**NNIPCamp Denver**

Session 1: Wednesday 10/22/2014, 2:15pm-3:00pm

Location: Sage

Session Title: Communications on a Shoestring Budget

Organizer: Spike

Primary Notetaker: Rob Pitingolo

Participants: Murray, Smith, Branson, Clark, Simmons, Cowan, Killeen, Vance, Martin (Sheila), Allen, Betts, Bray

[Session begins]

Spike: How many have an organizational communications plan that’s tight and clear?

[no hands]

Spike: How man have a semblance of a rough idea for communications?

[some hands]

Spike: How many are implementing communications without a plan?

[some hands]

Spike: How many are doing no communications at all?

[no hands]

Spike: OK, so everyone is doing something. You each get three words why you are not doing amazing, world changing communications. I’ll start off: We. Don’t. Care.

Branson: Time/resources, cowardly, mission conflict.

Smith: Prioritization, undetermined path.

Murray: Uncoordinated, hodgepodge, somebody else do it.

Pitingolo: Time, priorities.

Brey: Too many cooks.

Betts: Messaging to the right group.

Allen: Lack of expertise.

Martin: Need a professional.

Vance: In a transition.

Killeen: Fractured ownership.

Cowan: Lack of expertise.

Simmons: Don’t want to be provocative. Lack of time.

Spike: What would the organization gain by having rock solid plan and implementation? My motivation is: clear reason for being. We clearly explain why we need to exist (to funders, government, etc.).

Branson: Recognition, reputation resources.

Smith: Branding, connecting to audience.

Murray: Transparency.

Pitingolo: Influence

Bray: Buzz

Betts: Mobilizing stakeholder action.

Allen: Gaining support for the effort.

Martin: Influence, credibility and just being proud of ourselves

Vance: Buzz, mobilizing, transparancy

Killeen: Relationships.

Simmons: Letting people know we exist.

Clark: Benefit to community and being a thought leader.

Spike: That’s 12-15 pretty powerful reasons. Does anyone feel like those things aren’t important to your organization? Some people sometimes think this stuff doesn’t matter. So… we’ve heard about consultants. Has any organizations have either started to investigate a consultant or had a staff person investigate this?

Martin: After 4 years of putting off a communications plan, I realized I didn’t know how to do it. Costs 25k to buy a consultant for half a year. I just had that person start. Over time I want to hire a communications student who can do this stuff.

Spike: How do you feel about your confidence? How’s this going on a scale of 10?

Martin: 7, I think things will be better in a year from now.

Bray: We don’t have a strategy, plan, but we did hire former editor of school newspaper. Started saying stuff about what’s going on; inserting us into conversations. At the last meeting the NNIP person [Lionel] gave tips and it didn’t agree with university comm policy. All of this opened our eyes that before having a plan, have a presence.

Clark: We can relate to being in a university with conservative guidelines. We couldn’t make our own website. We have someone from the Charlotte Observer who talks about issues of planning. Some of the research we do the funder doesn’t want to release or communicate.

Spike: Do you have release clauses in the contract?

Clark/Simmons: We don’t always have great plans for that.

Killeen: Research can easily become something that gets stuffed in a drawer. Doing more comm, social media on our own, rather than through ‘official’ channels, we can probably get more done.

Spike: Anyone else?

Branson: We’re a non-profit without divisions to screw things up. The world we live in isn’t about reports. It’s about tweets and infographics. Our real deficiency is/was about not having a graphic design specialist. We can’t sustain a graphic designer full time. We had a firm on retainer instead. But the notion of having analysts do visualization is hard, creates a gap. Not everyone is happy about this. Some people prefer a 25 page report to a single infographic.

Betts: Communication isn’t about how important data is, it’s about communication to get someone to do something. Most things fall into 1) raising awareness or 2) preaching to the choir. What is it about some strategies that causes someone to change their mind and do something different. Is that what PR firms do? Or do they just say what you tell them to say?

Spike: Should be a firm that makes people act (if it’s your mission). Our org doesn’t push people to go protest, that’s what our partners do.

Bray: We use a tool. A simple chart, 5 columns- itemize the stakeholders an answer what you want them to do. Know, think and feel. So that they do what you need them to do. The do isn’t lobby an official or call city hall. Raising awareness isn’t a business. Activating partners is. We give you the bullets, you do the shooting. You have to know what you want people to do. Sometimes a tweet is just a tweet.

Spike: Sometimes it’s complex, we need to know who’s who so we get the right information to the right people. It got very deep and we didn’t have the people or resources to get it done. Aspirationtech.org publishing matrix is really good for understanding what this could look like. Shows you how big and messy all of this stuff can be. But gives you perspective on how you might get it done. Journalists have some subjective alliance. Something think the left/right is crazy. Find the right one to cover your work. The effort is building relationship over time and getting them information. THey can’t do anything without information. What’s worked for us is getting those relationships stronger. We can get a broad reach from smaller pieces of research.

Simmons: Is it someone’s responsibility in your organization now?

Spike: I’ve made it mine. So there’s a lot of us with little clarity or person.

Murray: We just got a full time person to start next week.

Spike: What are they going to do?

Murray: Exactly. I don’t know. There are so many things they could do.

Branson: What does the person think they’ve been hired to do?

Murray: Good question, I don’t know. We’re in the mode of big report, comes out few times per year. We are moving toward a place of being more real-time, graphically, connected to action.

Branson: Reciprocity. You gotta promote other’s people stuff if you want them to care about your stuff. I spend a third of my communications time promoting other people’s stuff. If you don’t put anything in, don’t expect anything back.

Spike: There’s a minimal amount of effort that has to go in. The more people who know about our issues, the more people who can do anything about it. Thousands is better than hundreds.

Pitingolo: It’s 2:55, time to wrap it up.

Spike: 40 minutes isn’t enough time. We finally hired a communications firm. People thought it was expensive and a waste of time. Foundations said we weren’t clear enough and needed help. Materials are a dense mess. So it took funders to tell us our stuff was a mess. Every city should have a firm that doesn’t non-profit type work, so they can be the best partners. We can’t justify a full time person now or in the future. Having a comm firm and a design firm on hand seems like an achievable way to do things properly. Any other things?

Simmons: We struggle with quantity over quality. Journalist focuses on new content all the time. We write about the same stuff all the time. Trying to get that message across. Cut it down to less frequency but better stuff with the time. Or just keep blasting stuff out.

Clark: I want to hear about your [Murray]’s new staff person and how it works out. Want to learn about how you deal with issues and what the person can do.

Spike: Can you [Murray] do a brief, confidential report back on this?

Murray: Yeah. Between the different interests and the old school keep-doing-it.

Pettit: We’re looking for a Tuesday session in Pittsburgh. This sounds like a candidate.

Martin: I might bring my new person to Pittsburgh.

Smith: Communications seems like it should be part of the business process.

Pettit: It’s a value proposition.

Martin: No I think it’s a channel.

Branson: the next frontier is about impact of engagement. Going to need to ask people about it.

Spike: Lots of people saying you need to do \_\_\_\_ but not really saying.

Pitingolo: Sorry folks, we’re over time. Gotta end.

[End of session]