# External communications strategies

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Leader: Laura McKieren

Attendance: Dan Brown, Jessie Wang, Seema Iyer, Tommy Pearce, Mark Abraham, Cheryl Knott, Rob (notes).

Laura: We struggle with this. We have a newsletter that goes out 4 times a year. We don’t do social media well. We don’t want to just push stuff out; we want to get stuff back from the community as well.

Dan: We have a similar problem to what you experience. We don’t have a lot of resources to post on social media. Just keeping up with work is already a lot. Our projects tend to be long term. We don’t often have things to put up. Increasingly what we do is post things from other organizations. Give them a shout out. Last thing we posted was a year and a half ago.

Seema: One thing I got out of that previous session was that you need to put in your proposal money and time to disseminate. I want to show something fun. We did a report for the able foundation about homeownership decline. We finished in Jan 2020. They issued the report in May. They almost didn’t post it at all because of the pandemic. Then we started getting invited by local groups to say what IS the ideal homeownership rate. That wasn’t the point of the report. After doing a few different presentations where people wanted “the number” I wrote a blog about how there is no ideal number. Of course, nobody reads blogs either. So we worked with a professor who has a design studio and we asked to take the blog post and turn it into something for social media. We met with them and they created a IG story. They picked out the things you would need. I think it’s awesome and we’d love to do more of it but we also didn’t get a huge amount of views. It feels like we did something amazing but didn’t get many eyes.

<https://twitter.com/bniajfi/status/1384565081086771200>

Tommy: Instead of doing one big post you could break it up and make multiple posts on social media. We maintain a blog with ARC but do quarterly snapshots. It might not get a lot of engagement but is putting things out there.

Laura: Who does your writing? In my org it’s me. I don’t think we lack thing to talk about. But the blog is always less important than other things like board management or fundraising.

Tommy: Our geographer used to be a journalist. Finding people with different backgrounds is helpful.

Jessie: Our last 2 interns were journalism majors. One is going to grad school and he is writing a blog for us every month. I relate to everyone’s situation of having little time. We came out with a larger report and partners wrote a guest blog. Captures their audience and we get someone to do the writing.

Mark: We have students write op-eds in the local newspaper. We did 10 op eds last summer. I am on social media anyway monitoring things, so I squeeze in time for some posts. With social there are multiple platforms and it’s always increasing and decreasing how much engagement you get. People are switching over to TikTok. We’re still promoting posts which can go from hundreds to thousands of views with a little money.

Dan: We had some interns. Taking a class in social media marketing, wrote up a little strategy for us. Overall it’s more than we could do. There’s an app that let’s you write on post and disseminate across all platforms.

Seema: To answer Laura’s question. I had that a-ha moment because I was doing too much myself. I’m fast at it but it’s not great. We decided Cheryl would do more writing. We had a conversation if she wanted to do it and if she wanted to.

Cheryl: We just have a lot that needs to be written and documented. I’ve been thinking about different ways to communicate and do things internally then make that external in the form of sponsorships. What are social media metrics to track? How might we expand followers on IG? We can share that out to sponsors and show the reach we are having. I am going to the U Balt business school to think through internal structure and communicating information. What sorts of products can we have? I haven’t had a lot of marketing skills except things I’ve done at BNIA.

Tommy: How do we position as a regional leader. We are adding new board members and I have a founder of a digital marketing firm because we’ll get some guidance and maybe support from his organization. Just because we have a marketing strategy doesn’t mean we can execute. We’ll see how it goes.

Laura: That’s a good idea for board recruitment. It hadn’t occurred to me it would also benefit if they offer discounted rates for services. I’m afraid of paying for something and not getting anything out of it. Once you’ve written something, I feel like you should get on there. I have thought about TikTok but it seems way outside the scope of what you can do in a day. You have to write stuff because you can’t necessarily trust someone else to do it. At that last session lots of folks had a contract, they paid X per month to manage that.

Tommy: No but one thing we don’t do enough of is contacting partners and asking them to share.

Seema: I thought the contract presentation was very good but I thought if I had 25k to spend I wouldn’t spend it on that. For us communication is much more tactical – giving a presentation. I get more out of it than any social media.

Mark: People remember you from presentations.

Cheryl: We have struggled because we do social media pushes in fits and starts. We’ve had student assistance. We had someone who would take photographs at events and do things for reports and social media. We had them, then they graduated, then we didn’t have anyone. Seema is the twitter person; I am the IG person. Because of that we don’t know what each other is posting necessarily. Because we haven’t been consistent people don’t know they can expect to engage with BNIA.

Rob: What about focus on only 1 maybe 2 platforms?

Laura: How do you know which one is the one to focus on?

Seema: I don’t think it’s that simple. Twitter is good about news and Facebook for events.

Cheryl: It’s shifting. Younger people are using TikTok now. We’re not even on LinkedIn. Should we be on LinkedIn? Maybe we don’t get on there. One thing that’s cool about our networks is that Seema has a set of connections on Linkedin so she hits a bunch of people. If I share a post, I hit different people. They might not be following the org account. We’ve had decent engagement on LinkedIn.

Seema: We have a checklist we try to have people use.

Tommy: We only use 2 platforms because we have a bandwidth problem. LinkedIn is good because I am connected to city leaders on there. Twitter is kind of second tier. Lots of conversations happen that you can interact with. Having an org on LinkedIn let’s people tag us.

Laura: What about communication coming back from the community? Did you see SAVI? I went through it to steal it. It was long and I wondered if anyone would fill it out. Is anyone doing something like that?

**SAVI example**: <https://iu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5BeXfRz4k38hipo>

Seema: If you do it once you get a lot of good feedback which is good, but only lasts for a time. We hired a history student who interviewed people in our ecosystem.

Laura: When we ask people how they heard about data. Most people say word of mouth. Around town, this is still the way to communicate.

Tommy: We present to one group then get invited to other groups. We want to be a “geek squad” for community data. I think that will generate more leads and I hope it creates a cycle.

Seema: In our help center, we have ‘contact us’ and then a page where you can ask us to give a presentation. On the stay connected page there are linked to all of our socials.

Laura: Does anyone have a YouTube channel?

Seema: Yes it became useful during covid because we recorded a lot of things and then put them in playlists.

Cheryl: We have short videos uploaded and super helpful for folks. We know sometimes when you have thing scheduled during the day it’s a better option than sending slides with no presentation.

Seema: We were turned on to page authority. It’s a metric. That means how many other pages are linking to your page. You can use this to claim authority on something. Furman Center has a high page authority.

Mark: We just hired someone who does TikTok.

Seema: Anyone ever hired an influencer? I’ve been to lunch with one. It’s an experience.