

Communication Happens. Don't leave it to chance.

Planning for Increased Impact

At Voices, we believe in the power of the plan. And not only the plan itself, but the process of developing the plan, which keeps the focus on the right questions, in the right order, so that you can choose the best tactics and efficiently use limited resources.

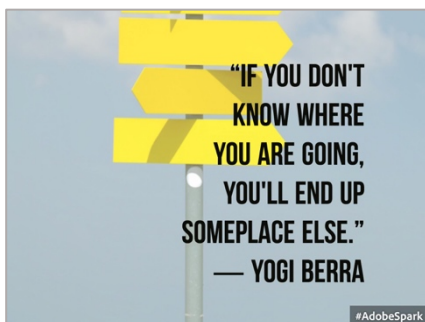
This document is designed as a tool to be used together with the Communications Planning Worksheet.

The process described here is the one we use at Voices. It provides a structure – the right steps, in the right order - for developing an effective plan for each of your **objectives**. It asks you to consider not only **audiences** and **messengers**, but the **core values** of those **audiences** and **messengers**, and their **level of readiness** to do what you need them to.

First, though, why even bother with a communications plan, especially for objectives that aren't overtly communications-oriented?

Top 10 Reasons to Develop a Communications Plan

10. Clarify what you are really trying to do
9. Efficiently use limited resources
8. Engage staff and volunteers
7. Civil Legal Aid is still pretty much invisible
6. Tactics follow strategy
5. Shape the message
4. Target your power-audiences
3. Coordinate stakeholder activities
2. Measure progress and adjust strategy as necessary
1. **Advance your organization's or campaign's objectives**



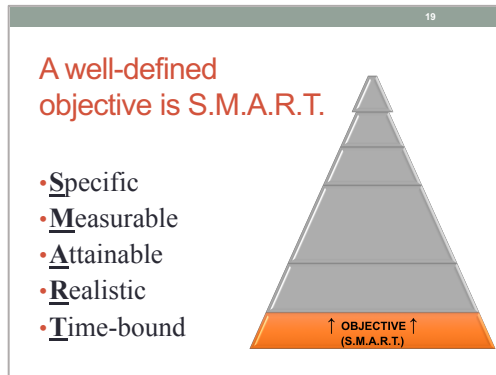
S.M.A.R.T. OBJECTIVES

The role of strategic communication, and therefore communications planning, is to advance the objectives of the organization or campaign. Period.

Assuming limited time and resources, would you set off on a trip without knowing the destination, mapping your route, putting gas in the car, etc.? Think of your communications plan as a map

to a destination. The **Objective** is the destination. For the plan to be effective, the objective must be well-defined.

A well-defined objective is S.M.A.R.T. What do we mean by S.M.A.R.T.?



SPECIFIC - Remember - Your objective should give you a clear destination. Other words that fit here are precise, clear cut, explicit, unambiguous... you get the idea.

MEASURABLE - For example - Not just “help people overcome barriers to employment,” but “build a coalition of retail employers in Springfield who agree to hire formerly incarcerated people.” How many employers? How many people will be hired? You need to be able to track your progress, adjust as necessary, evaluate the outcome / know when/if you have succeeded.

ATTAINABLE - Without regard to resources, is the thing you’re aiming to accomplish possible?

REALISTIC - Even if it is possible, can you do it with the resources available? In the political climate? In the time available?

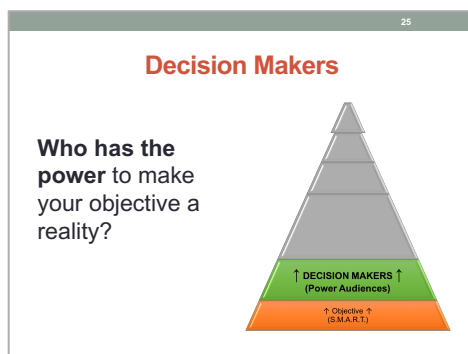
TIME-BOUND - There needs to be an end-point to your plan, a point at which you can evaluate progress, declare victory, or call it done and move on.

Example of a S.M.A.R.T. objective:

During the 2018 legislative session, avert sunset of the “Filing Fee” bill to sustain the state’s current level of funding to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation that results from filing fees.

(Fill in Step 1, the Objective, on your worksheet.)

DECISION MAKERS



Once you have a SMART objective, the next question to ask yourself is “Who has the power to make this happen?” These are your “Decision Makers” – your primary audience. It can be one person, a few, or many.

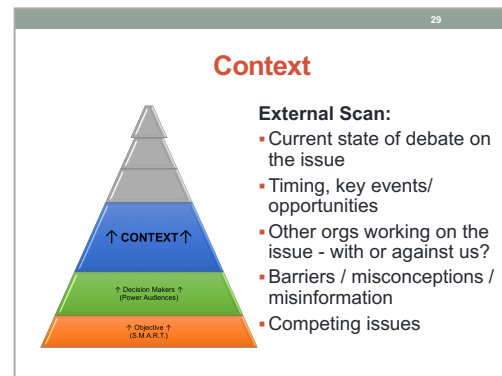
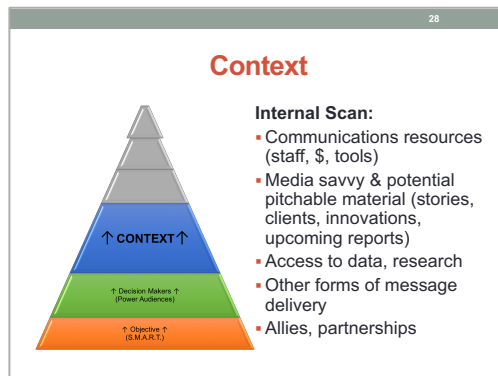
The defining factor of a **Decision Maker** is that they have the power to make your objective a reality. Ultimately your communication is aimed at influencing them.

For each of your **Decision Makers**, you need to consider their **Core Concerns** and **Values**. These will inform the rest of your planning process. For example, the **message** you later choose for a specific **decision maker** should be responsive to that person’s **values** and **core concerns**. Your job is to get them to act. To do that you need to know what will motivate them, which requires appealing to their **values** and **core concerns**.

The **Readiness** question on your worksheet asks you to consider how ready the **decision makers** are to be influenced. Do they know nothing (yet) about your issue and need to be educated? Do they know about your issue but need to be persuaded to act? Or are they already doing what you need them to do, but need to be thanked and encouraged to do more of it?

(Fill in Step 2, the Decision Makers section, on your worksheet.)

CONTEXT



The next level in the pyramid is the **CONTEXT**. Now that you know your objective, and who you need to reach, you'll need to evaluate the contexts in which you are working – both internal and external.

(Fill in Step 3, the Context section, on your worksheet.)

MESENTERS



Messengers are the people who are most likely to influence your **decision makers**.

When you have assessed your decision makers, and considered the context, you have the information you will need to choose effective **messengers**. Can you see how the previous steps need to come first?

Your **messengers** need to be activated, which, as with the **decision makers**, requires assessing their **readiness, core concerns, and values**.

(Fill in Step 4, the Messengers section, on your worksheet.)

MESSAGES



Your **message** is what you want your **decision makers** to **THINK, FEEL** or **DO** about your issue. That doesn't necessarily mean it's what you will say to them. It is always risky to tell anyone what they should think or feel about an issue.

Instead, you might use powerful stories that illustrate the important role of civil legal aid in helping veterans to persuade a **decision maker** that they want to fund your veterans program.

In practice, message and messenger go hand-in-hand; a message is more effective if it is delivered by **messenger** who has influence over your decision maker(s). For example, an op-ed written by someone your decision makers respect will be more influential than one written by someone unknown to them.

(Fill in Step 5, the Messaging section, on your worksheet.)

TACTICS



Well-chosen **tactics** are critical to the success of your plan, and they are often the fun part! We have a tendency to want to jump straight to tactics, but the best tactics cannot be identified until the other pieces of the plan are in place.

Tactics, like messengers, are critical to the successful delivery of your message to the **decision makers** you have identified.

How do you choose tactics? To be effective, your **tactics** must be a good match to your **decision makers**.

What would be good tactics to communicate with you? Why? Where do you get your information? Do you read the paper every morning? Are you a Twitter user? Facebook? What radio shows do you listen to? Whose opinion do you trust?

Answering those questions about your **decision makers** will lead to choosing the most effective tactics to communicate with them.

(Keeping all of the preceding information you have filled in in-mind, complete Step 6, the Tactics section, on your worksheet.)

Congratulations! You have a communications plan for your objective. Remember to do a separate worksheet for each objective.