



Key focus areas for

Growing Organizations

Episode 1: The Basics of Communications

ABOUT RIVER NETWORK

River Network grows and strengthens a transformational national network of water, justice, and river advocates.

We envision a powerful and inclusive movement that ensures abundant clean water for all people and nature to thrive. We believe that joy and hope for our planet flows through our rivers.

Meet the network and search our Water Protectors Map on our website!
rivernetwork.org ←



IN PARTNERSHIP

This work is produced by River Network with collaborative support from the Hudson River Watershed Alliance.

The production of these resources has been funded in part by a grant from the New York State Environmental Protection Fund through the Hudson River Estuary Program of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Hudson River
Estuary Program

ORG GROWTH CHECKLIST

For established / growing groups



COMMUNICATIONS / MARKETING

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- *How do you define the reach of your communications (is there a key audience)?*
- *Where can staff/volunteers access marketing assets (logo, boilerplate language, branding guidance, images)?*

River Network published an [Inclusive Communications Guide](#) - use it to better understand how your communications can be more accessible, welcoming, and ethical.

FINANCIAL & LEGAL INFRASTRUCTURE

When an organization starts receiving more funding and/or engaging more community members, there are additional financial and legal risks. Thinking through how to manage additional resources and risk is a statutory task for an organization's leadership team.

- *Does the organization carry insurance, or is it listed as additionally insured on another group's insurance policy?*
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For more information on insurance coverage, reference information from a trusted partner: [Nonprofit Insurance Alliance](#).

LEADERSHIP: POLICIES & PLANNING

Various elements come together to ensure smooth and sustainable leadership transitions: managing workloads, in-filling capacity, handing off information and duties, and more can be anticipated and well-planned for.

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Check out [this webinar by consultant Karen Strong](#) (Strong Outcomes) from the 2021 HRWA Annual Watershed Conference.

EVALUATION SYSTEMS

Evaluation is an often overlooked tool when considering workplanning and leadership needs. Having a way to constructively evaluate the organization's progress toward its mission, its leadership, and its value in the community will help guide work and identify needs in the future. Evaluation metrics also support fundraising and engagement goals.

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Not sure where to start? Check out this [sample board/leadership evaluation template](#), written for nonprofit boards of directors, but easily adjusted for any group.

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TOPICS TODAY:

- What do we mean by “communications”
- Determining your audience
- Choosing effective messages
- Creating and managing assets

TYPES OF COMMS:

INTERNAL

Information shared within your group/organization

Directed to members, volunteers, staff, leadership, etc.

EXTERNAL

Information shared outside of your group/organization

Directed to funders, supporters, community, decision-makers, general public

COMMUNICATIONS 101

IS:

Any messages shared
between your group/org
and its audiences (donors,
members, voters)

INCLUDES:

Fundraising Appeals
Gratitude
News / Event notices
Annual / Project reports
Blogs / Newsletters
Press Coverage
Position Statements

PLATFORMS:

Website
Social Media
Mail & Email
Print
Local Media
Live Events

WHY DO WE CARE?

At times, your group/organization may need to...

- Communicate project impacts
- Solicit others for resources
- Build visibility and legitimacy
- Bring attention to a local issue
- Take a stance on an issue and garner support



COMMS VOCAB

BRAND



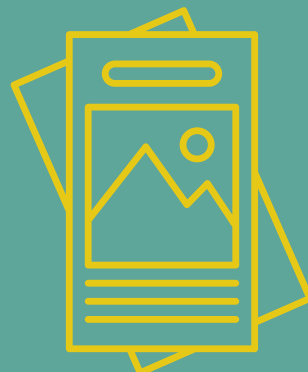
Visible & tangible elements that help convey your identity & mission

VOICE



Linguistic elements that convey personality and point of view, aligned with core values, that remain consistent regardless of messenger, audience, or communication

COLLATERAL / ASSETS



Physical & digital products that help achieve a communications plan

STEP 1: AUDIENCES

WHO you're communicating with is just as important as WHAT you are saying!

The general public or “everyone” is NOT an audience; think about groups of people who...

- You already have the support/attention of
- Have engaged with your work already
- Align with your values
- Have decision-making power that affects your work
- Have resources you need access to
- Oppose or challenge your mission



STEP 1: AUDIENCES

Tactics for managing & generating audiences include:

- Keeping an up-to-date contact list with audience categories
 - “Event attendee”
 - “Volunteer”
 - “Donor”
- Having a simple way to sign up for communications
- Hosting live events to gather contacts
- 1-1 meetings with community leaders



STEP 2: MESSAGES

Connect all of your messages to your MISSION STATEMENT:

- Informational → “news” and happenings
- Solicitations → all fundraising, event invites
- Calls to Action → motivational and action-oriented

WATERSHED D

monthly newsletter

Update from the Hudson River V

Annual Watershed Con

Collaborating Across Bo



The Hudson River Watershed Alliance's

was Collaborating Across B

This year's Annual Watershed Conference convened 150 Valley and beyond with presentations and conversations Collaborating Across Boundaries.

Working on watersheds takes people from all different ba of expertise. One of the key questions we explored: How effectively and efficiently to reach our watershed goals?

The webinar session on October 22 shared frameworks a scale collaborations, based on insights from Oregon's Pa



River Network

December 2, 2025 · 🌐

It's Giving Tuesday, join us in investing in the drivers of change: the people, organizations, and movements that turn local action into lasting impact.

Your Giving Tuesday gift helps us:

- ✓ Provide direct funding to community groups
- ✓ Expand tools and training for water leaders
- ✓ Support collaboration and shared solutions

If you've been waiting for the right time to give, today is the day.

Make your Giving Tuesday gift: <https://www.rivernetwork.org/donate/>

Your Giving Tuesday gift helps us:

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Good morning,

The US [EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers announced a proposed rule](#) last month to redefine the definition of "Waters of the United States" (WOTUS), a key term in the applicability and implementation of the Clean Water Act.

Unfortunately, this proposal advances an incredibly restrictive interpretation which would only serve to limit or eliminate federal protections for wetlands and many ephemeral and intermittent streams across the Great Lakes region, putting drinking water, habitats, and communities at risk.

To push back on this proposal, we need your help! If you'd like to join us in opposing the proposed rule, we have two actions you can take:

[Sign your organization onto our joint letter](#)

[Submit your own comment](#) on the proposal! The **comment period closes Monday, January 5.**

Use the HOW Coalition's Talking Points in drafting your comment.

Important note: the Administration has made a changes to how public comments are counted and sign-on letters and identical comments organized by advocacy organizations are being undercounted when comments are reviewed. As such, rather than providing you with a draft comment, [we've put together a set of talking points](#) so that you can draft your own short comments if you have the time. All you need to do is write one to two paragraphs about why this proposed rule is of concern to you and, if possible, share any insights on how it can impact your community.

We appreciate your support in pushing back on efforts to further weaken the Clean Water Act! If you have any questions please feel free to reach out

RIGHT TIME, MESSAGE, MESSENGER



Is now the right TIME to communicate your information?
Timely, relevant, responsive?



Is the message accurate, clear, and aligned with your audience?
Vocabulary, tone, values?



Is the VOICE/PERSON relatable, familiar, legitimate, trustworthy?

YES?

Let's communicate!

NO?

Reevaluate!

APPROVAL PROCESSES

Who approves messages, and how?

↳ Consider a [simple] written policy

Different protocols for...

- Social Media
- Newsletters
- Fundraising Solicitations
- Press/Media Opportunities

[Company Name] Internal Communication Policy

Last Updated: [Date]

Version:

Policy Owner:

Purpose

At [Company Name], our internal communication strives to:

- Provide clear, relevant messaging that enables team members to do their jobs well
- Foster transparency and alignment to engage employees across the organization
- Promote a connected culture where employees feel informed, heard, and empowered
- Maintain a shared vision and sense of purpose across all roles

Internal communication encompasses "official" communication channels (e.g., all-hands meetings, announcements, memos, intranet updates, software tools, and systems).

This policy establishes clear guidelines and expectations for how we communicate internally at [Company Name]. It outlines our internal communications guidelines (tone and cadence), expectations, channels, and tools. The [Job Role/Team] reviews and updates this policy on a [biannual/annual] basis.

The Internal Communication Policy applies to all employees, contractors, and anyone working on behalf of [Company] who engages with our internal communications.

APPROVAL + PLANNING

Funding Communications Example

Objectives	Channels	Approver	Timing	Notes
Initial fundraising request to members	Print appeal	Board Chair	Send by end of week	Development Committee drafting appeal, need approval by Weds.
Media Cover of Campaign	Press Release, Possible Interview	Board Chair	Schedule within two weeks	Vice Chair has news contact, coordinating with Board Chair
Social Media Calendar for Public Campaign	Social Media Posts, Stories	Development Committee	Ongoing for ~6 weeks	Working with Treasurer to benchmark fundraising goals, development committee for post content.

APPROVAL + PLANNING

Program/Education Communications Example

Objectives	Channels	Approver	Timing	Notes
Produce watershed BMP Guide	Digital PDF on web, Blog	Program Lead	1 week before e-newsletter is sent	Limit: 2 pages, get feedback from Comms Committee on layout/voice for guide and blog
Disseminate @ Spring Tabling Opportunities	In-Person Events, Print Flyer	Comms Committee	Ongoing March-June	Goal to attend 1 tabling event per month, list events on web/newsletter, inventory print copies regularly for re-order
Report Campaign Metrics	Grant Report, Project Report	Program Lead	August	Track: people reached, guides distributed, post views, PDF downloads - convert into report for funder & membership

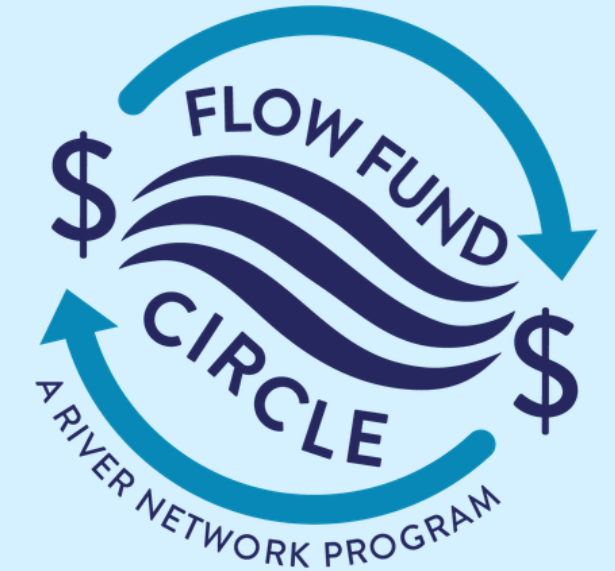
ASSETS & STORAGE

Communications assets to “always” have on-hand include:

- Logo / graphics
- Boilerplate language
- Image library
- “Get to know us” general flyer/postcard/trifold
- Fundraising solicitation / how to donate
- Website
- Contact lists

And...

- Nice to have: Letterhead
- Advanced: Brand Kit and/or Voice Guide



RECAP

- External vs Internal Communications
- Basic definitions & vocabulary
- Audiences
- Messages & messengers
- Plans, approvals, and how they work together
- Assets & storage



RESOURCES

1



Monster Under the Bed: How to Overcome Your Fear of Your Website

RiverNetwork • 34 views • 1 month ago

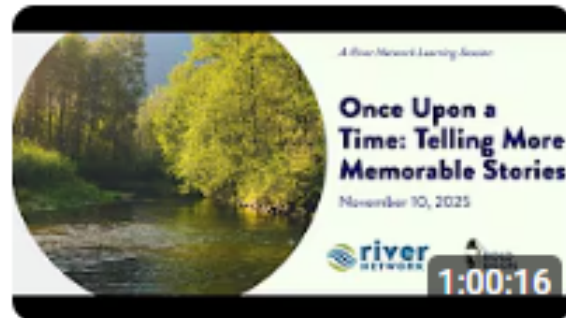
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D.I.Y. Marketing Made Fun, Efficient, and Cost-Effective

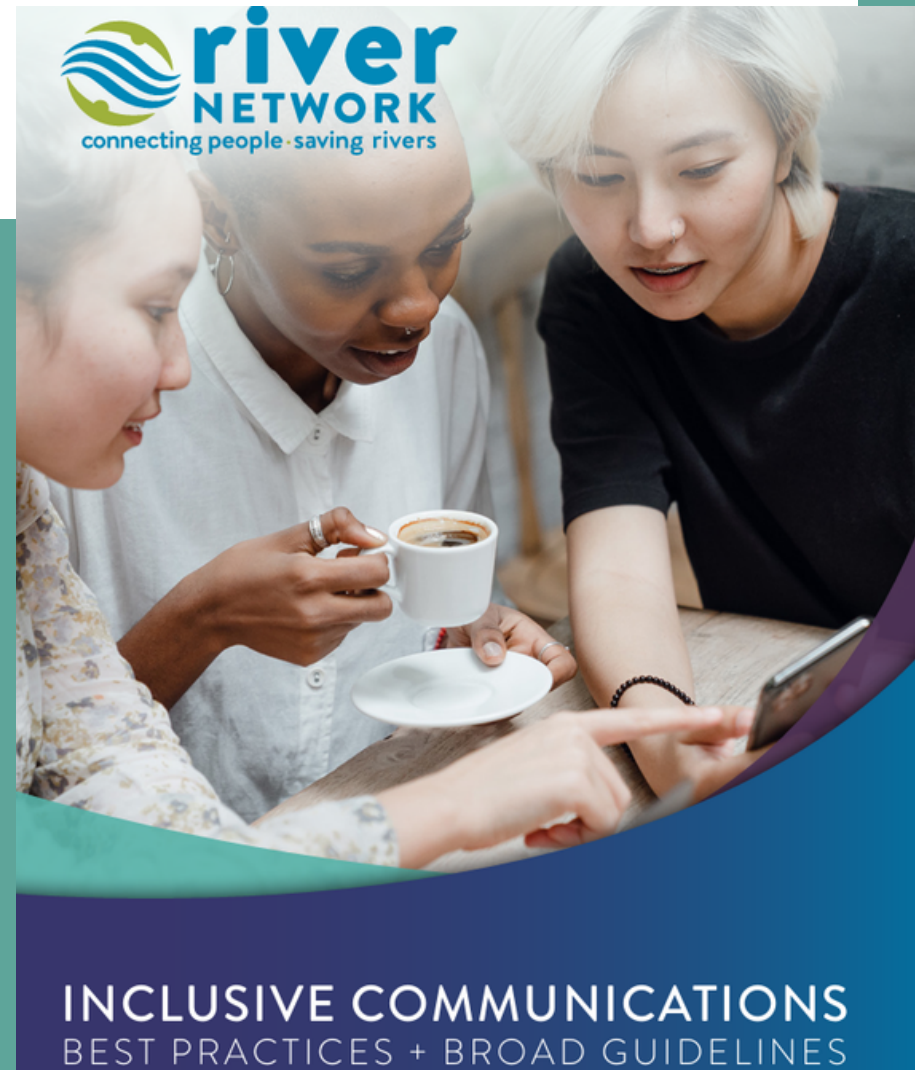
RiverNetwork • 38 views • 2 months ago

3



Once Upon a Time: Telling More Memorable Stories

RiverNetwork • 49 views • 3 months ago



- Communications plan template
- Communications calendar template
- Inclusive Communications Guide from River Network
- Recorded webinars from Bold Bison on various communications topics for groups, coalitions, and nonprofits

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THANK YOU!

Find more
information at
www.rivernetwork.org

*Explore membership, resources, and join
our newsletter & online community!*

