

Pivoting and Protecting: Communications for This Moment

Nonprofit organizations across the country are navigating a communications landscape that has shifted significantly. This toolkit is designed to help your organization assess your current communications approach and make the strategic decisions that will enable you to move forward with clarity and purpose. It is organized around four adaptation areas: Defensive, Resource, Narrative and Tactical. Each represents a different dimension of your communications strategy. The real value of this handout is in the conversations it starts — use it with your team to identify where to focus and what to do next.

YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Before you can decide where to go, it helps to get honest about where you are. This self-assessment is designed to help you and your team do exactly that.

Rate each statement from 1 to 5. There are no right or wrong answers, just useful ones. Where your answers are 1s and 2s is where to focus your efforts first.

1 = Not there yet | 2 = Aware but not addressed | 3 = Working on it | 4 = We are making progress | 5 = Feeling confident

DEFENSIVE	1	2	3	4	5
If our organization came under public scrutiny tomorrow, do we have a plan or would we be figuring it out in real time?					
What is the level of risk we face through any communication we put out right now?					
What is the level of urgency for us to communicate and what happens if we do not?					
Are we the right messenger or should we be enlisting partners and allies?					
RESOURCE	1	2	3	4	5
Are we spending time and energy on work that moves the needle or running on autopilot?					
What outcomes are we seeking and do our current communications actually support them?					

Do we have a sense of where our communications capacity is being drained without meaningful results?					
NARRATIVE	1	2	3	4	5
Are our communications centered on the people we serve and the difference we make?					
Do we know who else we need to reach to further protect and advance our work and do we know where to find them?					
Are the accommodations we made still aligned with our core values?					
Is there a gap between what we say publicly and what we believe?					
TACTICAL	1	2	3	4	5
Do we know who our audiences are and where they are gathering?					
Are we communicating on the right platforms and in the right formats for our audiences?					
Are we listening to what is being said about our issue area before we communicate?					

TWO QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING – IN ANY ADAPTATION AREA

Regardless of which adaptation area — Defensive, Resource, Narrative and Tactical — needs your attention most, these two questions apply universally.

Question 1: What should we stop? Look at every recurring communications activity and ask: "If we paused this tomorrow, what would actually change?" If the honest answer is "not much" — that activity is a candidate for rethinking.

Question 2: Where should we focus the capacity we free up? Given our goals right now, what communications work would move the needle most that we are not doing or not doing well enough?

THE THREE STANCES – DECISION MAPPING

When your organization is navigating pressure or scrutiny, one of the most important decisions you can make is your communications posture. There are three possible stances to consider: **Protective**, **Resistance** and **Transformative**. Choosing the right one starts with reading internal and external signals. The combination of those signals points to your starting stance.

External signals

- How contested is your issue area right now in your specific community?
- Is the pressure aimed at your organization specifically or your issue area more broadly?

- Where is the pressure coming from: media, policy, funders or community?

Internal signals

- How aligned is your leadership on how to respond?
- What is your team's current capacity to sustain a more active or visible stance?
- How strong are your existing relationships with funders, partners and community members?

IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING...	CONSIDER THIS STANCE...
High external pressure, strong internal capacity and alignment →	Resistance stance: name the harm and shape the narrative
High external pressure, limited internal capacity →	Protective stance: lead with people and the necessity of the work
Diffuse external pressure, strong partnerships and relationships →	Transformative stance: invite a broader coalition into the story
Uncertainty or somewhere in between →	Start with the Protective stance: your stance can evolve as the situation does.

WHERE TO START – FOUR STEPS TO ADAPTATION

You do not need to tackle everything at once. Start with one area and one decision.

Step 1: Look back at your self-assessment. Where do your 1s and 2s cluster? That is your starting point.

Step 2: Pick one thing to stop. What is one communications activity you are maintaining out of habit that is not earning its place?

Step 3: Pick one thing to focus on. Given your most urgent adaptation area, what is one change you could make in the next 30 days?

Step 4: Make it a document. Prepare a one-page communications brief that captures your adaptation approach and what you are committing to in the next 30 days so your team is working from the same plan.

For more information and resources, please visit:

strategiccommunicationtools.com