NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

Developing a Communications Plan

While there are more avenues for reaching an audience than ever before, not every platform is the right fit for every project. When developing your communications plan and selecting where, and how, you'll share your work, reflect on your goals and objectives for outreach, target audience, key messages, and the types of content that best fit your project and production capability. These factors together will inform your strategies.

Initial Steps for Building a Strategy

1. **Define Goals:** The reason(s) your project team is communicating with partners, stakeholders, media, and the public. (Example: Fill all spots in a summer program)

2. **Identify Target Audiences and Objectives:** The people you want to reach with information or call to engage with your project.
    - **Audience:** Who are you trying to reach?
        - Determine primary audiences (who the message is intended for) and the secondary audiences (who may also receive the message or engage with it).
        - Identify who is currently engaged in the topic and what additional audiences should be engaged.
        - Examples: K-12 educators; librarians; museum staff; higher education faculty, staff, and students; K-12 students and parents; historical societies; local government; members of Congress; professional societies and associations; podcast listeners; etc.
    - **Objectives for Audiences:** How do you want the target audiences to engage with your message? What would "success" look like?
        - Objectives pair communications tools (eg: webinar blog post) with a measurable outcome (eg: 50 registrations for the webinar from the post).
        - For each target audience, determine what you want them to do with the communications they will engage with. This can include increased awareness and actions.

3. **Create Key Messages**: The pieces of information you need to communicate to your audience that explain who you are, what you do, and why it matters.
    - Review your project and application to identify words and phrases that are essential to understanding your work. Use these as the basis for the longer key messages you will craft.
    - Research other projects and organizations in the field to determine how you can differentiate your message.

- Key messages should be concise, easy to understand, active, and tailored to the audience/objective they are paired with.

4. **Select Channels/Platforms:** Based on the audiences you defined, your goals and objectives for communications, and your production capability, select platforms for outreach. Ask the following questions:
    - Where do your target audiences get their information?
    - What is your budget – both financial and in terms of time to invest in communications?
    - What additional content can be produced? Will there be photographs and video or more written content?
    - Will you need to use traditional media (print, radio, broadcast, etc.), social media, digital content, or a combination of various tools? If a combination, which?

As you answer these questions and identify the best approach for your project, review later sections of this toolkit for sample content, creative resources, and strategies for creating material for various platforms, as well as ways NEH can partner with you to develop materials and share your work with the broader humanities community across the nation. When you implement your plan, be sure to follow a timeline to ensure you can meet your goals and be prepared to monitor platforms, review metrics, and adjust your communications plan as you go.