NSPRA Communication Audits

Effective Communications Program – Or Not.
How Do You Know?
Are you on track or off course?

An NSPRA Communication Audit is your communication program GPS.
Planning Your Communications Strategically

- Research and analyze the situation
- Plan how to address the situation
- Implement the plan
- Evaluate the plan outcomes
Planning Your Communications Strategically

- **Research** and analyze the situation
- Plan how to address the situation
- Implement the plan
- **Evaluate** the plan outcomes

... the two steps most often skipped!
What is a Communication Audit?

• A comprehensive **evaluation** of current communication efforts and how information flows internally and externally

• A snapshot of current perceptions about your schools, district and leadership

• A tool for maximizing your communication dollar through baseline **research** and recommendations for a more strategic communications program
What can a Communication Audit do for you?

• Help to define the communication vision and focus
• Demonstrate accountability
• Build trust and credibility with stakeholders
• Raise the visibility of the communication/PR function
• Recommend proven, best practice strategies to improve and enhance the communication program
Identifying the “Gaps”

- Is your message clear?
- Is your message resonating?
- Who or what is your audience’s primary source of information?
- Are your information delivery vehicles meeting audience needs?
- Are you delivering the information your audience needs and wants?
Communication Audit Trends

- Communication planning is more reactive than proactive:
  - Many districts have **board policies** that support a community relations program on some level
  - Few districts have a formal, strategic communications plan based on research and assessed through evaluation
Communication Audit Trends

• Districts **communicate better with parents than with staff** or the wider community:
  • Parents consistently rate their districts higher for communication than staff
  • Community ratings are typically the lowest
  • Staff often report little authentic engagement, even when their input is sought
Many traditionally **printed communications** have gone
digital for cost-efficiency and ease of distribution:

**PROs:**

- Digital communication “push” strategies (e.g., email, text and app alerts, social posts) increase message reach and help “pull” stakeholders back to district websites
- More video storytelling increases message engagement, impact

**CONs:**

- Inconsistent digital access among stakeholders (limited Wi-Fi or data plans, spam filters, email address errors, workplace restrictions, etc.)
- Comfort level with new digital technologies varies
Communication Audit Trends

• School-to-home communication is still #1 for parents

• Parents and staff want more personalized and timely communications

• District/school social media content isn’t often tailored to the unique interests of users on each social platform (lowers engagement)
Communication Audit Trends

• More focus on:
  • Family and community engagement through communications
  • Including branding/marketing as components of communication programs
  • Communication equity, including more consistent, accurate translations of materials and awareness of cultural differences that affect communications
Information stakeholders say they desire:

• Specifics about school finances.
  “I’m not interested in stories about the new milk containers. I want to hear about the bigger issues that impact property values.”
  – community member in Nebraska

• The rationale behind board and administrative decisions.
  “Communicate why things don’t happen. Let us know if it’s money, state or federal mandates, or something else. Don’t just tell us what was decided, but what is being done and why.”
  – staff member in Oregon
Information stakeholders say they desire:

• People want to know about problems and challenges as well as successes.

“The district needs to behave as if the schools are owned by the community.”

– parent in Arizona

“Don’t sugarcoat information. We need to know what is going on to be able to answer questions and help fix problems.”

– staff member in Missouri

• Close the communication loop.

“Sometimes we’re asked what we think in a survey or on a committee, but then the district makes a different decision without getting back to us about why.”

– staff member in Missouri
Good Times to Conduct a Communication Audit

• Leadership transitions:
  • New superintendent is hired
  • New communications director is hired
  • Board majority shifts

• Guidance needed for future decisions:
  • Prior to starting a long-range strategic planning process
  • When there are contentious issues or unrest in the district
  • Bond elections and other initiatives have failed

• No changes made to communications program in 10+ years
Making the case for investing in communication

• Many NSPRA resources at:
  www.nspra.org/nspra-communication-audits

Your blueprint to school community support

An NSPRA Communication Audit takes a snapshot of your current communication efforts, the climate for communication, the issues and image perceptions you are facing, and the communication needs and patterns of your target audiences. Each communication audit is different as it is tailored to your needs.

When you call to find out more about the auditing process, you will be asked, "What do you want an NSPRA Communication Audit to accomplish for your district, service agency, association, etc.?" NSPRA auditors review all current communication materials and techniques at the district and building level. They talk with key representatives from target audiences; seek their honest opinions on the communication process, role and