

Approaches to Communications Planning

Friday morning, 9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.

The May 2014 panel during the NNIP Partners Meeting in St. Louis reinforced the idea that partners need to be more strategic in planning for communications. Partners should be motivated to periodically review their communications strategy for several reasons. Most importantly, they need to know the best channels and formats to reach their local constituencies. Partners provide data and services in order to positively influence the behavior of other local actors so they, in turn, can achieve neighborhood improvement goals. Communication is key to this influence. (See [Monitoring Impact](#), NNIP's recent guide to performance management for more explanation).

The NNIP network and its individual partners also need to better articulate to funders and others supporting organization how the services related to accessing and using data facilitate cross-sector collaboration and enable local organizations to be more effective. More explicit efforts to communicate the value and results of the NNIP-related work contribute to the sustainability of the organization. The Urban Strategies Council 2012-2013 Impact Report

(<http://www.urbanstrategies.org/about/impact2013.php>) is one great example of this.

The purpose of this session is to stimulate partners' thinking about how to better plan for communications by learning about three different partner approaches and completing a sample exercise about their own work.

Jeff Matson from the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota will moderate the panel and share his perspective on reaching internal and external audiences.

- Tim Bray from Institute for Urban Policy Research at University of Texas at Dallas will first discuss their approach that uses internal staff skills and a simple planning tool to help focus on the purpose for each activity.
- Sheila Martin from the Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies at the Portland State University will then relate their experiences in employing a marketing professional through the Encore Fellowship program (<http://encore.org/>) to help develop an overall strategic communications plan and associated performance measures.
- Lastly, Sharon Kandris from the Polis Center at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis will describe their process for determining goals and metrics for communications and their decision to invest in the interactive SAVI Online Magazine.

After the panelists share their experiences, we will ask attendees to participate in a short exercise using an example from their own organizations before going into general discussion.

Questions for Discussion:

- What are ways we can share communications resources, such as written plans and templates?
- Are there common performance measures we can suggest across the partnership?
- How do we better capture lessons on when and how to supplement internal staff with external communications consultants?
- How can the network better capture and synthesize how partners develop and implement communications strategies, i.e. are there general principles partners should follow or a typology of approaches?