

Possible Elements of a Communications Strategy

Assume that a family foundation's mission can be advanced by connecting with key audiences throughout the community. The foundation's strategy might contain these steps and elements:

YEAR 1

- Establish goals for a communications strategy, and ensure that goals further the foundation mission;
- Select critical portions of the Mission Statement as the focus for messages to be offered to the community and key audiences;
- Identify key audiences, such as community leaders, local government officials, our sector of local nonprofits, and the public;
- Explore, with professional media advisors, optional approaches, such as sending messages via grantees, donor groups, etc.;
- Determine methods (neighborhood meetings, focus groups, etc.) of finding out about community feelings, values, opinions, historical problems, etc., and select methods that generate a constant stream of information from the community;
- Establish a procedure for making the Form 990-PF public and available;
- Talk with current and potential grantees about publicity: who will handle it, how the foundation's name and interests can be protected, what the goals are, etc.;
- Examine and cost out optional methods of reaching key audiences, such as convening meetings, direct mail, newspaper and radio/TV ads; and
- Create pilot communications products and develop capability to deal with the news media.

YEAR 2

- Arrive at longer term agreement with a communications firm;
- Narrow focus of the messages and select modest elements of the communications strategy for implementation;
- With grantees leading the effort, launch the strategy with a low-key briefing of local media;
- Follow up with meetings with key community leaders, government officials, key editors and reporters, potential collaborators in funding, etc.
- Open website for posting of the Form 990-PF, Mission Statement, Grant Guidelines, and other important information; and
- Publish the First Annual Report and distribute to key audiences.

YEAR 3

- Publish the Second Annual Report and distribute to key audiences;
- Form advisory group of grantees to advise the foundation on its communications strategy; and
- Appoint a qualified family member or hire an outside professional part-time to handle communications.