As discussed in earlier classes about communication planning, there are very specific steps to go through to develop an effective communication plan. It starts with having a clear understanding of the problem and audiences involved to solve that problem (Phase 1-Research) and then developing a clear plan for reaching out to specific audiences to achieve your goal (Phase 2-Planning). During this block of instruction, we will talk about Phase 3 - Implementation of your plan.

As the PAO, it is your responsibility to identify the necessary resources to execute your plan. You will determine the personnel in your shop responsible for executing various tasks and tactics as well as identify any additional resources necessary to ensure that nothing falls through the cracks.

Photo courtesy of pmpundit.com
Review Research and Planning

From previous readings and lectures you have learned that the first two steps of the communication process were research and planning.

Research results in defining the problem. This first step involves probing and monitoring knowledge, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of those concerned with and affected by the acts and policies of an organization. It provides the foundation for all the other steps in the problem-solving process by determining, “What is happening now?”

Planning deals with programming. Information gathered in the research step is used to make decisions about the program publics, objectives, communication strategies, tactics and goals. This second step in the process answers, “Based on what we have learned about the situation, what should we change or do, and say?”

Now we are going to look at the steps to take once a plan is in place. The implementation phase helps you get your messages out to key audiences.
Implement

This is where you coordinate actions and communicate what is going to happen. Although every communication action plan may not be the result of an initiating public affairs problem, many public affairs issues are the result of some action or inaction on the part of the organization. If something that was done caused a problem, then something must be done to solve it. This is the action component of your communication strategy.

Communication strategy supports the action program by:

● informing internal and external target publics of the action the organization is taking;
● persuading those publics to support and accept the action;
● instructing publics in skills needed to translate intention into action.

Although communication is important, it is not enough.

You simply can’t communicate your way out of a situation you’ve behaved your way into. For maximum effect, the organization must align its actions and words. The words and messages the command uses to show how it is handling a situation must match the actions that the organization is taking.

Now that you have a better understanding of the importance of a good implementation strategy, let’s look at the tasks associated with creating an implementation action plan.
Action Plan

You will need to review the Communication Plan template and Communication Plan matrix located in the assignment files.

Identify the tasks associated with each planned tactic. A typical action plan will take the stakeholder, goal, objective strategy and tactics and outline the specific steps for successful implementation. This includes the following information:

What is going to be done? List all activities and tactics for every public and objective. Then outline the steps, in order, that will lead to its completion.

For example, if one of your tactics is some kind of "kick-off" event to draw attention to your project, you need to think about all of the steps required to execute a successful launch.

You should create a launch checklist with questions like:

- Have we coordinated this launch with our strategic partners?
- Have we prepared and trained our staff and spokespeople?
- Do we have a list of media outlets we need to contact?
- Are all of our promotional materials ready? This includes things like brochures or trifolds explaining your program. It could also include PSAs, posters, as well as web sites and social media platforms created for your program.
- Have we created enough supporting materials (press kits, messages and talking points, response to query) to facilitate the launch?

After thinking through the tasks associated with your action plan, the next step is to look at your resources to see if the implementation action plan is feasible.

Identify PA and non-PA resource requirements.

Every task identified in the implementation action plan needs to include the associated resource requirements needed to accomplish the task. Look at funding, time, people, and materials.

For example, holding a press conference has a number of logistical requirements. Consider where you are going to stage the media. Provide press kits. This all can involve time, people, funding, and materials.

Develop an execution timeline. What is the timeline to accomplish this tactic? Working backward from the communication plan completion point, assign a date for each step.

Let's say your tactic is to place print PSAs in up to 25 periodicals, newsletters or bulletins. How long would that take? Here's an example taken from a corporate public relations plan.

Activity: Place print PSAs in up to 25 periodicals, newsletters, or bulletins


[Weeks 1 & 2] Identify list of potential placement opportunities and get names and addresses of public service director or advertising manager for each publication; (local phone charges); 4-6 person hours.

[Week 1] Draft/review/refine cover letter to director/manager; $0.00; 2 person hours.

[Week 2] Print letters; $0.50 (paper); 1 person hour.

[Week 2] Acquire flat envelopes and blank labels for mailing; $10.00; 1 person hour.

[Week 2] Create labels for mailing; $0.00; 3-4 person hours.

[Week 2] Assemble mailing; $0.00; 2-3 person hours.
Action Plan (continued)

[Week 2] Mail print PSAs; $13.75 (.55x25); .25 person hour.

[Week 3] Begin follow-up calls to PSA directors to encourage placement; (local calls); 6-8 hours (could be done by 2 persons;).

[Weeks 3-10] Monitor PSA placement; $5.00 to purchase papers; 3-4 person hours.

[Week 10] Write report about initiative, its outcomes, midcourse corrections, and things you would do differently next time; $2.00 paper & repro; 4-6 person hours.

[Week 10 or 11] Circulate to appropriate members of your organization; $0.00; 1-2 person. Hours Total direct costs: $31.25 Labor: 28-38 person hours (over 4-10 weeks' time after acquiring PSAs)

Other tool that you can use with your action plan that will help you visualize all of the tasks, responsibilities, and timeline associated with your campaign is a Gantt chart. The Gantt chart is a visual representation in sequential order of each tactic and step taken in your communication plan. Your Gantt chart will be useful to visualize simultaneous functions.
Action Plan (continued)

Typically, the date/timeline runs horizontally across the page; tasks are listed in chronological order down the left-hand side. A line extends across the page from each task, showing the date work begins and ends on that task or subtask. The point is to show the relationship of the steps over the time of implementation. An example of a Gantt chart is in the reading folder.

With everyone working from detailed action plans, you can carry out your communication plan more efficiently by simply asking for a report on where the person in charge is on any assigned project. Having overall start dates and due dates followed by individual start and due dates might seem redundant, but in reality, you can simply look at your calendar, see where the project is according to your Gantt chart and action plan step, and very quickly see if you are on schedule or not.

Photo courtesy of itsaboutyoursuccess.com
Conclusion

Having a good implementation plan is critical to carrying out a successful communication plan strategy. This lecture is designed to give you the tools necessary for creating a comprehensive implementation plan.
References and Additional Resources


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