

5 Step Communication Audit

A communication audit is a comprehensive review of your P&As communications to determine what is working, what isn't working, what's lacking, and where improvements can be made. The results of an audit can reveal how well you use your communication resources, how effective your communications are, and whether you are achieving your goals. It can also be used as a first step in drafting a communication plan for your P&A.

1. Scope

The first step is to determine the scope of your audit. A communication audit can examine every communication effort at your P&A or it can focus on one communication function.

2. Assessment

There are two parts to your assessment: 1) Reviewing your organizational practices and capacity; 2) Assessing the tools you are using, your methods of communication, your assets like an email list or Facebook follower.

3. Audience input

An analysis of your communication requires gathering feedback from the people who receive your communication. There are many ways you can go about gathering input from your target audiences including one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and online surveys. The point is to gather input from a wide variety of diverse people who can inform you of their perception of your communications.

4. SWOT Analysis

Once you have evaluated your current tools and methods and received input from your audiences, it is time to conduct a SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis identifies your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

5. Make a plan

Take what you've learned from the previous steps and make a plan. Identify what you can easily address first. Increasing the frequency of social media posts for example. Then move on to items that will take more time and resources to complete. But a completed communication audit is also an opportunity to evaluate your P&As entire communication strategy or, if you don't have one, to use as a basis to create one.

STEP ONE: Scope

Check off everything you plan to review in your audit and/or add to what is below.

Organizational Practices and Capacity

- Mission and vision statements
- Communication alignment with P&A principles and values
- Logo, branding and style guide
- Leadership support
- Staffing and Resources
- Communication Policies

Tools and Tactics

- Traditional Media (newspapers, radio, television)
- Social Media
- Digital Assets (websites, videos)
- Email Distribution List
- Publications
- Reports
- Press releases and/or statements
- End of year report (eg. Non-profit annual report, not PPRs)
- Education and Outreach (brochures, presentation, letterhead, handouts, posters)
- Branded Apparel or other SWAG

STEP TWO: Assessment

Adapted from <https://www.issuelab.org/resources/1343/1343.pdf>.

Part One: Organizational Practices and Capacity

Part one will review your P&A's communication practices and organizational capacity for communications. These are practices that every nonprofit trying to implement strategic communications should be performing at some level. This part of the review will help you determine if your communication activities are aligned with best practices and inform your communication strategy.

To complete this part of the assessment, it is important to have a gauge that helps to measure and illustrate where the organization currently stands in terms of its performance. That gauge is offered here in the form of a "practice maturity scale."

The practice maturity scale offers a continuum of possible performance levels for any given practice. Higher levels in the scale represent higher levels of organizational commitment to, integration of, and performance on the practice. Each practice may be classified as:

Level One: Improvised

The communications practice is ad hoc and unorganized. Few, if any, staff or financial resources are dedicated to it. Despite this chaotic environment, however, the communications practice may be implemented successfully. But because it is uncoordinated, efforts are inconsistent, inefficient, and quality may be variable.

Level Two: Planned

The practice is planned and deliberate as opposed to being performed on a reactive or "as needed" basis. Resources are allocated to the practice, responsibilities are assigned, and the process is managed. The practice does not occur regularly, however, and may still be performed by one or two individuals.

Level Three: Established

The practice is routine and part of the organization's "fabric." The organization has qualitatively determined the "best" way to approach the practice and has institutionalized it. Practices are known and coordinated within and outside the organization.

Level Four: Evaluated

The practice is evaluated and analyzed. Measures of performance and progress are collected and analyzed. Often a quantitative understanding of success is known and tracked, and the organization has a better ability to predict or estimate performance.

Level Five: Optimized

Because of its recognized importance to the organization, the practice is continuously reflected on and improvements incorporated.

Communication Practices	Quality Criteria/Standards	Level of Practice
Mission and Vision Statements	P&A has a mission and vision statement that is aligned with values and principles outlined in the P&A standards.	
Branding	P&A has a modern, unified brand, identifiable logo, and established style guide. Brand is applied to all communication.	
Goals and outcomes	Goals and outcomes determined by leadership and priority setting process are used to guide annual communication planning.	
Support for communication at the leadership level	Board and management understand and supports communications as an integral part of organizational viability and success.	
Sufficient staff and resources	P&A has dedicated staff and resources allocated for communications practice.	
Integration	Communications is not viewed as an isolated function but seen as an integral part of every organizational project or strategy.	
Involve staff at all levels	Staff understand how to support communication and receive training (eg. interview techniques for staff who speak to the press)	
Written communication plan	P&A has a written communication plan or strategy that is regularly updated.	
Communication Policies	P&A has communication policies (egs. governing interaction with the press; use of social media).	

Part Two: Tools and Tactics

In part two of the assessment, we will review your communication history and the specific tools and tactics commonly used to implement a communication strategy. Most organizations are using at least some communication tactics and tools even if they do not have an organized communication strategy. This part of the assessment will help determine if those tools and tactics, as well as your communication history, are working for you and are able to support your P&As communication strategy.

In this part, you will use a simpler method to measure the quality of the tools and tactics you use. Just enter zero (0) for no and one (1) for yes.

Quality Criteria/Standards	Traditional Media				
	Print/Newspaper	Television	Radio	Digital-only	Score:
Are you happy with the amount of coverage you receive?	Eg. 0				
Are you happy with the quality of coverage you receive?	1				
Does your media coverage include a call to action?	0				
Is the content of your coverage aligned with your values and principles?	0				
Are you reaching your intended audiences?	1				
Does your coverage include culturally diverse media outlets or stories that focus on intersectional issues?	1				
Score:	3				Total:
Quality Criteria/Standards	Social Media				
	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	Other	Score:
Are the number of followers where you want them to be?					
Are you happy with the frequency of posts?					
Are your engagement numbers (likes, comments,					

shares) where you want them to be?					
Are your social media channels branded?					
Are you including posts that speak to BIPOC and/or on intersectional issues?					
Are your posts accessible?					
Disability centric					
Did you convey the right messages and information?					
Were there a lot of questions about anything? Did you have to re-communicate to clarify any confusion?					
Did you incorporate visuals?					
Score:					Total:
	Digital Assets				
Quality Criteria/Standards	Website	Email	Videos	Other	Score:
Are your digital assets aligned with your brand?					
Are your digital assets accessible?					
Are you happy with the frequency of updates?					
Are you happy with the number of visitors/subscribers/views?					
Do the messages you use reflect your values/principles?					
Are your digital assets reaching your targeted audiences?					
Are you using the right technology?					
Are you producing content that speaks to BIPOC and/or on intersectional issues?					
Score:					Total:

Quality Criteria/Standards	Publications				
	Reports	Press Releases	Other	Other	Score:
Did you convey the right messages and information?					
Did you target the right audiences?					
Do your publications align with your brands?					
Did you incorporate visuals that communicate your intended message(s)?					
Did you use messages that reinforce your values and principles?					
Did you disseminate material using a variety of channels?					
Were there a lot of questions about anything? Did we have to re-communicate to clarify any confusion?					
Score:					Total:
Quality Criteria/Standards	Education and Outreach Material				
	Presentations	Brochures	Other	Other	Score:
Does your outreach material align with your brand?					
Are you using the right messages for the right audiences?					
Does your education and outreach material include BIPOC representation?					
Is it accessible?					
Were there a lot of questions about anything? Did we have to re-communicate to clarify any confusion?					
Score:					

Quality Criteria/Standards	Other				Score

Step 3: Audience Input

To get the full picture of the effectiveness of your communication, you need to ask the people who receive it what they think. It is important to approach this step with an open mind and some humility because their answers may surprise you.

You should try to survey all the audiences who you target with your communication efforts: social media followers, email distributions lists, staff, board and PAIMI Council members, community partners such as your DD council or other trusted organizations with whom you work closely, even reporters you send press releases to or lawmakers you hope to educate.

Here are some sample tools you can use to gather audience input.

Electronic Surveys

One of the easiest ways to gather feedback is with an electronic survey tool such as Survey Monkey. There are two things to remember. One, keeping it short and simple will increase response rates. Two, allowing people to remain anonymous will prevent courtesy bias (protecting your feelings) in their answers.

Continuous feedback mechanism

Include surveys on an ongoing basis in your current content. For example, in the emails you send to your distribution list you could include a link to a survey that asks 2 or 3 questions or you could include a survey on your website asking for people's opinions about it. Some P&As also send questionnaires with their monitors to learn if materials are understandable and accessible.

Formal and/or informal one-on-one interviews

Inviting people to engage in a discussion with you could yield new or different information from the more detached electronic survey. You can use the same questions but let the conversation flow naturally.

Facilitated group discussion or focus group

Engage groups of five to fifteen people in a moderated discussion and respond to open-ended questions about communications practices and organizational capacity. Their main advantage is the group interaction that takes place as participants react to and build on one another's responses.

Sample questions for your survey or interviews:

1. Based on the communication you receive from us, what is your impression of our P&A?

2. How would you rate the quality of the communication you receive?
3. Is this content relevant to you?
4. What do they think of our website, marketing, and communication materials?
5. Do you understand what our values and principles are based on the messaging you receive from us?
6. Has this communication provided value to you, and is there any room for improvement?
7. Are any parts of our communication inaccessible to you?

STEP FOUR: SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a way for you to examine and organize the information you uncovered during the assessment. It stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Once complete, you can use a SWOT analysis to inform your P&A's communication strategy going forward.

Example

Strengths

What do you do well?

- We have strong media contacts.
- Our leadership and staff understand the importance of communication.
- We have high engagement on Twitter.

Weaknesses

What do you need to improve?

- We do not have a full time communication staff person.
- We do not post on Facebook frequently.
- We have little or no unrestricted funds.

Opportunities

What can you take advantage of?

- We have pro-bono partnerships with law firms that have communication expertise.

Threats

What could harm you?

- Social media platforms are changing rapidly and we can't keep up.
- Traditional media is shrinking (our state's biggest newspaper downsized).

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

What do you do well?

- [Text]

Weaknesses

What do you need to improve?

- [Text]

Opportunities

What can you take advantage of?

Threats

What could harm you?

- [Text]

STEP FIVE: Make a plan

Now it is time to take what you have learned from your audit and make a plan for the future. How you proceed is up to you. You could start with something simple, like addressing the weaknesses you identified in your social media usage. Or, you could draft a full communication plan for your P&A. Below is a sample communication plan that NDRN’s communication team updates annually.

Sample Communication Plan from NDRN

NDRN Communication Work Plan for FY 2020-2021

Last Updated: November 19, 2020

Training and Technical Assistance

NDRN communication staff’s main priority is to provide training to the P&As/CAPs on variety of topics.

Goal: Surpass previous years in both quality and quantity of trainings offered to P&As.

Key Step	Person Responsible	Timeline
Conduct communication trainings	David, Tina	Quarterly
Conduct additional webinars <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Accessibility Series (5 parts) • Writing Series (7-9 parts) • Outreach (at least 2 with focus on intersectionality per strat. plan) 	David, Tina, Ian (outreach), Consultant (tentative)	Ongoing
Resource Development: Share resources on discussion forums	David, Tina	Monthly
Hold Study Hall sessions for P&A communicators	Tina	Twice monthly
Support production of Annual Conference	David, Tina	June 2021
Produce training video on FASD for legal directors	Tina, Diane	January 2021
Rethink External Relations Working Group	David, Nachama	

Desired Outcomes:

1. Increase knowledge, skills and abilities of P&A staff related to communication.

Communication with Members

NDRN’s membership relies on timely communication to make decisions on a wide variety of disability rights related issues. It is important for NDRN to establish stronger channels of communication with its membership to improve the efficiency with which NDRN can gather support for its initiatives.

Goal: Maintain regular communication with NDRN members.

Key Steps	Person Responsible	Timeline
Regular postings to TASC Update	David, Tina, Marcia	Twice weekly+
Email TASC Update recap	David	Monthly
In the News	David	Twice Weekly
Salsa Calls	David	Every 2 months

Desired Outcomes:

1. Enhanced ability to inform membership of resources and activities.
2. Improve responses to requests for action.
3. Strengthen the relationship between NDRN and its membership.

News Media

As a national disability rights organization, with deep connections to local communities through the P&As, NDRN should have a more prominent place in the national news media. Additionally, it is important for NDRN to both be prepared for responding to incoming media requests and to establish channels for placing news, information and opinion important to the disability community.

Goal: Position the National Disability Rights Network as the leading resource for journalists and media outlets covering disability rights.

Key Steps	Person Responsible	Timeline
Review 2019 and 2020 media coverage, analytics and Advertising Value Equivalent	David	November/December
Identify primary targets for 2021	David	November 2020
Set up alerts, send acknowledgements for good stories	David	Ongoing
Build ethnic media contacts and make contact with at least 5.	David	Ongoing
Staff Training on Interview Skills	Consultant	1st quarter 2021

Desired Outcomes:

1. Increase the frequency of NDRN's media appearances.
2. Improve the quality of news stories covering disability.
3. Strengthen our ability to place op-eds, letters to the editor, news stories, and other communication vehicles.

Digital Communications

NDRN must use as many methods of communication as possible, especially in the era of COVID-19, to own share its content and messaging. Web content, email communication, social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram) and videos carries NDRN's resources, information, and opinion on disability issues to the public, disability and civil rights community, members of Congress, legal community, coalition partners, and allies.

Goal: Inform followers on the activities of the Network. Engage more people on public policy actions (via Salsa). Build on NDRN's reputation as the leading resource for legal and legislative issues concerning the disability community.

Key Steps	Person Responsible	Timeline
Post on organization's activities to NDRN website	Tina, David	Twice weekly
Post at least two P&A/CAP stories per month to NDRN website	Tina, David	Twice per month
Send out NDRN newsletter (with either individual stories or a round-up of stories from feed) via email	David, Tina	Once a month
Send email alerts for public policy actions via Salsa platform	David, Tina	As needed
Send out donation appeals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving Tuesday / End of Year Appeal • March • Tax Day • June 	David, Tina	Quarterly+
Change out three featured P&As on NDRN website	Tina	Quarterly
Push campaigns via social media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability Rights in Black • LGBTQ+ Pride • National Disability Employment Awareness Month 	Tina, David, Justice (DRIB), Employment Team (NDEAM)	February, June, October
Post consistently to Facebook	Tina	Three times weekly
Post consistently to Twitter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like or Retweet a P&A/CAP account content 	Tina	Daily
Respond and engage with follower's comments and messages on all social media platforms	Tina	Whenever possible
Boost social media content using social ads budget (\$200/mo to be used at Tina's discretion)	Tina	Monthly
Evaluate social media engagement at strategy meetings	Tina, David	Quarterly
Support production of Annual Conference	Tina, David	June 2021
Share Executive Director's message (Monthly video message by Curt posted to NDRN.org and included in news email)	Tina/David, Curt	Once every two months?
Continue to release PandA Pod episodes	Tina, Erika	Eight times a year

Desired Outcomes:

1. Increase visitors to ndrn.org.
2. Grow email lists size.

- 3. Increase advocacy engagement via Salsa platform and number of social media followers

Publications

Publications have helped position NDRN as a thought leader on important disability rights issues and have launched several issues into the mainstream of disability advocacy (eg. *Segregated & Exploited*; *School is Not Supposed to Hurt*). Annual reports can be used to communicate NDRN’s activities to members, the board, the public and to potential funders.

Goal: To produce an annual report and maintain a regular schedule of issue reports.

Key Steps	Person Responsible	Timeline
Release an NDRN Annual Report	David, Tina, Staff	January 2021
Issue Reports Community integration/Olmstead: Using the risks of COVID deaths in nursing homes as an example. Reimagining Policing Out of State placement of foster children	Staff, David, Tina	As assigned
Revise webpages for existing NDRN reports	Tina, David, Contractor	
Opinion Writing for website	All staff	Ongoing

Desired Outcomes:

1. Position NDRN as a thought leader on issues using reports.
2. Inform stakeholders, members, funders of NDRN’s activities.
3. Enhance content of NDRN website.