links to items publicly available on Bravelo, timelines, upcoming events, links to past newsletters, announcement of the groups receiving the various small grants, as well as maps and current information on GNI.
10. Resource handbook
 - Each community might be charged with creating a resource guide for their neighborhood in the first year. It could provide helpful advice, offerings and contact information from local organizations, and frequently asked questions. It should be available electronically and in paper format. It could be updated every 2-3 years and perhaps provide a mechanism for residents to rate information.
11. Door to door canvassing
 - When the initiative needs broad resident input before proceeding or wants to announce a new program or decision, young people could distribute flyers or be trained to collect information by knocking on doors.

Communication strategies from this list could be selected singularly or combined. Some might work well across all six neighborhoods, while others are only effective in a few. The strategies might also build upon one another. For example, initial data for the resource handbook might be collected or revised at the health fairs.

Community Outreach and Engagement Strategies reported by Good Neighborhoods Initiative residents

Outreach Strategies

- Billboards
- Community flyers – schools (especially! – get parents involved), dr. offices, gas stations, stores, beauty/barber shops, casinos, malls, women’s support groups, daycares/Head Starts, clinics
- Church bulletins and flyers
- Carnivals
- Community block parties
- Radio and TV
- Flyers in food packets
- Murals
- Banners
- Bumper stickers
- Newsletters
- Word of mouth
- Computers/e-mail
- Telephone tree / phone calls
- Student councils
- Bulk mail for every resident
- Door-to-door
- Events for children, youth, and adults
- Stakeholder Meetings
- Community Newspapers
- Database of Enrollment of Schools
- Yahoo Group On-line
- Chat rooms for youth, such as My Space
- Lawn Boards/Signs
- Tee-Shirts
- Electronic Bulletin Boards-via cable companies
- Celebrities
- Phone Banks

Engagement Strategies

- Raffles, incentives, and give-a-ways
- Entertainment
- Hot meals at meetings/events
- Transportation to meetings/events
- Childcare during meetings/events
- Make activities affordable
- Competitions between groups
- Basketball tournament (particularly for youth engagement)
- Radio personality event w/ distribution of apparel
- Job opportunities (job fair or pass out flyers)
- Detroit Pistons community service
- Utilize the schools
- Role Models: Celebrities, Sports Figures, and Mentors
- Youth Drive
- Sponsor Positive Rap presentations: Hip/Hop Culture
- Church/School Groups (youth ministries, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts)
- Community Carnivals
- Community Block Parties
- Rallies at schools at and churches
- Dance/Low-cost Amusement Park
- Conferences & Workshops
- Identify Community Leaders, Organizers, Faith-Based Leaders