

## **North Dakota Library Association Strategic Communications Plan 2015-2016**

The North Dakota Library Association (NDLA) is responsible for the implementation and monitoring of this strategic communications plan.

Jason Matthews of JM Strategies LLC, a public relations and public affairs firm, conducted the planning process and wrote this plan, which was created in collaboration with the Strategic Communications Planning Committee. The following NDLA representatives served on this committee:

Greta Guck – *Leach Public Library & NDLA President*  
Christine Kujawa – *Bismarck Veterans Memorial Public Library*  
Mary Soucie – *State Librarian, North Dakota State Library*  
Kelly Steckler – *Mandan-Morton Public Library*  
Wendy Wendt – *Grand Forks Public Library*

This is the first strategic communications plan for NDLA. The association decided after the 2015 legislative session to develop a plan outlining practical and achievable communications goals. It is designed to set out the objectives, messages, and strategies that will be used during the next year to communicate NDLA's priorities and messages to various audiences throughout the state.

The Committee understands that effective communications must be a strategic priority for NDLA. Regular review of the association's communications approaches must be done in order to address challenges, identify emerging issues, and effectively communicate the association's policy positions and messages.

Whereas groups and individuals were once dependent on having their information disseminated through the proverbial "middle man" (the media), the Internet and social media have torn down these walls. Groups and individuals are now able to engage in one-on-one conversations with their audiences. While this development has revolutionized communications, it has also increased the importance of operating from a plan, having a core message, and strategically sharing that message.

At the outset, the Committee understood that the planning process is vital to the ultimate success of the plan. For this reason, the Committee began its planning process by conducting a communications audit of the association. Elements of this audit included: (1) Grading NDLA on its general communications; (2) grading the association leadership's general understanding of the importance of communications; (3) conducting a communications SWOT analysis examining the association's communication strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; and (4) identifying and prioritizing the association's key audiences. The results of this audit served as the foundation for the development of the entire plan.

NDLA is a volunteer driven organization. For this reason, the Committee opted to submit a communications plan that is simple, straight forward, and practical. The Committee has also built in general requirements and recommendations to ensure the successful implementation of this plan, along with the flexibility and discretion for the organization to review and amend the plan as needed.

## **Situational Analysis**

The communications audit revealed a consensus that NDLA's present communications is limited to its internal audience and state legislators. The Committee believes the association has failed to capitalize on the opportunity to create a website that serves as both a resource for members and a source of information for the general public. Social media efforts are lacking or non-existent. The association has not become a resource for members, thus membership has either declined or atrophied in recent years. Advocacy planning is limited to immediately before the start of the biennial legislative sessions. And advocacy is limited only to the state legislature at the great expense of local city councils/commissions and other governing boards.

Furthermore, the general public does not understand what NDLA does and – most importantly – has not heard a message emphasizing the importance of libraries. If NDLA does not communicate this message, no one else will.

While an apple to apple comparison to other state library associations is not exactly fair, it is clear that NDLA has fallen short in mobilizing the resources it does have to effectively communicate a message, advocate at every level, mobilize its members, and recruit new members.

The Committee strongly believes the association risks becoming irrelevant if it does not make necessary changes.

## **Communications Approach & Implementation of This Plan**

NDLA must adopt a *supportive* approach to communications. This requires the association to provide resources and on-going training to members. Such an approach can serve as one of the incentives to join the association, thus adding value to NDLA membership.

The NDLA Board of Directors shall appoint a Strategic Communications Committee to oversee the implementation, management, annual review, and amending of this plan.

## **Primary Audiences**

The Committee identified the following four (4) primary audiences as the most important to NDLA:

- NDLA Members & Potential Members
- Legislators & Local Leaders
- Patrons
- General Public

While each of these audiences have different informational needs, depending on their relationship to libraries, all communications from the association must be developed with at least one of these audiences in mind.

The association must frequently communicate with each of these audiences throughout the year. Best media avenues (local newspaper, social media, etc.) and unique outreach initiatives (meetings, events, etc.) should be employed in connecting with these audiences.

## Issues, Goals, & Objectives

The Committee believes the following four (4) issues must be addressed in order to ensure NDLA is effectively communicating to its primary audiences:

- Website
- Message and Marketing
- Advocacy
- Membership

### Issue: NDLA Website

**Strategic Goal:** To have a professionally developed and designed website, which will be a resource for both internal and external information.

**Primary Target Audiences:** NDLA members and potential members; legislators and local leaders; general public

### Objectives:

- Hire a professional web developer to develop and design a new website, which will be easy to administer, navigate, and be visually appealing.
- The association should explore the websites of other state library associations for ideas, elements, and features that can be included in NDLA's new website. This will help guide the website development and design process.
- The new website should include a media page that features press statements, news releases, policy statements, photographs, info-graphics, fact sheets about the importance of libraries, etc.
- The new website should include a 'Member Resources' page that provides various resources for NDLA members such as, but not limited to: Professional development, media relations and marketing materials and templates, library programming ideas, and mentorship program, etc.
- Make all publications available online in PDF format.

## **Issue: Message and Marketing**

**Strategic Goal:** Create a unified message and marketing strategy.

**Primary Target Audiences:** NDLA members and potential members; patrons; general public

### **Objectives:**

- Create a unified message for the organization around the theme “Libraries Matter.”
- Utilize the theme “Libraries Matter” in all communications and advocacy initiatives.
- Establish a marketing plan for the association.
- Create marketing brochures and information sheets for NDLA.
- Create marketing templates for NDLA members to be used at their libraries.
- Consider the possibility of running public service announcements (PSAs) on radio, online, and in weekly newspapers about why libraries matter.
- Use National Library Week, and other library and literacy related days and celebrations as opportunities to communicate on why libraries matter.
- Establish regular communication with key outside stakeholders – Non-member librarians (potential members), legislators and local leaders, library patrons, and the general public.
- Initiate regular communications with state and local media.
- Establish communications and relationships with all ‘Friends of the Library’ organizations across the state.
- Provide regular “action alerts” on local, state, and federal issues impacting libraries.
- Celebrate successes of member libraries across the state.
- Provide an online resource where members may share ideas with other members throughout the year and in between annual conferences.

**Issue: Advocacy**

**Strategic Goal:** To develop an advocacy strategy for the association and provide advocacy training and resources for members.

**Primary Target Audiences:** NDLA members and potential members; legislators and local leaders

**Objectives:**

- Create an Advocacy Committee.
- Initiate regular communication with legislators and local officials.
- Initiate communication with each member of the state’s congressional delegation. The association should also consider sending representatives to National Library Legislative Day.
- Develop a “Libraries Matter” policy priority list of *up to* five (5) important policy goals for NDLA to advance at the state and local levels.
- Develop an advocacy strategy for local libraries to follow and implement when dealing with local leaders.
- Develop an advocacy strategy for the 2017 legislative session several months before the legislative organizational session in December 2016.
- Have libraries nominate local leaders and legislators for outstanding support for libraries. NDLA selects one or two recipients for recognition with a special award during the annual conferences.
- Provide an advocacy toolkit for NDLA members and on-going professional development and training on advocacy.

**Issue: Membership**

**Strategic Goal:** To better engage current NDLA members and increase overall membership.

**Target Audiences:** NDLA members and potential members

**Objectives:**

- Increase the number of members serving on, and the authority of, the Membership Committee.
- Improve internal communication with NDLA members.
- Develop and distribute a survey to all librarians in the state on:
  - Awareness of NDLA, its mission and purpose?
  - Why are you or are not a member of NDLA?
  - What can be done to add value to NDLA membership?
  - What resources can NDLA provide to help you professionally in your role as a librarian?
- Based on survey results and recommendations, develop and utilize new engagement tactics for both current members and potential members with a heavy reliance on the new NDLA website and social media.
- Ensure the annual conference provides a diverse range of programming from both NDLA members and outside presenters.

## **Communications & Advocacy Tool Kit**

NDLA shall develop a communications tool kit for members that will consist of the following:

- Statewide media list
- Talking points on key issues
- Sample Communications Plan
- News release template
- Media statement template
- Social media post ideas and examples
- Letters to the Editor ideas and examples
- Newsletter ideas and examples (both print and online)
- Op-Ed ideas and examples
- Examples of formal letters to federal, state, and local leaders
- Examples of constituent/library supporter letters to federal, state, and local leaders

## **Outreach Tactics & Vehicles**

When communicating to NDLA's four (4) primary audiences, the following media and outreach tactics can be used:

### NDLA Members & Potential Members:

- Website
- Social media
- Email messages and electronic updates (including 'Action Alerts')
- Newsletters
- Letters
- Webinars
- Annual conference and other events

### Legislators & Local Leaders:

- Website
- Social media
- Email messages
- Letters
- News releases, media statements, and news stories
- Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor
- Newsletters
- Events

Patrons:

- Website
- Social media
- Newsletters
- Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor
- Events

General Public:

- Website
- Social media
- News releases, media statements, and news stories
- Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor
- Events

**Evaluation**

After one year of the plan's approval, the Strategic Communications Committee shall perform a communications audit to evaluate the effectiveness of this strategic communications plan. Based on the results of the audit, the Committee may recommend amendments to this plan.

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Approved by Strategic Communications Committee on September 14, 2015.