

DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS IN INDIAN COUNTRY

ACTION KIT



National
Congress of
American
Indians



PYRAMID
COMMUNICATIONS

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WHAT IS COMMUNICATIONS?

Communications is everything you say, write, show, or do to convey an idea and engage audiences in your work.

Effective communications make points of view and ideas easy to understand and relate to.

Effective communications connects with your audience and makes them feel as though they're a part of what you're doing and saying.

As Native people, communications is about our stories, our relationships, and how we reciprocate through language, songs, gatherings, ceremonies, governance, self-determination, and so much more.

SIX M'S OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

In today's information-rich society—where attention spans are short and competition for eyes is fierce, tribes and tribal organizations need effective and strategic communications to ensure Indigenous voices are heard.

Our stories are powerful, and telling our stories will help to move people to act.

Using the Six M's of Strategic Communications can help you identify and shape a communications strategy that will help your Nation meet your goals and be recognized as the leader you are in Indian Country.

THE SIX M'S:

Mighty Goal

What is your primary objective?
What are you trying to achieve?

Market/Audience

Who needs to hear your message
in order to achieve your goal?

Messaging

What do you want to tell your
audience? How can you clearly
communicate that?

Messenger

Who's the correct person or
messenger to deliver your
message?

Medium/Platform

Where do you want to deliver
your message? Where will your
audience see or hear it?

Measurement

What exactly are you trying
to achieve? How do you know
you've reached your goal?

WHAT IS DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS?

Digital communications encompass all of the ways we communicate and share information through digital spaces. This includes social media, websites, digital advertisements, podcasts, and online video, such as YouTube and streaming services. Essentially, any content you consume on a computer, tablet, smartphone, and even some TV is digital media.

Digital communications are now more important than ever. Today, as we fight COVID-19, digital channels are sometimes the only way we can connect with people safely.

Digital channels are the primary mechanism through which people find and consume news and information. The way that information travels and is shared through digital channels is how dominant narratives and stories are formed. Ideas and stories that are shared more become the ideas and stories we believe, that influence our understanding, behavior, and decisions.

Native people and Native Nations, our communities, often face barriers to accessing digital channels, whether due to broadband access in rural communities or access to technology and devices. We must utilize these channels to center how our country and communities shape and share ideas.

THE KEY ELEMENTS OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

Applying strategic communications practices to your digital communications efforts will help ensure that your work and your campaign are successful. Using the six M's and best practices outlined in this toolkit will provide you with a solid foundation for any communications strategy your Nation might need.

1. DEVELOPING YOUR STRATEGY

Your strategy should be focused and clear; it doesn't need to be complicated!

Ask yourself these questions, and refer back to your answers as you execute your plan.

What is my effort/organization's overall goal?

- This is the answer to the question, "If my strategy is ultimately successful, how will I know? What will people know, think, feel, and do?"
- Everything you do and plan for should support the answer to that question.

Who are our priority audiences (i.e., tribal members, elected officials, general public)? How does digital media help us reach them?

- Your priority audiences are those who need to hear your message to help you achieve your goal. Who do you need to know, think, feel, and do those things?
 - » If you're trying to reach a specific representative/decision-maker, consider asking "Who do they listen to?"
 - » Be as specific as possible—avoid "general public"
 - » Narrow your audience by location, interests, etc.

What is our voice? How does that show up in our messaging?

- Your messaging, including the language and tone you use, should be authentic to you.
- Your voice should reflect your values, your culture, and your communities.
- Will your audience understand industry jargon? If not, use simple, accessible language.

How often will we create content? How often will we publish?

- Frequency will depend on the channel and your capacity (see Section II).

How to prepare your audience

Prepare your audiences to take action by building a strong foundation of understanding, shared knowledge, engagement, and trust.

- Publishing consistent and engaging content will help your audience become invested in your organization and your goals.
- Bring your audiences along through a story—start at the beginning, explain the situation or challenge, and offer the answer and call to action.
- Clearly communicate how and where people can connect with you, and which channels are the official voice of your tribe or organization.

How to build authentic and collaborative partnerships now for activation later

- What other movements and organizations align with our mission?
- Find space for meaningful relations with partner organizations or Nations—support their efforts, uplift their voice, and engage in conversation on what a meaningful partnership might entail.
- When the time comes, you will be a part of a powerful coalition to uplift your collective goals.

2. CREATING YOUR CALL TO ACTION (CTA)

Calls to Action (CTA) provide your audience the space to direct their energy, and your followers are more likely to engage if they feel they can play a helpful role. Every campaign needs a CTA.

Define your CTA

- Your CTA is the pathway to achieving your goals.
- Clearly state what needs to be done and how to do it.
- Simplicity and clarity are key.
- When possible, provide the opportunity to engage right away through clear instruction, buttons, or sample language.

SAMPLE CALLS TO ACTION

You're footing
the bill for
Tacoma LNG.

**You deserve
a say.**

WEIGH IN



The first people of the land
should not be the last to vote.

**MAKE A
VOTING PLAN!**

Need help? Contact vote@narf.org



3. HOW TO CREATE IMPACTFUL DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

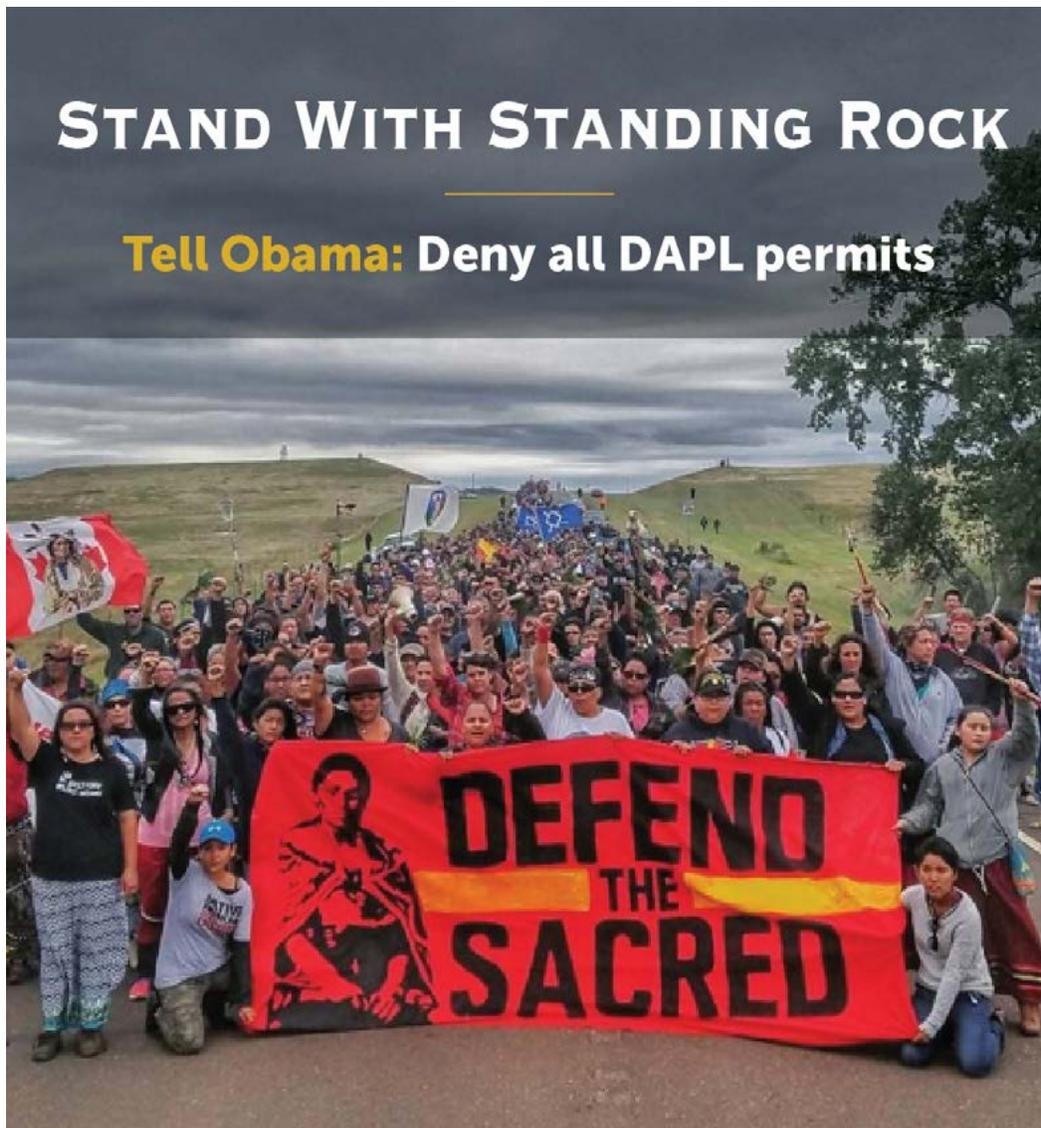
Social media is a valuable tool for people to connect with family, friends, and organizations they like and trust. It is also a critical source for information, news, and resources. When thinking about how to use social media in promoting your campaign, think about how you can use different channels to showcase different aspects of your messaging.



A. SOCIAL MEDIA

In general, some things to think about when implementing effective social media efforts include:

- Tag or mention relevant people and organizations.
- Utilize visual content, such as video, infographics, and photos.
- Share news while it's timely.
- Center your goal and story—share the impact of what you do and why it matters.
- For many people, social media is a primary source of news and information. Make sure your channels provide reliable and up-to-date information.



Tailor your content to your platform:



Twitter prioritizes timely content. In order to stand out in the rapidly changing Twitter feed, organizations should post short, direct, and clear messages as often as possible (a good practice is about three times a day). These posts can include articles, messaging, and links to relevant sources. Twitter has an audience that is generally more interested in advocacy, activism, politics, and news. Use hashtags to expand the reach of your organization's message (no more than two per tweet). Best practice is to post here 1–3 times a day, but you can have success posting several times a week.



Facebook prioritizes images and conversation. While Facebook posts can be used for longer messages than Twitter or Instagram, posts with a visual element are more successful, and help to catch your audience's attention. The audience tends to be broad, and generally slightly older (35–55 and aging up). Facebook provides a place for people to connect and share with community or tribal members in places like Facebook Groups. Aim to post here 3–5 times a week.



Instagram is a visual-first community, anchored on images and video. Instagram can be a powerful visual storytelling tool, but can be challenging for showcasing dense messages. Striking, high-quality photos are a necessity, as there is less focus on the written content you produce. Using hashtags is essential to helping your organization's content get discovered, and it's difficult to include links to learn more. Instagram generally attracts a younger crowd, including teens and millennials. Aim to post to your feed 3–5 times per week, and post to your story 1–3 times per day.



YouTube is a leading video platform. YouTube tends to work well for content that is more instructional, longer form, focuses on different elements of a singular campaign or series, and is adaptable to both high- and low-quality production styles. Your organization could produce simple how-to's about filling out the census, top ways it helps and impacts our community, and what people need to know to protect their rights, then add them to a 2020 Census playlist.



LinkedIn is where you go to connect with professionals and colleagues. LinkedIn is the leading professional digital network with many resources around job opportunities, professional development and inspiration, and collaboration. Use LinkedIn to engage peers in helping to support the census and educating them about how your organization is supporting it.

TWITTER

✗ DON'T DO THIS

- Highlight a key statistic, but with no message.
- Text is long, with many commas and no abbreviations.
- No link, image, or hashtag.
- Problem and solution feel disjointed.
- Omits tagging the service provider.

✓ DO THIS

- Use a relevant key message.
- Be succinct. Use abbreviated words and remove extra punctuation.
- Use hashtags and tag relevant organizations.
- Use an image (pulled from a news story) with real people pictured.
- Offer a solution that exists in the community.
- Include a link to learn more.



FACEBOOK

✗ DON'T DO THIS

- Several messages and statistics are stacked together with no link or larger context.
- Post is long, with many points that could be split into multiple posts.
- No image.

✓ DO THIS

- Use a relevant key message.
- Tag the relevant organization.
- Include a link to learn more, with a description of what's at the link.
- Use an image (pulled from a news story) with real people pictured.
- Offer a solution that exists in the community.



HASHTAGS

Hashtags are a mechanism on social media to help bring conversations into a single “feed” of related conversations. It’s ideal for your campaign to have a unified voice, and including a hashtag in your conversation will be a critical way to unite efforts and make it easier to organize information on your campaign.

If you’re entering ongoing work or movements, such as Native Vote or Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, look into what hashtags are already in use, such as:

#MMIW	#NativeVote
#MissingAndMurderedIndigenousWomen	#NativeVote2020
#MMIWG	#GOTNV

If you’re creating a new campaign that’s not a part of an existing campaign, you can create a new hashtag. Make sure your hashtag is easy to read, is not already in use by another campaign or organization, and clearly identifies your work.

B. EMAIL

Email is a valuable tool for communicating relevant, timely information and driving people to learn more or to take other requested actions. Below are some examples of how to more effectively use email.

- **Make it personal.** The subject line determines whether someone will open an email, so it’s important to create personal, strong, short subject lines that stand out in a busy inbox.
- **Put the most important information first.** Many people will not read long amounts of text, so keep the most important information in the top left of your email.
- **Keep it succinct.** Every story or piece of content in an email should be less than eight lines long, and the email as a whole should be less than two pages long (two scrolls). The most successful emails have two to four medium-sized paragraphs, or around 200 words.
- **Organize content consistently.** Newsletters and emails should be organized and consistent and, by using a template, establish consistent expectations with your audience.
- **Prompt action.** Keep the content in each newsletter fresh and new, with a call to action for readers at the beginning and repeated at the end.

✘ DON'T DO THIS

- Subject line is not personal, and doesn't offer context.
- Messages and statistics are stacked without a personalized, organization specific, message.
- Text block is long and hard to get through.
- Call to action isn't specific, and doesn't offer context.

Subject: Tuesday News

Creating more housing with affordable rent will help prevent homelessness. We all want safe, livable, healthy communities. There is a direct correlation between rising rents and rising homelessness. In 2018, 5,627 families or individuals experiencing homelessness found permanent housing—a 30 percent increase from 2017. Eighty percent of people experiencing homelessness in King County surveyed said more affordable housing and rental assistance were key factors in finding housing. Jonathan Sposato and Karen Marcotte-Solimano said in a Seattle Times Op-Ed, “Every day we are inspired by the generosity and compassion of people in our community who want to help address our homelessness crisis. They know that Seattle is booming—not dying—but that last year a record number of people experiencing homelessness died on our streets. Without adequate shelter, housing, and behavioral health resources, the most vulnerable in our community have nowhere to turn. The trauma of homelessness can often lead to substance abuse and addictions that make it even harder to exit homelessness.” **Read More.**

✓ DO THIS

- Use the subject line to pose a question and offer context.
- Separate messages and use small text blocks.
- Include multiple types of content.
- Use a clear call to action, at least twice.

Subject: Why is housing important? | News and Events

We all want to live in a safe, livable, healthy community. One way to help prevent homelessness is by establishing more housing with affordable rent for everyone.

Fact: There is a direct correlation between rising rents and rising homelessness. Eighty percent of people experiencing homelessness in King County surveyed said more affordable housing and rental assistance were key factors in finding housing.

UWKC Co-Chair Jonathan Sposato and board member Karen Marcotte-Solimano said in a **Seattle Times Op-Ed**, “Every day we are inspired by the generosity and compassion of people in our community who want to help address our homelessness crisis ... Without adequate shelter, housing, and behavioral health resources, the most vulnerable in our community have nowhere to turn.”

How you can support: On Tuesday, April 9, attend the **DESC Clement Place Opening**. Join DESC on April 9 at 10 a.m. to help them open their newest permanent supportive housing building, Clement Place! Clement Place will house adults who are chronically homeless, struggling with substance abuse, and have serious medical problems—some of the most vulnerable populations in our city.

RSVP to the opening now!

C. VIDEO AND LIVESTREAM

Tribal communities are expressing an increasing desire for quick, reliable, and accessible information. One of the easiest ways to achieve this is through videos or livestreams. Things to consider when developing your videos and livestreams:

- **Don't worry about making your videos highly produced—your videos can be simple and still professional and effective.**
 - » Filming short videos on a smartphone or web camera will work fine for most situations.
 - » If you want to create higher-quality or frequent videos, it may be worth it to invest in a camera, lighting, and/or audio equipment for your organization, but this is not necessary to get started.
 - » See our list of [tools and resources](#) to find filming and editing software that will work for you.

- **Do a tech rehearsal.**

Practice every technical aspect of your livestream before you do it. This can include making sure your video and audio are clear, your internet connection is stable, and any videos or presentations you are playing are easy to queue up. If possible, have someone support the technical aspect of your presentation—such as making sure audio levels are okay, and keeping track of questions in the chat.

- **Pick a quiet, distraction-free location.**

As much as possible, curate the look and feel of your space to feel like a professional setting. Keep your background simple, focus lights on your face, avoid sitting in front of windows, and keep your face in the center of the screen. Close all background applications and windows, as they can slow your internet connection. If possible, film in a quiet location. If that's not possible, wear headphones to minimize background noise.

- **Connect with your audience.**

Build rapport with your audience. Look directly into the camera (not your monitor), smile, and create a comfortable atmosphere. It can be helpful to have a person you are comfortable talking to stand near the camera so you can feel like you're having a conversation with them instead of an inanimate object. If that's not possible, do your best to imagine someone there.

- **Keep things brief.**

In an increasingly digital setting, your audience's attention span is decreasing. Do what you can to condense your message and maintain as much brevity as possible. Identify and use a few memorable and brief statements that encompass your key messages. In general, videos under 10 minutes will do the best on social media platforms.

- **Pace yourself.**

Most people have a tendency to speak quickly in front of groups or on camera. In fact, when speaking on camera, it's best to speak even slower than feels comfortable. It's always a good idea to pause to let facts sink in or to gather your thoughts.

- **Minimize extraneous movements.**

Don't let body movements get in the way of your presentation. Do what you can to minimize extraneous hand motions or shifting in your chair. Make sure you are comfortable before you begin; wear comfortable yet professional clothes, sit in a comfortable chair, etc.

- **Create space for questions.**

Appreciate that your audience may have questions about certain aspects of your presentation, so save enough time for a question and answer session. Be prepared for likely questions and stay open and receptive. If you're presenting live, keep an eye on the chat during your presentation, as people may be asking questions throughout. If you're posting a video, check comments regularly to see how people are responding.

- **Add captions to your video.**

Closed captions are necessary to make sure the information in your video is accessible to people who are hard of hearing, such as Elders or people with auditory disabilities. Most video sharing platforms have internal software to create captions—but be sure to check that names, places, words in a Native language, or other hard to spell words are spelled correctly.

- **Consider gathering feedback.**

Asking participants to evaluate your presentation and provide feedback is a failsafe way to make sure your presentations keep improving. Use a simple rating system so participants can quickly offer their thoughts.

D. WEBSITE

Your website is your digital front porch—often the first place people go to learn about your organization and get involved. We know from research that most users decide whether or not to stay on a website within three seconds, so it's imperative to win them over fast. Creating a user-friendly website that is easy to navigate, easy to find, and responsive to different devices is a critical part of any communications strategy. As you set up your website, consider the following:

- **Homepage**

Many users will only ever view your homepage, so it's important to elevate the most important information. Make good use of your hero area to convey who you are, what you do, and why it matters. Use buttons or call-outs to provide clear paths for users to navigate to key landing pages on the site. Ensure that timely content is promoted on the homepage, so users can quickly find the information they seek.

- **Keep Content Short and Scannable**

We know that most website users scan rather than read, so it's critical to pack a punch with your content using as few words as possible. Leverage headlines, subheads, and bulleted lists to keep content easy to scan, and err on the side of shorter sentences and paragraphs.

- **SEO and Metadata**

Leverage SEO tools and the metadata on your site to make sure it's easily surfaced during searches and shared on social. This means writing custom SEO descriptions of your key landing pages, being diligent about writing page titles and headlines that reflect your SEO keywords, providing "alt text" descriptions for images, and optimizing your featured and SEO images for sharing.

- **Analytics**

Be sure to install Google Analytics or other analytic tools on your site, so you can capture important user data—like page views, bounce rates, in-page interactions, and demographic and device information—and leverage that data to make iterative improvements over time.

- **Accessibility**

It's important to consider how users who are using assistive technologies or who may have different accessibility needs are using your site. This means considering font size and color contrast, ensuring that media-like images are properly described in the metadata, and important content isn't locked away in less accessible formats, like audio or video-only materials. [WebAIM](#) is a great tool that can help you create an accessible site.

- **Mobile/Responsive**

Be aware that your website will be viewed on a variety of devices, so it's critical to have a website that can be responsive. Choose existing responsive templates and platforms for your site, and always check how new content looks on desktop and mobile before publishing.

HOW TO PROMOTE YOUR CAMPAIGN ON YOUR ORGANIZATION'S WEBSITE

Use your organization's website to increase awareness of your campaign, share how your organization plans to support it, and to share reminders. You could:

- Feature a prominent banner on the home page in a high-visibility area.
- Draft a series of blog posts on what your campaign is, who it impacts, and why it matters.
- Host a calendar with key dates or a timeline of events.
- Link to volunteer opportunities to engage with your work.
- Include clearly labeled and easy to see buttons asking for donations, including a clear and succinct ask telling your audience why they should consider donating.

Ensure information on your website is clear, succinct, and well-labeled.

- Keep the most important information at the top left of each page, so it is the first thing your audience sees.
- Break up information into small paragraphs and utilize subheadings. Include the important takeaways in your headlines and subheadings.
- It is tempting to try and save the most important information for last, but most readers will not get that far. Structure information in an upside down pyramid, with the most important information at the top, and nice to know, but not necessary, information toward the bottom.

HOW TO EFFECTIVELY CRAFT YOUR MESSAGE

The crafting of your message is just as important as the medium you use to reach your target audiences. Being clear on your audience, and how effectively you reach them across multiple channels, go hand in hand. And in order for your message to break through, you should always look at ways to deliver your message five or six times, through your various mediums, in order to make sure your messages are heard.

MAKE SURE YOUR MESSAGES ARE TAILORED TO YOUR AUDIENCE.

For digital and any other communications you do, your audiences will come to the table with different opinions and perspectives. What's important to one may not be important to another. In Indian Country, you will encounter very diverse audiences like these below. As you identify your audience, determining the objectives for each diverse audience is key, as is asking yourself key questions before engaging with each.

- **Tribal community:** What level of understanding of your issue do they possess? What steps can you take to ensure the tribal community is well-informed? How do you wish to engage them and what action do you want them to take?
- **Non-Indian communities:** How much of a cursory introduction to Indian Country (such as history, terminology, key players, key concepts of sovereignty, a primer of government-to-government relationships) is needed? How much of this background can be provided with ancillary materials?
- **Policymakers:** Knowing that policymakers rely heavily on staffers to brief them, even on complex issues, such as the nation-within-a-nation status of tribes, what relationships and materials should you prioritize developing in advance for staffers? When given time with a policymaker, what are the key outcomes you need to advocate for?
- **Media and press:** What are the key talking points that need to be reiterated in order to avoid the media's tendency to oversimplify and/or sensationalize issues in Indian Country? Who is the most appropriate spokesperson for your organization who would be the best messenger to stay on point? If you could write the headline for the story you want them to tell, what would it be?

- Partner organizations: How do you wish to engage partner organizations in collaboration and to enhance the work of all? What is the most appropriate way to convey that while being sensitive to diverse missions and resources?

HOW TO CRAFT YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS CHANNELS

Knowing how to communicate who you are, what you're trying to accomplish, and how you intend to get there is key to any campaign. Within Indian Country, you have the added benefit of integrating your long and varied history of storytelling and culturally unique ways of communicating with one another and with other communities. When communicating across cultural lines (whether that is between tribes or to non-Native communities), you should seek to incorporate this rich tradition of storytelling and oral histories into your messaging.

Messaging should be:

CLEAR

Messages should be easily and immediately understood. By using clear, descriptive language, rather than issue-specific terminology, we help audiences understand this issue and our work.

CONCISE

Messages should use as few words as possible.

CONSISTENT AND UBIQUITOUS

Messages should be used across as many partners and platforms as possible.

HONEST

Messaging should not shy away from acknowledging what is true—even if it's hard.

FORWARD-LOOKING

At the same time, messaging should invest more energy in illustrating the path forward.

GALVANIZING

We'll be successful when our entire community engages. Give audiences a role in this work through messaging.

HUMAN

By speaking to audiences as we would friends and colleagues, in the context of shared values, we can make stronger connections.

KEYS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Building and strengthening relationships with diverse entities in your community allows you to develop your work in new and meaningful ways. Always take the time to engage your community, using these tips as a guide.

- **Don't count on the local media to tell your story.**

Consider social media, direct mail, or paid advertising as ways to tell your story in your own voice, while educating both tribal and non-tribal members about your latest news or campaign.

- **Know who you need to know—map your audience.**

Identify top community leaders (county commissioners, school board members, the local chamber, rotary, faith leaders, and others) who have the greatest influence in the community. Cultivate relationships with these groups and, most importantly, educate them on what you are doing, through mailings, briefings, and electronic updates. Over time, you can create a “Friends of” list of people that you can count on for support and turn to during times of need.

Governor Inslee stands with Tribes and dozens of environmental and justice groups across Washington – say No to LNG

Hoh Indian Tribe • Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe
Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe • Lummi Nation • Nisqually Indian Tribe
Nooksack Indian Tribe • Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe • Quileute Tribe
Quinalt Indian Nation • Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe
Skokomish Indian Tribe • Spokane Tribe of Indians
Squaxin Island Tribe • Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians
Suquamish Tribe • Tulalip Tribes • Yakama Nation

— ooo —

Northwest Immigrant Rights Project • OneAmerica
Citizens for a Healthy Bay • Sierra Club • Washington Conservation Voters
Washington Environmental Council • Advocates for a Cleaner Tacoma
Community to Community • Earth Ministry/Washington Interfaith
Faith Action Climate Team • Faith Action Network • Front and Centered
Got Green • Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center • Latino Advocacy
Na'ah Illahee Fund • Native Daily Network • Power Past Frack Gas Coalition
Puget Sound Sage • Redefine Tacoma • Resistencia • The Church Council of
Greater Seattle • The Conversation • Washington CAN
Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility • Water Warriors
World Relief Seattle • 350Seattle • 350Tacoma

It's time for the City of Tacoma to act.

Tell Elizabeth Pauli.
(253) 591-5130

- **Tell your story: Conduct community briefings for tribal members, the general community, and internal staff.**

Oftentimes, tribes interact with the community only when there is a sensitive community issue at hand. By conducting an online community open house for tribal and non-tribal members, you can raise awareness around the tribe's latest goals and accomplishments.

- **Find ways to engage tribal membership in the digital space.**

Choose tools that allow tribal members to stay involved in alternative ways, such as filmed general council meetings, brief video and social media posts, email newsletters, and keeping your website and community calendar up to date.

- **Know your vendors.**

Tribes often support the surrounding community through the use of local and regional vendors. Who are they? Are they supportive of your tribe? Make sure you educate the people with whom you are doing business. They are messengers within your community and should be supportive of what you are doing.

INTEGRATING MEDIA RELATIONS

Indian Country has a rich media landscape, ranging from online news publications to radio, television, and online video.

Media offers great opportunities to promote your campaign in news stories, interviews, op-eds, and letters to the editor.

When thinking about how to use media, it's important to be strategic to have the most impact. Ask yourself: What media does my audience listen to, read, or watch?

Remember that smaller outlets are often hungry for content. Some will welcome your organization submitting a written news story rather than having a reporter cover it. If you're wondering if a publication accepts submissions, look at what they feature on their website, or call or email the news editor.

HOW TO WORK WITH THE MEDIA

There are a number of important things to consider when engaging your media targets, including:

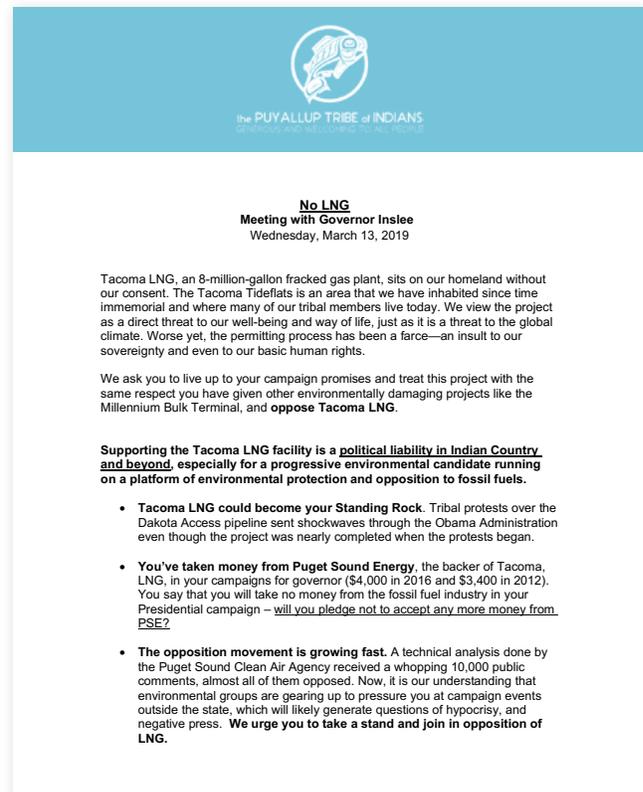
- **Provide the reporter with relevant materials in advance.** The more a reporter understands ahead of time, the better chance you have to communicate your points successfully. Include supporting work for reference, such as recent newsletters, news stories, social content, or websites.
- **Know the angle.** It is perfectly appropriate to ask a reporter the following questions before an interview: What is the story about? What is its scope? Who else are you talking to? What do you expect from this interview?
- **Know the reporter.** Research other articles the reporter has written. Review their social media. If possible, talk to others who know the reporter. Before the interview begins, try a little small talk with the reporter. You can create a more comfortable interview for both of you when you seem personable and human.
- **Develop talking points and the bridge message.** Prepare one page of talking points using your key messages. Read them, refine them, rewrite

them, and rehearse them. For most interviews, three strong, concise messages are usually enough. What is the bridge message that links you back to your key points and message themes?

No one can be prepared for every question—unless you have a bridge message that gets you back to your agenda. The bridge message is what helps people stay on message. A bridge message is simple, such as:

- » “We think the issue is really ...”
- » “Let’s look at the facts ...”
- » “The key to resolving this problem is ...”

- **Tell the truth.** If you don’t know something, offer to research it, and phone the reporter back with the answer before the deadline. Don’t be afraid to say that you want to double check the facts and follow up with the correct answer after the interview.
- **Use clear, jargon-free speech.** Speak plainly. Use examples and illustrations that help an average person to understand you.
- **Take a breath between thoughts and sentences.** By pausing to take a breath between ideas, you add emphasis to an idea and maximize the effect of your presentation. It also allows you to collect your thoughts before moving on to new territory.
- **Stay “on the record.”** Avoid going “off the record” with a reporter, unless you have an established relationship and are certain you can trust them. A good rule of thumb is to never say anything to a reporter that you wouldn’t want to see on the front page of the newspaper.



HOW TO WRITE A PRESS RELEASE

An effective press release can determine if and how your story gets covered. Remember to always:

1. Be accessible.
 2. Supply contact information.
 3. Don't crowd your press release with more than one phone number.
 4. Always provide an email address, along with a website. If reporters want to find out more about your organization, they will expect to find it there.
- **Keep the headline to a single line, if possible.** Summarize the news using verbs, and avoid incomplete sentences.
 - **A good quote always follows a good lead.** Quotes are reserved for provocative, exciting language that summarizes the key issue. Every press release lead should be followed by an interesting quote that succinctly tells your story.
 - **Keep it short.** There is rarely a need to draft a press release beyond one page. The press release is your chance to sell your issue to the media, nothing more.
 - **Write in plain language without jargon.** If you showed your press release to a spouse or a friend, would they understand it? If members of your family do not understand it, rewrite the release in plain language avoiding insider terms or technical jargon. Remember that reporters are writing for a general audience, not special interest groups.
 - **Email press releases as text, not attachments.** While a well-formatted press release is appealing, news outlets are equipped with spam filters and rarely accept unsolicited attachments. To avoid going straight to the junk folder, always send your press release in the body of the email.
 - **Have a second party proofread your press release.** Nothing can sink a good press release quicker than an embarrassing typo that makes your organization look amateur. All press releases require a second pair of eyes for proofreading and review. Ask a coworker to read your press release for typos, grammar, and then content.

See a [sample press release](#).

HOW TO USE OP-EDS AND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR (LTE)

A couple of things to always consider:

- **Take a stand.** Editors want their pages to feel like debate forums. They want to publish pieces that identify an issue, and stake out a position on it. The more specific you can be, the more likely your piece will be accepted. For instance, you might want to focus on specific benefits of what your campaign can do for the local Native community. Or, why a political leader should take a stand, and side with your tribe on an important legislative issue.
- **Be timely.** Connect your piece to something fresh—deadlines, community help opportunities, virtual events, and more. You might also tie your piece to the publication's recent coverage of your campaign.
- **Be clear.** Using plain-spoken language shows an editor you understand their readers and want to reach them. Imagine you're writing for your aunt, or the high school student across the street, or the person you see at the coffee shop each day. Oftentimes, you are. Local media are not academic journals, they're not conference reports, and they're not law journals. Make sure everyone understands your point by leaving the jargon behind.
- **Be concise.** While your piece will need an introduction that draws readers in, get to the stand you're taking quickly. Readers should not have to wait to learn what you're advocating for; if they do, they'll stop reading. Most op-eds can be well argued in about 600 words; letters to the editor, about 200. Check with the publication you're submitting to to find out the word count they're looking for. Most publications also have guidelines for the kind of pieces they want to see.

[Read a sample op-ed.](#)

- **Spread the word.** Plenty of your supporters and potential supporters may not see your news story, interview, or op-ed when it's first published or posted. Remember to use your own tools to share it far and wide.
 - » Include links to the piece on your social channels.
 - » Add a link to the news section on your website.
 - » Include it in email updates.
 - » You can even print it and bring it as a leave-behind at in-person meetings.

CONCLUSION

This communications toolkit includes just some of the tools we find essential to effective communications throughout our work in Indian Country. There are many other tools and practices that are being used throughout Indian Country that should be considered when developing integrated communications campaigns—see this list of [Tools and Resources](#) if you're looking for specific tools and software to get you started. We hope you find this information useful. If you have any specific questions, feel free to contact Temryss Lane, Director of the Indian Country practice at Pyramid Communications. Temryss can be reached at tlane@pyramidcommunications.com.

ONWARD.