



client **memorandum**

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**To:** Belinda Petroskey **January 18, 2007**

**From:** Greg Brooks, West Third Group

**Re:** Draft findings – NIRPC Communications Audit

**CC:** file **Twenty-one pages**

## 1.0 DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

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This report for the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) includes results of the communications audit undertaken by West Third Group. Analysis, findings and recommendations are offered in the following areas:

- **Strategic assessment** of overall communications competencies and the sophistication of their practice. This is the communications audit viewed through the lenses of capability and focus; and
- **Review of operating environment** (SWOT analysis)

Recommendations in this document take the form of broad-scale policy and operational imperatives; recommendations focused on tactical issues (i.e., suggestions for specific new and existing communications products) will be part of the communications plan, presented separately. The plan will also include suggested staffing and budgeting levels to implement recommended communications activities, as well as a series of models showing funding/budgeting options.

Additionally, there are appendices that contain background information on communications concepts the consultant team feels are crucial to decision makers planning and authorizing NIRPC's communications efforts as they move forward.

## 2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 2.1 Summary of Strategic Communication Audit

Using information gained via literature review, interviews with staff, board members and other stakeholders, and best-practices reviews of more than two dozen MPOs, the consultant team has produced a snapshot of NIRPC’s communications capabilities, strengths and weaknesses.

The key strategic findings of the communications audit can be summarized in the table below, which maps NIRPC’s communications practice maturity level (in the first column) against a number of strategic communication areas. An explanation of both the practice-level maturity gauge as well as quality criteria for each communication area are included the main part of this document.

**Figure 1: NIRPC Strategic Communication Audit Matrix**

<b>5. Optimized</b>																		
<b>4. Evaluated</b>																		
<b>3. Institutionalized</b>																		
<b>2. Planned</b>																		
<b>1. Ad Hoc</b>																		
<b>0. Not Performed</b>																		
	a. Identify the vision	b. Choose goals and outcomes	c. Select target audiences	d. Develop messages	e. Identify credible messengers	f. Choose communications mechanisms / outlets	g. Scan the context and competition	h. Develop effective materials	i. Build valuable partnerships	j. Train messengers	k. Conduct steady outreach	l. Monitor and evaluate	m. Support at the leadership level	n. Earmark sufficient resources	o. Integrate communications throughout NIRPC	p. Involve staff at all levels		
	<b>Strategy</b>						<b>Implementation</b>					<b>Support and Integration</b>						

Taken as a whole, NIRPC's communications efforts are characterized by inconsistent implementation. Across many interviews as well as comparisons with the operations of other MPOs, the challenges NIRPC's communications efforts face were clear:

- **There is a skills gap within the organization for communications projects.**
- **This "siloing" of communications within areas of similar projects also leads to inconsistent messaging.**
- **Funding for overall communications efforts is required, but it is less of a stumbling block than it initially appears.**
- **Varying levels of understanding among board members and elected officials in general greatly impact NIRPC's visibility, effectiveness and clout in the region.**

Because NIRPC cannot address all communication challenges simultaneously, the consulting team's recommendations for prioritized attention include the following actions:

- **The top priority is developing a funding model that makes overall NIRPC communications efforts an element of overhead.**
- **NIRPC should also develop a communications strategy for the overall organization rather than only for specific projects.**
- **The communications function should largely be concentrated in one person who "owns" communications for NIRPC.**

Specific recommendations on media relations, a range of brochures and other collateral material, budgets, timelines and staffing will be presented in the communication plan.

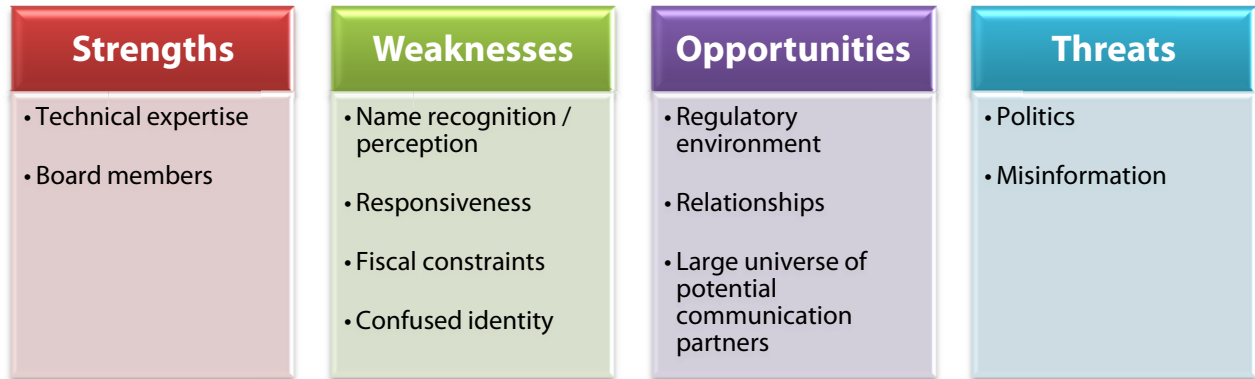
## **2.2 Summary of SWOT Analysis**

The consulting team conducted a scan of the internal and external environmental factors relevant to NIRPC's communication efforts. Environmental factors internal to the organization can be classified as strengths (**S**) or weaknesses (**W**), and those external to the organization can be classified as opportunities (**O**) or threats (**T**). Such an analysis of the strategic environment is referred to as a SWOT analysis.

The SWOT analysis provides information helpful in matching resources and capabilities to the competitive environment; it's an important tool for strategy formulation and selection.

Summary SWOT findings are presented in the graphic on the following page; a full explanation is presented later in the document.

**Figure 2: SWOT Analysis for NIRPC Communication Efforts**



### 2.3 Methodology

The communications audit was conducted through a review of relevant literature; interviews with staff, board members and other stakeholders; and communication with (as well as review of communication materials produced by) more than two dozen MPOs.

### 3.0 BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY FOR THE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AUDIT

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#### 3.1 The Communication Audit Defined

A communications audit is a systematic assessment of an organization's capacity for, or performance of, essential communications practices. It determines what works, what doesn't and what might work better with adjustments or adaptation.

The communications audit has evaluative and formative value – it provides a snapshot of where NIRPC stands in terms of its communication capacity or performance, and also points to areas in which the organization can strengthen its performance.

Communication audits more common in the for-profit world than in the non-profit or public-agency spheres, and not familiar to most non-communications professionals.

#### 3.1.1 Step One: Know Critical Strategic Communications Practices

Knowing the specific practices associated with strategic communications is the first step to assessing an organization's performance and capacity with respect to those practices. These are practices that every nonprofit trying to implement strategic communications should be performing at some level, whether by a single individual or by many staff members throughout the organization.

The table on the next page identifies sixteen essential strategic communications practices. They are grouped into three categories: 1) strategy, 2) implementation, and 3) support and alignment.

- **Strategy** – Includes the core tasks of communications planning and strategy development.
- **Implementation** – Includes practices most common to an organization with an *active* communications function.
- **Support and Alignment** – Includes non-communications-specific practices within the organization that help to ensure the communications function is successful.

The table also offers quality standards or criteria for each practice. They describe in brief what the practices should look like. This list, just on its own, has substantial value in the audit process. It can be used as a checklist to help determine if an organization is actually performing each strategic communications practice. But more importantly, the audit process can reveal if quality criteria are being met, and if not where improvements can be made in *how* the practice is performed.

**Figure 2: Strategic Communication Practices**

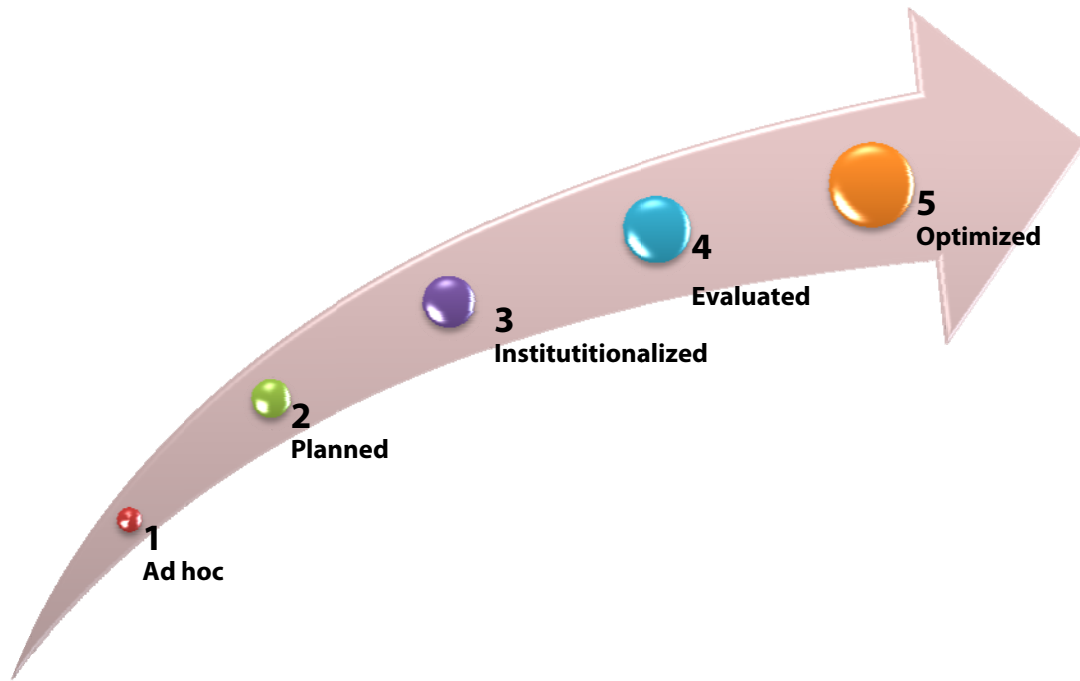
	Strategic Communication Practices	Quality Criteria/Standards
Strategy	a. Identify the vision	The communications vision is aligned with, but distinct from, the organization’s overall mission.
	b. Choose goals and outcomes	Goals/outcomes are well defined, measurable and help guide a defined plan of action.
	c. Select target audiences	Audiences are specific and include decision makers or individuals who will influence key issues.
	d. Develop messages	Messages are specific, clear, persuasive, reflect audience values, and include a solution or course of action.
	e. Identify credible messengers	Messengers are seen as credible by the target audience, and can be recruited/available.
	f. Choose communications mechanisms / outlets	Outlets (both media and non-media) are chosen for their access to target audiences.
	g. Scan the context and competition	Risks and variables that can affect communications successes are identified and factored into planning when possible.
Implementation	h. Develop effective materials	Materials are developed in attractive, accessible, and varied formats for maximum exposure.
	i. Build valuable partnerships	Links exist with internal and external stakeholders who can help carry the message.
	j. Train messengers	Internal and external messengers are trained in key messages and are consistent in their delivery.
	k. Conduct steady outreach	Outreach and dissemination to audiences is regular/sustained.
	l. Monitor and evaluate	Activities and outcomes are regularly monitored and evaluated for accountability and improvement.
Support and Integration	m. Support communications at the leadership level	Management understands/supports communications as an integral part of organizational success.
	n. Earmark sufficient resources	Communications needs are identified before they arise and are funded/staffed appropriately.
	o. Integrate communications throughout the organization	Communications is seen as an integral part of every major project or strategy.
	p. Involve staff at all levels	Communications is not seen as an isolated function; most staff members have some knowledge and/or participation in communications efforts.

### 3.1.2 Step Two: Identify Possible Levels of Practice

To assess an organization on the practices in the previous table, 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. The figure below illustrates the scale’s five levels. 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 1) ad hoc, 2) planned, 3) institutionalized, 4) evaluated, and 5) optimized.

**Figure 3: Practice Maturity Scale**



These levels of practice maturity are summarized as follows:

- **Level One: Ad Hoc** -- The communications practice is ad hoc and unorganized. Few if any staff and financial resources are dedicated to it. Success is based on the competence and efforts of a small number of individuals who either take an interest in the process or produce "heroic" efforts. Despite this chaotic environment, the communications practice may be implemented successfully. But because it is

uncoordinated, efforts are often inefficient and go over budget and schedule. Quality may also vary widely because different people perform the same tasks over time.

- **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: Institutionalized** – 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.

Distinctions between levels one and two are based on the degree to which an organization is reactive and disorganized (level one) versus purposeful and proactive (level two). At level three, the practice is performed regularly, consistently across staff members, and has been performed enough that the organization has gained a certain level of proficiency at it. At level four, the organization has committed to tracking the practice for purposes of better understanding how to improve performance. The organization is monitoring the quality of the practice. Level five demonstrates an even higher level of organizational commitment to the practice, as the organization cares enough about it to learn from and improve performance over time.

### **3.1.3 Step Three: Assess Current Performance and Capacity**

A tool is needed to collect data about communications practices, and to use that data to make assessments about performance and capacity. The practice maturity scale described previously is used to gauge where the organization stands on all essential strategic communications practices.

The figure shown in the executive summary illustrates how this assessment was structured at the strategic level. The matrix arrays communication practices along the bottom row, and the practice maturity scale vertically.

#### **3.1.4 Step Four: Identify Areas for Improvement**

Once the assessments are made, areas in which NIRPC can improve can then be identified. It's unreasonable to expect NIRPC or any similarly sized organization to be a "Level 5" on all strategic communications practices. Rather, the assessment of where NIRPC should be is based on an accounting of the organization's *realistic* capabilities with respect to communications; for the purposes of this audit, those areas identified for improvement are based on the assumption (which, in turn, is based on conversations with the Executive Director) that changes in staffing and resource levels can be expected.

## 4.0 STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AUDIT FINDINGS

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### 4.1 Summary

Taken as a whole, NIRPC's communications efforts are characterized by strong intention (largely the result of the new Executive Director's focus on communications) and inconsistent results. Across many interviews as well as comparisons with the operations of other MPOs, the challenges NIRPC's communications efforts face were clear:

- **There is a skills gap within the organization for communications projects.** Because each of the programmatic areas of NIRPC currently control their own communications, skills developed in (for example) the environmental section do not necessarily benefit communications efforts in the transportation section.
- **This "siloiing" of communications within areas of similar projects also leads to inconsistent messaging.** These inconsistencies include strategically important points about the organization that vary between various communications tools, variances in quality and look-and-feel, and varying frequencies that may lead the press, elected officials or other key audiences to misunderstand the roles NIRPC plays in the community.
- **Funding for overall communications efforts is required, but it is less of a stumbling block than it initially appears.** Funding options for a more-integrated, more-consistent communications program will be discussed in the communications plan.
- **Varying levels of understanding among board members and elected officials in general greatly impact NIRPC's visibility, effectiveness and clout in the region.** Because NIRPC cannot expect communications funding levels to rise sufficiently for broad-scale advertising or other marketing efforts, the single most effective, highest-ROI communications activity the organization can engage in is the training of board members to be better ambassadors for NIRPC within their communities.

Figure 4: NIRPC Strategic Communication Audit Matrix

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	<b>Strategy</b>						<b>Implementation</b>						<b>Support and Integration</b>					

**4.2 Current Performance and Capacity**

**4.2.1 Strategy**

With respect to strategy, NIRPC does communications planning, but usually only based on federal mandate (the public participation plan) or when it is part of a funding requirement (for much of the environmental work). Even then, the planning is done by the project manager or (in the case of some projects) whoever is writing the proposal, only to be revisited when a progress report is due. NIRPC is reasonably clear about its audiences, as they do not change much over time, but some key allies, such as the region’s universities, have not been approached about their potential as message channels and partners.

There is little or no central development of key messages, and no systematic scanning is done of the environmental context and potential risks.

#### **4.2.2 Implementation**

Implementation of NIRPC-wide communications has been sporadic, with department heads managing the implementation within their own program areas.

Regarding implementation, the organization is purposeful in its communications practices, but they still tend to be technical and process-based, making them less accessible to the average citizen. Communication efforts of one or two individuals within the organization predominate, rather than integrating communication as an important function throughout the organization. Outreach, particularly the public involvement elements NIRPC must undertake, are more regimented and organized because of plan requirements from the federal government; the agency's public participation plan is reasonably strong and a good example of how an execute-measure-assess-adjust cycle could be implemented in other areas of NIRPC communications.

#### **4.2.3 Support and Integration**

In terms of support and integration, the Executive Director recognizes and supports the communications function at what appear to be historically strong levels. However, communications funding is currently tied to projects and many projects don't have that funding as a line item – a situation that hamstringing NIRPC in its efforts to create and sustain organization-wide communications efforts. In addition, the communications function is “owned” by no one in the organization, which has the net effect of increasing the level of effort expended (because of duplication) and also virtually guarantees mixed messages.

At the board level, members have not traditionally had their role as ambassadors of NIRPC stressed. Board members have many other responsibilities and duties and it's unreasonable to expect that all would become stronger advocates of NIRPC if given the tools.

#### **4.3 Areas for Improvement**

The audit assessment points to numerous areas for potential improvement. However, NIRPC's size and resources, changes should be prioritized. The consulting team recommends the following, in order of descending (that is, lower) priority:

- **The top priority, because it affects all others, is developing a funding model that makes overall NIRPC communications efforts an element of overhead** that may then be funded as a small portion of virtually every project.
- **NIRPC should also develop a communications strategy for the overall organization rather than only for specific projects.** In doing that, more attention will be paid to goals and outcomes, and assessing the environment and risks.
- **The communications function should largely be concentrated in one person who “owns” communications for NIRPC.** It is recommended that this person report directly to the Executive Director.

## 5.0 REVIEW OF OPERATING ENVIRONMENT VIA SWOT ANALYSIS

### 5.1 Background and Role of SWOT Analysis

A scan of the internal and external environment is a fundamental part of the communication planning process. Environmental factors internal to the organization can be classified as strengths (**S**) or weaknesses (**W**), and those external to the organization can be classified as opportunities (**O**) or threats (**T**). Such an analysis of the strategic environment is referred to as a SWOT analysis.

The SWOT analysis provides information helpful in matching resources and capabilities to the competitive environment; it's an important tool (but not the only tool) for strategy formulation and selection. The following diagram shows how a SWOT analysis fits into a current-position assessment, sometimes referred to as an environmental scan:

**Figure 5: SWOT Hierarchy**



At the core of an effective SWOT analysis are two important factors:

- **SWOT analyses can be very subjective.** Two people rarely come-up with the same final version of SWOT. The SWOT analysis should be used as a as guide and not a prescription.
- **SWOT is primarily a tool to jump-start thinking beyond (and sometimes to the exclusion of) the obvious.** Great opportunity for communications success lies in identifying a fit between the organization's

strengths and upcoming opportunities. Similarly, in some cases organizational weaknesses can be overcome in order to pursue a compelling opportunity.

To develop communication strategies that take into account the SWOT profile, a matrix of these factors can be constructed. The SWOT matrix is shown below:

**Figure 6: SWOT Matrix**



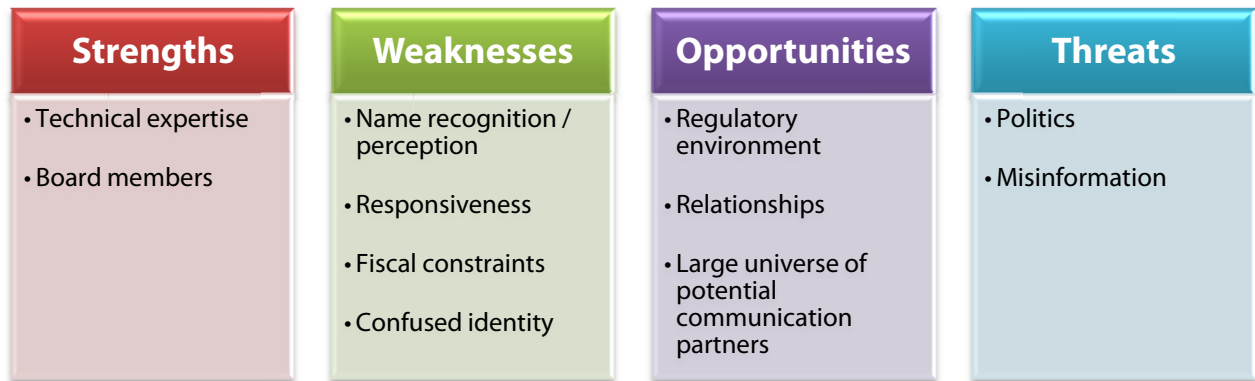
- **S-O strategies** pursue communication opportunities that are a good fit to the organization’s strengths.
- **W-O strategies** overcome weaknesses to pursue communication opportunities.
- **S-T strategies** identify ways strengths can be used to reduce vulnerability to external threats.
- **W-T strategies** establish a defensive plan to prevent weaknesses from making the organization highly susceptible to external threats.

These strategies will be addressed in the communication plan.

## 5.2 SWOT Analysis for NIRPC’s Communications Efforts

The consulting team’s SWOT analysis for NIRPC is summarized in the graphic on the following page. Individual strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are explained in greater detail following the graphic.

**Figure 7: SWOT Analysis for NIRPC Communication Efforts**



**5.2.1 Strengths**

- **Technical expertise:** NIRPC “owns” the regional planning function in Northwest Indiana and lacks any competition (something most marketers would be quite pleased about). This is the organization’s single biggest strength – a form of market dominance. This dominance will allow any/all communication efforts to establish visibility and credibility faster.
- **Board members:** NIRPC’s board represents an incredible communication asset that has, until now, gone largely unleveraged. Because every board member has deep roots in his or her respective community, they are an ideal starting place for the dissemination of key messages.

**5.2.2 Weaknesses**

- **Name recognition/perception:** NIRPC’s litigation means some segments of the public may view the organization unfavorably. Others are suspicious of any/all public-sector agencies or have a negative view of “government trying to plan everything.”
- **Responsiveness:** This term attempts to capture all of the issues that arise from the lack of a dedicated communications resource. Lacking this resource leads to less responsiveness for both normal, ongoing communications, as well as those required during a crisis or when a reporter merely calls on deadline.
- **Fiscal constraints:** NIRPC lacks a funding model for organization-wide communications.
- **Confused identity:** NIRPC has many programs and roles, and anecdotal evidence within the region indicates that citizens very, very seldom have a clear picture of what the organization actually does.

### **5.2.3 Opportunities**

- **Regulatory environment:** Existing laws and regulations mean that NIRPC is part of many processes and programs throughout the region. NIRPC plays a very real, very important part in nearly every high-visibility development or infrastructure project in the region – another solid platform for visibility.
- **Relationships:** NIRPC staff's colleague-to-colleague and agency-to-agency relationships represent an opportunity to dramatically extend the reach of key messages about the organization.
- **Large universe of potential communication partners:** There are scores of nonprofits, universities, localized community information channels and other communication partners in the region that could help extend messages about NIRPC and its projects. To date, few of these potential partnerships have been explored.

### **5.2.4 Threats**

- **Politics:** As awareness of NIRPC grows, the organization may encounter increased negativity from those who dispute its decisions or simply have an axe to grind. Communication carries risks, and an aggrieved party could escalate complaints to NIRPC's public-sector board (either formally or through back channels), eroding support for the organization.
- **Misinformation:** Because so little is known in the public about NIRPC, much of what is "known" is incorrect – in the absence of ongoing, accurate information, misinformation can be expected to flourish.

## 6.0 One-Year Communications Plan

### 6.1 Introduction

The culmination of the research and analyses contained in the audit is a communication plan – a one-year framework for creating sustained messages, a more-persistent presence in the mind of stakeholders and the general public, and frameworks for measuring success.

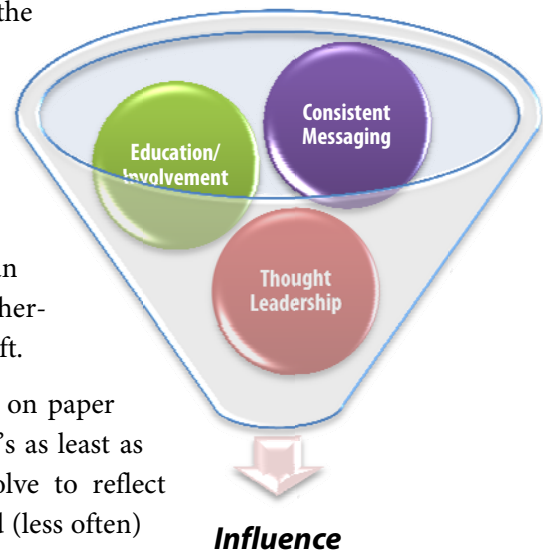
One way to consider any communications plan – and certainly the best way to consider such a plan for an organization that is ramping up its communications to higher-than-historical levels – is as a snapshot of an ever-evolving draft.

This isn't to say that there's no value in setting things down on paper and following a proscribed course of action – there is. But it's as least as important to remember that the plan can and should evolve to reflect changes in the political or policy landscape, in capabilities and (less often) changes in the organization's overall direction.

So why write down anything at all? Because having a plan gives you a basis for answering these important questions:

- **Are we doing what we said we would do?**
- **Is it working according to the success metrics we established?**
- **Are the success metrics still relevant to our organization's goals?**
- **When we have initiatives, do we have a growing body of communications knowledge that helps us understand why outreach/promotion efforts might or might not succeed before we commit resources?**

Communicating consistently helps NIRPC develop greater mindshare and clout in the region – *communicating according to a plan* achieves that and answers these questions along the way.



## 6.2 Thematic Communications: A New Paradigm for NIRPC

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Beyond operational and staffing changes (discussed in greater detail on the following pages), the most fundamental recommended change to NIRPC’s communications efforts involves migrating away from *programmatic communications*, embracing a regimen of *thematic communications* instead.

### 6.2.1 Programmatic Communications

This approach – what NIRPC largely focuses on at this time – can be thought of as program-specific, “siloes” communication tactics and strategies designed to communicate information about a single program area or (often) a single program. Under this framework, communications in the environmental program may have no common messages with communications coming out of, for example, the transportation program.

The deficiencies of this approach include:

- **Lack of organization-wide standards for communications**
- **Message redundancies or misfires – audiences hearing similar key points in a manner that is confusing or missing key points entirely because there is no central coordination**
- **Increased cost because some effort is duplicated**
- **General reliance on tactical communications limited to specific programs rather than organization-wide efforts of lasting effect**

### 6.2.2 Thematic Communications

In contrast to the programmatic approach, a thematic communications effort starts with a top-down view of the organization and its communications needs, asking: *What are the key points that need to be reinforced in order to achieve NIRPC’s overall goals?* These points are then aligned with major audience groups to prioritize which messages should have primacy; the results feed into a classic structure of Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Tactics that give those in charge of the communications program a roadmap for execution.

Advantages of this approach include:

- **Strategic focus** – the foundation of the communications effort – goes from “How do we tell people about this program?” to “How can we advance NIRPC’s goals by communicating about this program with key audiences?” NIRPC’s overall organizational goals take primacy in every communications effort.
- **Greater efficiency**, because the framework doesn’t require brainstorming for new themes or reinventing the proverbial wheel with each new communications tool developed.
- **Repeatability**, achieved through focusing on the message points and audiences first, rather than the communications vehicles or the individual NIRPC projects that are generally used as a platform for reaching the media, the public and key stakeholders.

### 6.3 Audiences and Thematic Messages

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Based on local interviews with board members, staff and stakeholders, as well as a review of the communications activities at more than two dozen MPOs nationally, the consultant team recommends the following key audiences and thematic messages as the focus of NIRPC’s communications efforts for at least the next fiscal year.

**Audiences** (not listed in any order of importance):

- **Board Members and Elected Officials** – Current board members as well as the sitting council members of all cities and counties in NIRPC’s area of influence.
- **Media** – Print and broadcast outlets for local and regional news. May include both mainstream media as well as other significant distribution channels, such as municipal newsletters.
- **Legislators and Legislative Partners** – Both Indianapolis and Congressional legislators who serve NIRPC-area constituents, as well as the government-affairs liaisons at organizations such as InDOT or the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns.
- **General Public** – For the purposes of this segmentation, defined as members of the public who do not typically get information about NIRPC activities through special-interest or dedicated-stakeholder groups.
- **Business Community** – Owners and managers of regional businesses.
- **Organized Stakeholders** – Those groups that are organized to represent the interests of a segment of the community typically not defined by geography. Examples would include advocacy organizations for bicyclists, for transit riders or for the disabled.
- **Staff** – The internal audience at NIRPC.
- **Academia** – Leadership at the six colleges and universities in the region.
- **Technical Stakeholders** – professional planners, engineers, attorneys, private consultants, department heads, directors of public works etc. (The specific technical stakeholders important to a given project’s or initiative’s success would vary by project.)

Thematic Messages (importance varies by audience segment) for the audiences include:

- NIRPC is contributing to **long-term economic vitality and regional growth**
- NIRPC is a voice for **regional stewardship of our natural resources**
- NIRPC is committed to plans and projects that **enhance our transportation and mobility systems**
- NIRPC is **the voice of regionalism in northwestern Indiana**, and a developer of **consensus-backed solutions**.
- NIRPC seeks **consistent and in-depth input on what citizens want** for the future of their communities.
- NIRPC is a **partner and a resource for local governments** that want to improve their communities.

Each audience was assigned primary messages (those that should be repeated in virtually every communication), secondary messages (those that should be emphasized often) and tertiary messages (those that may be of interest but are not of overwhelming importance). Recommendations for how audiences and their key messages align are contained in the table below.

While it is understood that each audience could conceivably be interested in most or all thematic messages, a key component of this approach is to focus the messages each audience receives, both to increase retention and to build NIRPC's reputation by focusing on information that each audience would deem most relevant.

The exception: Staff receives all messages at the same level of importance.

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AUDIENCE	THEMATIC MESSAGES					
	Long-term economic vitality and growth	Regional stewardship of natural resources	Enhance transportation and mobility systems	Voice of regionalism / consensus-based solutions	Consistent and in-depth input on what citizens want	Partner and resource for local governments
Board members and elected officials	Primary message			Secondary message	Tertiary message	Primary message
Media	Primary message			Secondary message	Tertiary message	Tertiary message
Legislators and legislative partners	Primary message			Secondary message	Tertiary message	Primary message
General public	Primary message			Tertiary message	Secondary message	Tertiary message
Business community	Primary message	Primary message				Tertiary message
Organized stakeholders	Primary message			Secondary message		Tertiary message
Staff	Primary message					
Academia	Primary message			Secondary message	Tertiary message	Primary message
Technical Stakeholders	Primary message			Tertiary message		Secondary message
LEGEND	Primary message			Secondary message		Tertiary message

### 6.4 Staffing Recommendations

While it is possible in theory to undertake a thematic communications program under the current NIRPC communications structure – where every department head manages outreach and communications for their area – it is very difficult to do so because the coordination required. The consultant team recommends that NIRPC determine a method for consistently funding a communication manager position (or communications director - the title may vary depending on requirements of salary

classifications) within the organization or explore an ongoing relationship with a PR/marketing agency that has experience in public-sector communications. Based on information obtained through interviews and analysis, we believe such a position is feasible and appropriate given NIRPC's size. Specific recommendations related to staffing include:

- The communications manager would report directly to the executive director and would "own" all public-facing and internal communications initiatives within the organization.
- Based on the goals and objectives outlined later in this plan, the recommended experience level is between five and seven years. Demonstrated skills should include:
  - Project management
  - Media relations
  - Small to mid-size event management
  - Basic desktop publishing and HTML editing
  - Extremely strong writing and editing skills
  - Ability to work with a high degree of independence and shift priorities as needed
  - Strong capabilities with standard office programs including: Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Access
- Second-tier skills that are desirable but not required include:
  - Experience with local, regional or state government and/or policy-related issues
  - Experience with public involvement efforts
  - Photography skills

Additional information regarding the anticipated salary level of an individual in this position, as well as possible funding options, can be found in the budget section.

## 6.5 Goals, Objectives Strategies, Tactics

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This communications plan is based on a hierarchical framework of desired outcomes and actions:

- **Goals** are, ideally, derived from an organization's mission or vision statement or at least from strategic organizational imperatives;
- **Objectives** provide a measure of completion or success for determining when a goal has been met;
- **Strategies** describe the approach an organization's staff will take to achieve an objective; and
- **Tactics** define actions to be taken or materials to be developed

## **6.5. 1 Definitions**

### **6.5.1.a Goals**

Goal setting is the heart of a strategic communications plan. The sum total of NIRPC's communications goals should describe a desired end-state for the organization.

Proper goals are not measurable, actionable or constrained by a specific time frame. They are like newspaper headlines declaring what the group would like to see happen in the future. "We will increase public participation in NIRPC studies" is an example of a communications plan goal, albeit a rather vague one.

Goals form the foundation layer, spelling out what a marketing effort hopes to achieve. To be effective, goals should be relatively few in number. Once established, goals seldom change.

The communications plan contains more goals than the consulting team would normally recommend for an organization of NIRPC's size, but we believe the best choice, given the diverse nature of the client base and the services offered, was to map goals across the four Ansoff's Matrix quadrants.

### **6.5.1.b Objectives**

Goals become achievable when they have measurable objectives associated with them. An objective states exactly what needs to be done to achieve the goal, in what time frame and according to what standards. Objectives clearly define the parameters and measurements for success. Each goal may have one or more objectives associated with it, but all objectives must be achieved to claim the goal has been met. Objectives need to be complete, realistic, and readily measurable. They, in turn, provide the basis for group strategies.

All objectives should be **SMART** i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-Bound:

- **Specific** - the objective should state exactly what is to be achieved.
- **Measurable** - an objective should be capable of measurement, so that it is possible to determine whether (or how far) it has been achieved.
- **Achievable** - the objective should be realistic given the circumstances in which it is set and the resources available to the organization.
- **Relevant** - objectives should be relevant to the people responsible for achieving them.
- **Time Bound** - objectives should be set with a time-frame in mind. These deadlines also need to be realistic.

### **6.5.1.c Strategies**

While objectives are realized when a set of detailed strategies are linked to them, a strategy states: “Here is how we are going to achieve the objective, given the resources and time frame available to us.” If, for example, an objective is to boost sales by a specific amount, a marketing strategy could include determining key selling points and marketing channels to reach decision makers.

Each objective has one or more strategies linked to it. Together these present a complete picture of exactly how the objective will be met. Strategies should make explicit the assumptions about available resources and critical success factors, including people, funding, economic and market conditions, supporting technologies, and so on. This is the place in the communications planning process for clearly stating needs, flagging risks, and establishing contingencies.

### **6.5.1.d Tactics/Tools**

Once a comprehensive system of goals, objectives, and strategies has been developed, a sound basis exists for planning and budgeting specific activities to support them. Tactics (tools) are the deliverable formats for communication: brochures, advertising campaigns, media relations, etc.

## **6.5.2 Goals, Associated Objectives, and Strategies**

The goals, objectives and strategies listed are based on overarching goals for the direction NIRPC’s communication should move in for the coming 12 months. Because NIRPC has not communicated this extensively or this much of an organization-centric (rather than program-centric) manner before, the consultant team grouped goals by audience segment, with 1-2 goals per segment. This approach gives the organization more individual goals than might normally be appropriate in a communications plan, but it also creates a focused list of objectives to jump-start NIRPC’s efforts.

Where timeframes are shown, the date indicated is after sufficient staffing has been achieved, i.e., “within 60 days” means “within 60 days of hiring a manager/director of communications.”

**6.5.2.a Board Members and Elected Officials**

**Goal 1:** *Board members will be more fully engaged with NIRPC both as recipients of regular and useful communications, and as ambassadors of NIRPC’s mission in the communities they serve.*

**Goal 2:** *New board members will receive a thorough “onboarding” experience at the start of their terms, in the process learning enough about the organization to serve in this ambassador role.*

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Strategies</b>
<p>Within 60 days, develop council-level briefing materials that board members can use to offer other council members an overview of NIRPC, attempting six such overview presentations in the first year.</p>	<p>a. Overview kit based on backgrounder material (three pages, max) and talking points for the board member.</p> <p>b. NIRPC provides a senior staff member, if requested, to attend briefings.</p>
<p>Within 60 days, introduce existing board members to new onboarding materials and develop a formal program for orienting new board members at the start of their tenure.</p>	<p>a. Onboarding guide developed as part of the communications audit/plan will be primary tool for this effort.</p> <p>b. New board members are assigned both an experienced board member they can work with regarding questions as well as a designated staff contact</p> <p>c. Feedback from board members who go through the process (perhaps after a year of implementation) will be used to adjust/improve the effort.</p>

<b>6.5.2.b</b>	
<b>Media Goal 1:</b> <i>The media will have clear points of contact and consistent access to NIRPC information that goes beyond reactive reporting of board events.</i>	
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Strategies</b>
<p>Within 60 days of appropriate staffing, begin sending one press release a month (unrelated to upcoming board meetings) to local and regional media outlets.</p>	<p>a. Press releases need not announce the beginning, end or call for public involvement of a study – they may highlight demographic trends, new air-quality data, etc.</p> <p>b. Whether the news gets covered is less important in the beginning than getting reporters used to the idea that there will be a steady stream of non-meeting-related news coming out of NIRPC.</p> <p>c. Designated spokespersons can and should vary depending on subject area; press releases should, when possible, quote board members as well as senior staff.</p>
<p>In the third quarter, develop a “state of the region” media briefing that covers current projects, recent demographic trends, the state of transportation infrastructure, etc.</p>	<p>a. Need not be based on any newly completed studies, although timing coinciding with one would be useful.</p> <p>b. Designed to de-silo news coming out of NIRPC and present a more-complete, holistic picture of the region’s state and challenges.</p> <p>c. Multiple sets of data and multiple stories – a publication can choose to cover the environmental aspects, the transportation news, the economic development angle, etc.</p> <p>d. A component should be a Q&amp;A with regional experts on the areas covered.</p>
<p>Each quarter, develop and disseminate story tips to the region’s media.</p>	<p>a. Not full press releases – bulleted lists of potential story ideas related to NIRPC’s ongoing efforts.</p> <p>b. Designed to get reporters’ “wheels turning” about stories they may not have considered.</p> <p>c. Parallel approach: Send monthly NIRPC newsletter to media as well.</p>

**6.5.2.b**

**Media Goal 1:** *The media will have clear points of contact and consistent access to NIRPC information that goes beyond reactive reporting of board events.*

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Strategies</b>
Beginning immediately and as an ongoing effort, develop an in-house list of specialized media pertinent to the region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Includes publications such as chamber or homeowner association newsletters, union newsletters and the internal publications at large employers such as casinos and the mills.</li> <li>b. Each publication’s editor should be contacted and their interest in receiving NIRPC press materials determined. Once that is determined, materials are distributed to these channels as any other media.</li> <li>c. Determine whether these outlets are willing to run pre-packaged stories (such as a column from the NIRPC executive director) on a one-time or regular basis.</li> </ul>
After six months, attempt editorial-board or editorial-page-editor meetings with the region’s major newspapers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Not related to any particular study or program.</li> <li>b. Educational session – what NIRPC does, what the region’s key challenges are, etc.</li> <li>c. Designed less to generate an editorial than to provide background when subsequent, related issues arise.</li> </ul>

**6.5.2.c Legislators and Legislative Partners**

**Goal 1:** *State and federal legislators based in the region will regularly receive relevant information from NIRPC that puts the organization’s and the region’s needs in perspective, and arms these elected officials with the data they need to support NIRPC initiatives in Indianapolis and Washington.*

**Goal 2:** *Legislative partners addressing issues that overlap those of concern to NIRPC will receive information that helps coordinate and enhance messages for joint benefit.*

Objective	Strategies
<p>Within 60 days, develop a monthly or every-other-month (at the discretion of the NIRPC executive director) email update for state and federal legislators.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Emailed from the executive director, not staff.</li> <li>b. Focus is on policymaking issues and new data.</li> <li>c. Early notification device for longer-running issues that may be followed up on with personal contact or briefings.</li> </ul>
<p>At an appropriate time (generally just before the start of a new legislative session) create and distribute an annual “regional issues guide” to legislators.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Printed guide or three-ring binder</li> <li>b. Short – overview of the pressing issues, what NIRPC is doing and what assistance is needed in Indianapolis or Washington</li> <li>c. Ideally delivered as part of a personal briefing; if that isn’t possible, then transmitted via mail with a personal cover letter.</li> <li>d. Depending on the legislator and knowledge of their staff, additional copies may be made available for staffers.</li> <li>e. Copies also distributed, as appropriate, to legislative partners.</li> </ul>
<p>Within the first 90 days, assess the viability of developing a loose, working-group affiliation with legislative partners to coordinate messaging.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Could occur at the strategic (executive director) or tactical (communications manager/director) levels.</li> <li>b. Need not be formal and meeting-centric; could take the form of simply keeping each other in the loop consistently on legislator and policy-related communications.</li> </ul>

**6.5.2.d General Public**

**Goal 1:** *Through regular communications via the media, community presentations, advocacy by board members and other channels, the public will be educated about NIRPC’s roles in planning, environmental studies and other areas of long-term benefit to the region.*

**Goal 2:** *Increased participation in public-involvement initiatives will occur as NIRPC raises its profile in the community.*

Objective	Strategies
Within 60 days, create a standard NIRPC overview presentation that can be given by senior staff members to community groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. 20-30 minute presentation</li> <li>b. Include reworked NIRPC overview handout as a leave-behind.</li> <li>c. Digitized and posted on the web site as well.</li> </ul>
Over 12 months, book no fewer than seven presentations with community groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Reach out to chambers, civic organizations (Lions, Elks, etc) and key stakeholder groups first.</li> <li>b. Book at least 4-8 weeks in advance – longer if possible – so minimize calendar disruption.</li> <li>c. Use executive director for large and/or influential groups; senior staff for smaller presentations.</li> </ul>
Within 30 days, begin outreach to community groups as channels for publicizing information about NIRPC public-involvement opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Contacts developed through media relations outreach to these same groups, as well as outreach to universities/colleges.</li> <li>b. Provide short press releases or briefs about upcoming public involvement activities and public meetings.</li> <li>c.</li> </ul>
In the second six months after adoption of the plan, undertake an upgrade of the NIRPC web site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. More and more-relevant content on the home page.</li> <li>b. Better search engine optimization.</li> <li>c. Ability to sign up for email (the NIRPC monthly newsletter) or advance notice of public meetings.</li> <li>d. Possible integration of Limehouse document management and public-involvement solution.</li> </ul>

**6.5.2.d General Public**

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**Goal 2:** *Increased participation in public-involvement initiatives will occur as NIRPC raises its profile in the community.*

Objective	Strategies
Over 12 months, at least triple the circulation of the basic NIRPC newsletter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Primarily distributed via email, not mailed/printed.</li> <li>b. A basic offering to anyone expressing ongoing interest in the organization.</li> <li>c. Encourage sign-ups on the web, and during public presentations.</li> </ul>

**6.5.2.e Business Community**

**Goal 1:** *Through both formal and ad hoc partnerships, NIRPC will provide increased information about long-term regional challenges and solutions to the business community.*

Objective	Strategies
Immediately and on an ongoing basis, partner with the NWI Forum to coordinate messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Relevant NIRPC news to Forum members, and vice-versa.</li> <li>b. Recommended staffing plan (shared staffing) will make message coordination efficient.</li> <li>c. Forum members should receive the NIRPC newsletter and be invited to public-involvement events.</li> <li>d. One presentation per year should be devoted to a Forum overview for NIRPC board members and staff; one should be devoted to a NIRPC overview for Forum members.</li> </ul>
Within 60 days, begin contacting chambers of commerce and economic development organizations with an offer to present an overview of NIRPC and the region's challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Done in concert with the presentation developed in 6.5.2.d</li> <li>b. Presentations should generally be done by the executive director.</li> </ul>

**6.5.2.e Business Community**

**Goal 1:** *Through both formal and ad hoc partnerships, NIRPC will provide increased information about long-term regional challenges and solutions to the business community.*

Objective	Strategies
Within 60 days, determine the content/article/news brief needs of all local chambers and economic development organizations, and agree to provide them with information regularly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Covered under media relations goals.</li> <li>b. Could be a joint effort providing NIRPC and NWI Forum information.</li> </ul>

**6.5.2.f Organized Stakeholders**

**Goal 1:** *NIRPC will leverage the existing relationships and trust that organized stakeholder groups have built with the communities they serve, providing relevant information that educates and encourages participation.*

Objective	Strategies
Within 30 days, reach out to stakeholder groups to determine how they would like to be communicated with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Personal contact (phone or email)</li> <li>b. Emphasis is on information gathering: What kind of information would they like to see? In what format?</li> <li>c. Based on feedback, groups can begin receiving press releases, the newsletter, public-involvement announcements or a combination.</li> <li>d. As part of the effort, encourage members of the groups to sign up for the NIRPC newsletter, giving NIRPC a direct path to communicate with them.</li> </ul>
Within 60 days, arrange presentations with select groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Per the presentation outreach effort under the general-public goal.</li> <li>b. These presentations may be more highly modified than most, to reflect key group interest.</li> </ul>
After six months, review the possibility of holding listening sessions with some groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Strong strategy for reducing distrust from hostile or wary groups.</li> <li>b. Not related to any process/plan under way – more of a background activity.</li> </ul>

**6.5.2.g Staff**

**Goal 1:** *NIRPC’s increased emphasis on communication will focus inward as well as out, ensuring that staff have access to information that keeps them informed about the organization’s projects and goals.*

**Goal 2:** *To support greater communication with the community, designated staff will be trained to work with the media, give presentations about NIRPC, or take on other roles that are more public than their traditional duties may have been.*

Objective	Strategies
<p>Within 30 days, NIRPC staff will receive a brief weekly email update and a more-substantial monthly email newsletter.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Plain-text (rather than HTML) to reduce production time.</li> <li>b. Consistent –same day, same approximate time every week.</li> <li>c. Keeps staff in the loop about programs and activities in other areas they may not follow.</li> <li>d. Reinforces key points so staff, in their interactions with the public, delivers correct and consistent messages.</li> </ul>
<p>Within 30 days of developing the basic presentation, staff who are expected to present regularly will go through speaker training to encourage quality presentation and consistency of message.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Training done in-house by communications manager/director.</li> <li>b. Emphasis is on the audience and thematic message grid – matching the message to the audience.</li> <li>c. Speakers also trained to collect information about their audience – how many were there, response, etc for tracking purposes.</li> </ul>

**6.5.2.h Academia**

**Goal 1:** *NIRPC will forge stronger relationships with the region’s six academic and research communities to gather input on major projects, to leverage their existing communication channels for NIRPC messages and to potentially utilize the world-class academic resources available in pursuit of better regional quality of life.*

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Strategies</b>
Beginning in the second quarter, regular (at least quarterly) meetings with college and university leadership to explore ways in which the institutions and NIRPC might work together.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Consider initiating an academic working group</li> <li>b. Quarterly memo or brief white paper to academic officials summarizing relevant NIRPC projects.</li> <li>c. If a working group is established, set goals and objectives for the coming year up front.</li> </ul>
Within 90 days, determine in conjunction with university and college officials the best way to disseminate NIRPC information of interest to the general public (meeting notices, feature stories, etc) through established campus channels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Similar to the media relations effort.</li> <li>b. Attempt to get beyond mentions in campus publications and into things like staff/faculty email updates.</li> </ul>

**6.5.2.i Technical Stakeholders**

**Goal 1:** *NIRPC will maintain open relationships and two-way communications with the region’s technical stakeholders in order to leverage their expertise and in-depth understanding of their constituent communities.*

Objective	Strategies
<p>Within 60 days, develop domain-specific lists of technical stakeholders (i.e., a list for those interested in water/stormwater issues, a list for those involved in transportation, etc.) and develop announcement emails that would go to those lists every 30-60 days.</p>	<p>a. Simple emails updating technical stakeholders                      b. Can and should be brief, with references back to the web site                      c. Depending on the level of interest, these domain-specific groups could be encouraged to work on committees or to work advisory groups.</p>
<p>Within 90 days, determine in conjunction technical stakeholders the best way to disseminate NIRPC information of interest to the general public (meeting notices, feature stories, etc) through channels that the technical stakeholders may control or have access to, such as community public-access channels, city newsletters and web sites, etc..</p>	<p>a. Similar to the media relations effort.                      b. Enlist public-sector technical stakeholders as gateways for getting project an initiative information disseminated within city and county staffs.</p>

**6.5.3 Tactics and Tools**

It should be noted that the NIRPC staff has done an outstanding job with the development and execution of existing tactics and tools. This is particularly true given the decentralized nature of the communications program thus far. Indeed, many of the tools and tactics recommended are already in use at NIRPC, and would merely need to be made consistent in their message across the thematic-communications matrix, as well as given a slightly more consistent look and feel.

Most of the tactics and tools anticipated can be used in multiple situations, and will be listed without reference to specific strategies or objectives except where clarification is needed.

### **6.5.3.a Infrastructure**

- **NIRPC requires an organization-wide data store for managing stakeholder and related contacts** that is robust enough to capture tracking data (attendance at meetings, interest, etc) and flexible enough for all authorized users within the organization to use with little learning curve. If programming is available at no cost within the organization, we would recommend a database with a Web-based front end and access control to keep the public out; if that is unavailable or only available at great cost, then an Excel or Access file on the server, if properly set up, should do the job for at least a year.
- **A more-robust method for managing the web site – particularly in terms of allowing staff members who may not have any HTML knowledge to manipulate content – is required.** Because the web site will become a greater part of NIRPC’s communications toolkit overall, a more-efficient manner of managing that asset is necessary. The consulting team recommends a move away from the current Front Page-based site architecture to a content management system with administrative log in levels allowing some users to enter content and have it posted immediately, while other users could enter content that had to be reviewed before going live. Several free and fee-based options exist in this space, and the optimal choice will depend on the capabilities of NIRPC’s hosting provider.
- **Similarly, NIRPC could benefit from a more effective way of tracking electronic communications.** Email brings many benefits to the NIRPC communications program such as immediacy of delivery, but it also brings tracking capabilities that could help the organization understand how best to allocate its communications resources. It is very common to track “clickthroughs” in HTML email to monitor, for example, how many people went from the email to a specific link on the web site. There are low-cost commercial solutions for sending out large amounts of customized HTML email with link tracking; two that the consultant team recommends are Constant Contact (a hosted solution) and Send Studio (which can be hosted on NIRPC’s server or that of its ISP).

### **6.5.3.b Electronic and Print Communications**

- **The NIRPC newsletter is a strong product that should be continued and improved.** Recommendations include:
  - Shorter articles, but more articles, per issue. If a subject needs a longer treatment, write a brief article in the newsletter and link to a longer piece or a white paper on the NIRPC web site.
  - Electronic distribution to any/all stakeholders that NIRPC has email addresses for, unless the stakeholder specifically opts out

- Three to four annual “themed” issues that move timely news to the back and focus on a major theme that parallels NIRPC’s work areas such as transportation, environmental work, etc.
- Personalized emailings to technical, academic and legislative partners a few days before the newsletter is sent out, asking them to distribute the document within their organizations.
- **Standardized HTML and plain-text “postcard” emails should be developed** to alert stakeholders to upcoming meetings or events. Technical stakeholders should be encouraged to either send these out within their organizations and/or to their stakeholders, or they should be asked to provide lists for NIRPC staff to send out the emails.
- **In addition to the newsletter, NIRPC should produce 3-5 new information pieces annually. These include:**
  - Issue overview pieces (similar to a white paper) on transportation, economic development, environmental management and/or other program areas. These are designed to be “mini annual reports” that offer an overview of NIRPC’s role in these areas, as well as summaries of current efforts.
  - An annual “state of the region” report that takes information from the overview pieces as well as updated demographic and economic information. This would be used to drive a press conference and follow-up coverage about trends in the region.
- **The web site is fundamentally strong compared to other MPOs of similar size and capabilities, but should include more material** to help visitors understand the breadth of programs. This is less of a design issue than an infrastructure issue – the site would likely have more material on it if it were easier to update and if those updates could be handled by multiple staff members.
- **The existing NIRPC overview document should be revised and expanded** to present NIRPC’s role and responsibilities framed in a manner consistent with the major themes developed. In addition to a print version of this document, it should be available via the web site as a PDF and, potentially, as a downloadable, self-running presentation.

### 6.5.3.c Presentations

- **Develop a standard NIRPC overview presentation in PowerPoint**, along with a script, that can be modified for the various audiences and purposes identified in the objectives and strategies.
- **Additionally, consider making the presentation available in a self-running format** via the Web site.
- **A subset of this presentation can then be used as backgrounder material** when specific program or outreach presentations are being made.
- **Finally, develop a pitch letter and/or phone script that administrative staff can use** in setting up presentations for a range of local audiences.

#### **6.5.3.d Media Relations**

- NIRPC **should consider developing a monthly “regional facts” graphic and short copy block that can be easily graphed/charted and distributed to regional print media.** Variations and extensions of this task include developing a brief column that could run regularly or periodically in the local business journal or other publication, as well as using these same materials to reach out to the myriad Chamber and business-association newsletters in the region. Also, this material (the fact, the column or both) should be repurposed for the Web site and the NIRPC newsletter. *The idea is to get people thinking about regional trends.*
- NIRPC should develop an annual “state of the region” or “the region by the numbers” **demographic, planning and economic data report** for use by the media. This is an overview document rather than a formal study, and would merely develop a snapshot of the region as the basis for commentary in the media by NIRPC board members and executives. As it becomes established as an annual event, other related stories could be pitched at the time of the document’s release.

## 6.6 Budget Considerations

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The majority of the new materials planned can be produced electronically or by NIRPC's internal copying/printing operations; the single largest new expense to consider in the adoption of this plan is staffing.

### 6.6.1 Costs For Internal Staffing

Based on a survey of marketing and communications professionals who were presented with the general responsibilities of the position, the estimated salary range for this position fits within the band already established for director-level professionals at NIRPC: approximately \$43,000-\$60,000. At the low end of that scale, NIRPC could reasonably expect to hire someone with five or fewer years of experience and an emphasis on a broad range of skills; at the higher end of the range, the organization could expect to get someone with basic management experience, more in-depth project management skills and perhaps a background in government or policy work.

This is the most traditional solution for meeting the NIRPC communication-staffing need – a full-time employee reporting to the executive director.

**Approach strength:** The advantage of the approach is the constancy and intimate organizational knowledge that a full-time employee can develop.

**Approach weakness:** Employees are less challenged to stay on top of new developments in their field, and there is increased tendency to do things a certain way because “that’s the way we’ve always done it.”

### 6.6.2 Costs For Outsourced/Consultant Staffing

For comparative purposes, West Third Group reviewed the scope of work required under this plan and estimated that a small to mid-sized marketing or public relations consultant would price the work at approximately \$3,500-\$5,000 per month. Depending on negotiations, this could either be level across the contract period or front-loaded to reflect the higher levels of effort expended in jump-starting the program. At the lower end of that budget range, major projects such as a full web site redesign would need to be planned far in advance in order not to interfere with ongoing or periodic tasks; at the higher end of that range, NIRPC would get a turn-key solution and a great deal of “face time” from its chosen vendor.

**Approach strength:** This approach favors rapid, high-end execution because it's likely that an outsourced solution would involve multiple people with high levels of experience.

**Approach weakness:** Crisis communications and staff communications would be more difficult because, by its very nature, an outsourced approach will mean fewer hours overall and many fewer hours actually in NIRPC's offices.

### 6.6.3 Costs For Non-Staffing Expenses

The consultant team lacks information on NIRPC's in-house costs for production of new informational sheets, reprographics and other services. However, based on other projects of this type, we anticipate that a 12-month budget not to exceed \$10,000 should cover anticipated needs for postage and reproduction.

Assumptions:

- Mail would go out at a nonprofit rate
- Changes to the NIRPC web site would involve no more than \$1,000 in coding/design costs, with the remainder of changes done internally.
- The majority of communications with contacts would be via email or personal letter, both of which are low-cost vehicles for outreach.
- The largest printing/reprographics costs would be for the higher-end pieces developed for leave-behinds at speaking engagements or use by legislators.

### 6.7 Schedule

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Because the objectives are time-bound against the start of a new communications manager/director, no detailed schedule has been provided.

### 6.8 Success Metrics and Measurement

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Success metrics are highly specific to the goals and objectives of the communications plan, the nature of the goods or services being sold, the maturity of the organization, and other factors. The right metrics for judging the success of NIRPC's communications are not the same as the metrics another organization might use – indeed, they are not the same this year as they will likely be next year, when the plan evolves.

Because NIRPC has not consistently taken an assertive, proactive role in past communication with the public, Success metrics come down, essentially, to execution against plan goals and objectives, as well as end-product metrics (i.e., number of stories placed in the press, average and total number of participants at public-involvement activities, etc.) from those efforts.

Recommended success metrics to track in the first year of the communications plan include the following:

- Were the objectives for each goal met?
- Were time-window standards for objectives met?
- Ranking press and newsletter stories as either positive, neutral or negative, did the total amount of coverage – and the total amount of positive coverage – increase over previous years?
- Were public participation levels up, on average, after a year of execution?