

Keep Your Chapter On Track With A Communications Plan



How do you manage, plan and track all the communications you send out for your chapter association in a year, a quarter or just a month? Do you have a centralized location for your final chapter communication documents, messaging, deadlines, etc. Or is each area of your chapter responsible for tracking their own?



If it's the latter, what happens when you need to communicate something you've messaged before, like your annual chapter conference or your monthly chapter meetings? Do you redo your communications for each event, membership renewal, educational programming? If you do, that must mean you're taking time, each time, to determine:

- What you need to say
- Where you need to say it
- How you need to say it
- Who you need to say it to
- When you need to say it
- And more.

All that work takes time. And that's doesn't include the time your volunteers spend writing, posting and/or sending out the actual communications. (If your chapter is like many, each year you probably need to find a new volunteer, or several, to help you figure it all out and execute it.)

It's likely that many of the companies where your members work use communications plans to keep their communications organized and track the countless details. Communications plans are often "owned" by a company's marketing and project management organizations. Unless your chapter is part of a marketing or project manager association, your chapter board members may not be familiar with communications plans and how useful they can be for chapters.

What is a communications plan?

At its simplest, a communications plan is a document that contains the information your chapter needs to effectively communicate a message around a specific activity. It can be used to track one-time or repeating events, and includes the:

- Goal of the communication(s)
- Details you need to share
- Groups who need to receive the message
- Timing for different messages, if applicable
- Responsible parties
- Stakeholders
- Links to completed documents
- Notes and feedback from stakeholders and volunteers.

These plans are typically stored online. Those who need the information in it are given access by their level of need, some can just read it, some can edit, some can download, etc.

How can a communications plan help your association chapter?

Think about how many different communications your association chapter sends in a month. Do you have a good idea of what's going out when, the message in each and any overlap between communications? An association chapter communications plan can help ensure that for each activity you're holding, whether conference, regular meeting, networking event, etc., you:

- Have worked out the details
- Don't need to start from scratch each time
- Know what you're saying, when you're saying it and to whom.

It can also help ensure that you're not overwhelming your members and other audiences, by highlighting items that can be combined, sent out further apart and maybe even eliminated.



Sample Association Chapter Communications Plan

You'll figure out what format is best for your chapter and the information you want to include in your chapter's communications plan. Excel can be a great platform to use. It lets you easily add and delete columns and cells and sort information, to show, for example, which stakeholders have ownership over which projects. Some organizations find it helpful to have a summary communications plan that tracks all chapter communications at a high level. Then, they create individual communications plans for each event. Below is a sample of a basic communications plan, with some of the cells completed so you can see how it fits together.



