

Communications Planning Checklist

A strong message without a plan behind it rarely moves the needle. This resource gives you a practical framework for turning your messaging goals into organized, executable communications activity. Use this checklist to prepare for any communications campaign, event, or plan.

Section 1: Set Your Goal

- ☐ My goal is specific enough and success is definable.

Example: Secure passage of an SB 123 amendment expanding civil legal aid funding by the May legislative session.

Section 2: Define Your Audiences

- ☐ I have identified my primary audience (the people I most need to reach).

Example: State legislators on the judiciary committee who are undecided on the funding bill.

- ☐ I have identified any secondary audiences.

Example: Local business associations who benefit from stable communities and can influence legislators.

- ☐ I understand what my audiences believe and what I need to say to persuade them on the issue(s).

Example: Many think the court system is already fair and accessible; cost concerns dominate.

- ☐ I know who and what my audience trusts.

Example: Local judges, small business owners, and constituent stories.

Section 3: Sharpen Your Message

- ☐ I can state my core message in two sentences or less.

Example: When people can't access legal help, they lose homes, jobs, and safety—and communities pay the cost. Funding civil legal aid is an investment in stability.

- ☐ My message reflects the language guidance in this document.

Tip: Use "legal problems that affect everyday life" not "civil legal needs." Frame as problem-solving infrastructure, not entitlement.

- ☐ Everyone on my team is working from the same message.

Tip: Share the message map one-pager at every planning meeting; have staff repeat the core message back.

- ☐ I have a clear ask (I'm not just raising awareness; I'm moving my audience toward a position).

Example: Vote yes on SB 123.

- ☐ I am aware of possible negative reactions to my messages and am prepared to respond.
Example: This is not about expanding the civil justice system, it's about making it better for everyone involved in it.

Section 4: Choose Your Messengers

- ☐ I have identified the best messenger(s) for my audience(s).
Example: A small business owner whose employee dispute was resolved through legal aid (speaks to economic framing). A local judge or court administrator speaking to legislators.
- ☐ If working with someone with lived experience to share their story, I have supported them and they understand how their story will be used.
Example: Prep sessions, talking points, and a debrief afterward.

Section 5: Select Your Communication Channels

- ☐ I know where my audience gets information.
Example: Legislators read local newspaper editorials, constituent emails, and caucus briefings. A social media campaign reaches the public, advocates, and others.
- ☐ I have prioritized the channels I can sustain.
Example: Op-ed in state's largest paper, targeted email to 12 key legislative offices, and one coalition sign-on letter.
- ☐ I have considered earned media, social media, community outreach, partner networks, email or newsletters, and testimony or public comment.
Note: Each channel requires different capacity so choose based on where your audience is over what is familiar.

Section 6: Build Your Calendar

- ☐ I have mapped out my communications activity to my policy or advocacy goals.
Example: Op-ed publishes the week before committee vote; client story drops the day hearings begin.
- ☐ I have identified anchor events (legislative sessions, awareness days, news hooks).
Example: Equal Justice Week (May), state legislative session opening, local court anniversary.
- ☐ I know the internal process to follow before anything goes public.
Example: Prep for client story, develop media list, approval of messaging, team responsibilities assigned.
- ☐ I have a simple calendar in place that is functional.
Tip: A shared spreadsheet with date, deliverable, and staff owner is enough.

Section 7: Assess Your Resources and Timing

- ☐ I have mapped out staff time, capacity, and resources.

Example: One comms staffer at 50% equals 1–2 major deliverables per week. Use Canva templates instead of separate design budget. Focus on earned media and partner amplification.

- ☐ I have planned out the internal process.

Example: Client story development (five days), legal review (three days), ED sign-off (two days) = 10 days to complete before publishing. Build this into your calendar.

Section 8: Define Success

- ☐ I have decided how I will measure whether I have achieved my goals.

Example: Bill passes committee, three legislators supported, 500 constituent emails sent.

- ☐ My measures of success are meaningful.

Example: 3–5 legislative meetings secured and votes changed vs. number of social media impressions.

- ☐ I have a plan for tracking and reviewing results.

Example: Weekly 15 minute check-in against goals; post-campaign debriefs within two weeks of conclusion.

Before You Launch: The Final Check

- ☐ Does all my content reinforce my core message?
- ☐ Am I reaching my audience(s) where they are?
- ☐ Do my messenger(s) match my audience(s)?
- ☐ Is everyone involved aligned on what our desired outcomes are for this campaign?
- ☐ Do I have capacity to complete this campaign?