



Allerton Hill
Consulting_{LLC}

Communication and Outreach Plan:
Ann Arbor District Library

Prepared for: Josie Parker, Library Director

Prepared by: Jennifer Economus and Joel Gagne

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SECTION 1: THE SITUATION

Building upon the communication goals identified in the Ann Arbor District Library's Strategic Plan, the purpose of this document is to further enhance these goals and develop new strategies for Ann Arbor District Library's (AADL) outreach efforts and communications with the public. It is vital that AADL begin reaching out to stakeholders in a consistent and broad manner.

AADL has several key stakeholder groups with which it needs to communicate. Every stakeholder has different needs in terms of type of information and how it is presented. Every stakeholder will benefit from multiple touch points.

Recommendations

Identifying Key Themes

The message strategy is the foundation for all of your marketing. Your message strategy makes it easier to deliver the same message across all marketing media including your Web site, brochures, newsletters, presentations, and social media. AADL needs to speak with one, unified voice and be able to use the many varying communication tools to share key messages with staff, patrons and all community members. Consistent execution of the same message is a critical factor in successful marketing. In addition, targeted marketing to specific citizens must be executed as well.

A precursor to maximizing any outreach and messaging is a high quality survey. As indicated in Goal 1 under the Strategic Initiative IV portion of the Strategic Plan, an identified objective is for AADL to learn more about its patrons – both users and non-users. The most effective way to capture that and the pulse of your community is through a professional survey that provides scientifically proven data regarding the opinions of the citizens in your community.

In order for Allerton Hill and the AADL to incorporate a key marketing message that will resonate with local citizens, there must be a high quality, third-party survey (also known as a Community Satisfaction Survey) to determine the priorities and the public perception of the library. The data will help us target the key points more closely, show nuances of thoughts within the public, and guide our efforts in a strategic way. Otherwise, any attempts to arrive at key points are a “best guess.”

We also recommend that AADL conduct a Community Satisfaction Survey every two years and that this specific goal be incorporated into the AADL Strategic Plan. This recommendation serves two purposes: It provides data to show if there has been a change in perception and/or if citizens are more informed about a specific initiative or situation; and, it provides more viable and current data as attitudes and opinions naturally change throughout time.

In the interim, here are some general themes that should be incorporated in all communication and serve as the foundational message:

- Our nationally acclaimed Ann Arbor District Library provides outstanding service to the community and is a good value for residents.
- Our Ann Arbor District Library is a key contributor to our community's quality of life. It's a reason why people chose to live in Ann Arbor and protects our property values.
- Our Library supports literacy and education for all ages and helps job seekers gain training and find employment.
- Our nationally acclaimed Library provides tremendous value to citizens via diverse collections, helpful research assistance, outstanding programs and convenient services.
- The Ann Arbor District Library is a pillar of our community and we strive to promote a culture of generosity.
- AADL combines a strong sense of public service with responsible fiscal management that protects the public's investment.

Cross-Marketing: Tools to Help Get the Message Out

There are many varying communication tools to disseminate our message out to internal (staff) or external (residents and patrons) representatives. The vehicles of communication to use are as follows:

- Quarterly Newsletters and/or oversized post cards (Direct Mail)
- Brochures (message integration into this current tool)
- Social Media
- Events (coffee)

Special Use of Technology to Reach Key Stakeholders

Utilizing Web 2.0 strategies to reach key stakeholders will be vital to the communication plan. Using these technology driven tools will help us reach a diverse population in a cost effective manner. AADL consistently uses social media to get information out to the public. A great start! However, it will be important to expand the messages via these mediums to include the main themes and to cross-market your message driving followers to other communication vehicles (newsletters, brochures, news articles, etc.).

We also recommend expanding your use of social media to include the following:

- More online webinars with staff
- More videos
- Director's blog focused on message
 - Consider adding Twitter
- Instagram
- Mobile App

Building Understanding of AADL Priorities

Building understanding and support for AADL's priorities will be key. AADL must also build capacity and gather buy-in from vital members of the community: staff and patrons. They

must be given roles and responsibilities in your efforts. Reaching out via multiple meetings will be important. Examples of stakeholders meetings are as follows:

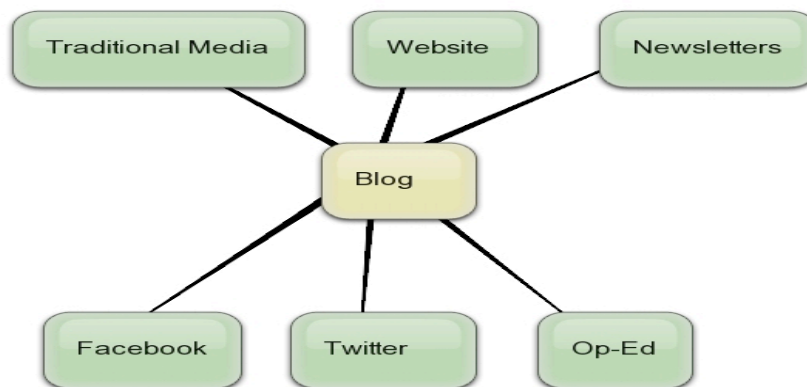
- Staff Meetings and Message Training (Two rounds: The first on the value of communications. The second on what's ahead (hot topics) and how they can help.)
- Community Organizations and Leaders Events (person to person)
- Citizens to Discuss their Role in Utilizing Key Messages, Overall Plan
 - Key Communicators Group
 - An informal, third-party group, which includes supporters and patrons that are not directly involved in the library, that can help share key information about the library on a person-to-person level.

The Value of Person-to-Person Communication

Person-to-person coffees and meetings allow the director and board to effectively reach out to the community on a personal level. For consistency, a standard presentation should be developed on the state of AADL and the challenges ahead. The director will use these opportunities also as a way to gather feedback. We recommend recruiting parents, business partners and other supporters to host these events. We also recommend that the director regularly attend and speak at civic meetings (Rotary, Kiwanis, etc.).

Putting it All Together:

Below is a diagram of how cross-marketing can work. Since citizens get information in various places, repeating the message via different mediums helps ensure the message is getting out to the community at-large. By anchoring the message to, for example, a blog site, AADL can create the message in one place and then can link it to other forms of communication and outreach:



Please note: Any communications plan should be considered a living document, that is, as more information becomes available and situations change, we should be able to adapt our strategy to meet certain changing needs with the fundamental goals and tools still intact. All of this information contained in the plan should be considered the foundational building blocks of a comprehensive communications initiative with the flexibility to tweak and refine as necessary.

SECTION 2: THE CHANGING FACE OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH

In an increasingly skeptical world, transparency and communicating value is critical to community support. Just as the private sector engages in marketing with its customers, public entities need to engage in a healthy dialogue with citizens.

Here are some broad “rules of the road” for AADL to consider as you plan for the future:

1. Never get too far ahead of your community. Ask yourself: are our citizens comfortable with the notion of average libraries being preferable to high quality libraries that offer services above and beyond?
2. Don't be wary of using library resources to mount an effective information effort. Research shows that people want to be informed. They don't want glitz, but they **DO** want information. Fortunately, AADL is accustomed to utilizing communications and marketing pretty consistently.
3. Increasingly, the information they seek pertains to finances more than to services. Government entities have drawn praise, for example, when they issue comprehensive annual financial reports.
4. Independent surveys of the community are absolutely vital. In fact, growing segments of the population value data driven decisions.

More and more residents expect information about the public services they receive via the many outreach tools out there – from direct mail to the Internet to social media. Either governments update communications to match the changing times, or they face a disengaged community.

SECTION 3: TARGETING AND NARROWCASTING

In the past, the belief was strong that the best marketing was of a “one size fits all” nature. Perhaps you can identify with the belief that ADDL’s message had to be broad enough so all segments of the population would identify with it.

Today the rules have changed. Our world has changed and public service entities must change with it. One size fits all has been largely replaced with “To each person there’s an interest.”

Think about your own family’s media habits. Adult interests today include literally dozens of cable TV outlets, specialized magazines, the internet, upscale newspapers, community papers, direct mailings, talk radio...the list goes on and on, growing by the year. Young adult tastes vary dramatically from their parents and grandparents. There are just so many choices and so many hours in the day. Targeting AADL’s messaging to these different audiences is vital.

You must tailor and deliver your message in a way that resonates with each unique stakeholder. **A third-party survey can help with that - via the cross-tabulation data- and provides information on the opinions of different segments of the community.**

Narrowcasting plays a significant role in overall marketing and outreach and it needs to be a part of a communications strategy.

SECTION 4: INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Internal communications are the information pieces (i.e. memos, emails and or newsletters) to keep your staff informed on all matters. It is key that AADL sets up an effective and efficient form of communication with all internal parties in the system.

Your people are your biggest asset, and they are on the front line with customers and are trusted sources of information. They are important carriers of the message to the community.

In our interviews with staff, it was apparent that different employees in different departments received different information from their supervisors. AADL would benefit from a consistent protocol and streamlining of information so that all communications to staff is consistent, especially based on the potential survey data.

Providing staff information on key themes and messages throughout the year will help build consistency and capacity in your outreach.

Recommendations

- ✓ We recommend meeting with staff at each branch two times per year to discuss “hot topics” and provide district wide themes.
- ✓ We also recommend a streamlined strategy of providing information to departments so that all departments share the same information (district wide key themes) with their employees.
- ✓ We recommend staff message training, which focuses on communication and outreach. The training should include topics and recommendations as how to stay on message, the value of public engagement and outreach, and proven strategies that help public entities communicate effectively and provide quality customer service.

SECTION 5: SOCIAL MEDIA

AADL uses social media consistently and understands its value in connecting with the community. No doubt, AADL does a great job using social media. You keep it positive and provide lots of pictures and good information.

Social media is a cost effective way of getting information out on what is going on in your district. Things move fast in today's world and real time multimedia and online social media sites are becoming a more prominent way for people to get information. In other words, many community members want to know what's happening and they want to know right when it does. On top of that, they want to receive this information where they seek it, whether it be on their Smartphones or on their Facebook or Twitter feeds.

Social media can also help you cross-market your message. Social media can direct followers to other forms of communications – local e-newspaper, your website and other traditional forms of outreach.

What's the Social Media "Voice" for the Director?

Many government leaders use social media as a way to share important information in an informal and personal level. It is both timely and positive information that helps community members feel a personal connection. Since social media is less formal and more conversational, it helps leaders connect with their community when it's not always possible to personally meet with people. It is not a replacement for person-to-person outreach, rather, it complements the work that is already being done and it reaches a key demographic (female, young people, parents) in a medium where we know they are getting information.

Here are some suggestions for Mrs. Parker to consider for building her social media presence:

Twitter

Twitter is a “microblogging” service, where you can share links to interesting content and short insights (140 characters or less) on topics that demonstrate your expertise and professional knowledge. It is also a great way to let people know you are out in the community attending events and sharing your personal observation regarding the value it brings to the community.

Here’s how to maximize results from Twitter:

- Have a simple name people can remember and search for to follow you. One suggestion is “@AADLDirector”
- Write a Twitter bio that describes you in 160 characters or less. That’s a tremendously useful exercise, one that can really help you focus on your “elevator pitch” too.
- Follow other influential people in industry and engage with them.
- You should also consider following and retweeting posts from other Twitter accounts or any other community groups and local newspapers, or other local governments. This will help you build your presence and consistency.
- Learn how to use hashtags so that you can participate in online discussions that are of interest to other members of the community.

How often

Since consistency is key, you should post to your Twitter feed at least once daily, with a daily maximum of about five posts. The rationale is that you need to strike a balance between remaining viable and interesting while not “turning off” followers by overdoing it. Social media is social – people are more responsive to what you have to say if you keep the content fresh but people can only tolerate so much in their twitter feed!

Overall, these numbers are just basic guidelines. The main concern should be that you are providing valuable content. Think about why a user should follow you in the first place. Are you interesting, funny, helpful, or conversational? The question of what you are tweeting is often times far more important than how often you are tweeting it.

Director's Blog

Blogs are a great way to share information with community members with a journal like structure. Blogs are much more lengthy when compared to Twitter, but they allow you to dig deeper into a topic and provide information that is timely. Since the director currently has a blog, we are recommending ways to enhance it. A blog is already a great medium to share information where you control the message and can get district-wide information out to help cross-market the main themes.

Some suggestions on blogging:

- Create an editorial calendar. Sometimes a little bit of structure can remove the anxiety of blogging. Consider how often you want to post, create different types of content, and begin filling out topic ideas weeks or months in advance.
- Identify core messages versus secondary messages. Oftentimes, a blogger may stray from writing about that which matters most to them. Consider the key messages you want to hit again and again, and how you can explore them in new ways.
- Repackage ideas into series. Instead of creating many one-off blog posts, create a series of five or ten posts that work together.
- Try different types of media. Instead of writing a post, create a video and embed it. Or tell a story with photos. Find other ways to express the same ideas.
- You do not need to post every day – once per-week is a nice posting frequency.

Videos and Webinars

We have seen great success with “Lunch with the Superintendent” Webinars and feel this success can be used by other government entities. This allows patrons to interact with the

library from the comfort of their own homes. We recommend conducting these quarterly. These are typically done during the lunch hour so people can “tune in” while they are eating lunch at their desks at work, or at home making lunch for their kids, etc. We recommend these events last no more than 30 minutes: 15 minutes for presentation followed by 15 minutes of questions and answers. Topics can include: overview of finances, update of program initiatives, featuring staff and an overview of any comprehensive mission or vision plans. These can be recorded and placed on the website for viewing at a later date.

Videos

Similar to webinars, we recommend AADL consider developing a catalog of videos on hot topics (some general to all residents and some specific to a targeted group), that will be placed on the district’s website community members to access. These videos should last no more than a couple of minutes and can serve as a “how to” or “introduction” on AADL programs and operations. For example, you could feature a librarian talking on video about different services for job seekers or upcoming events. A video guide of your branches could give residents a look into what you offer and maybe some programs and services they didn’t realize you offered. We also recommend conducting quick updates on finances and “Welcome” videos by the director or board president. These videos can be produced by AADL staff or outsourced.

Other Recommendations:

- ✓ Promote social media on website in a prominent place.
- ✓ Considering using Instagram (both AADL and Director):
 - Instagram is a visual platform that helps build brand images and allows you to showcase your services to your followers in a visual way. Photos are uploaded via smart phones and can be easily shared to specific other social media accounts as well.
 - Instagram use is staggering: 130 million active monthly users with 432

thousand more daily users than Twitter!

- Uses for Instagram include: showcasing services, going behind the scenes of your library and sharing photos of your employees and environment, announcing new services, showing board meetings and much more.
- ✓ Develop a strategy with a mobile app - Mobile devices have drastically shifted the online landscape to the point that statistics show that most all Internet access is being done via handhelds of some sort. If patrons are on their smart phones to gain information and access to services, AADL should consider a strategy of meeting them there via a mobile app.

Social media is a two way street between the community and your library. It is a fast, cost-effective way of both sending and receiving information. We all get our information on topics of interest differently. Web 2.0 is the fastest growing instrument of information distribution today. Organizations that respond to questions, concerns in real time will have a better chance of gaining support from the public than ones who do not.

SECTION 6: NEWSLETTERS AND DIRECT MAIL

Next to face-to-face communications, direct mail is the best way to provide information to residents. Newsletters and direct mail allow AADL to hit on main themes and highlight excellence and value to the community. Since there is little to no print media that features news articles about the library, mail is a great way to bring information to your residents' doorsteps.

In our employee interviews, it was evident that the library brochures were highly recognized and provided quality information to the public, yet staff felt they were underutilized. We suggest cross-promoting the brochures via direct mail either through the newsletters or postcards.

Newsletter and Direct Mail Recommendations

Again, incorporating the themes outlined in this plan will be key. Here are some thoughts:

- ✓ We recommend (at least) quarterly newsletters that hit on main themes. Careful consideration to the placement and prominence of articles should be given, and each newsletter should feature an article from the director. Each newsletter should be limited to four pages and include lots of pictures and graphs with bold, large text and short articles.
- ✓ Oversized postcards are a great place to share testimonials. The focus needs to be on how AADL has provided value to the community. For example, in the interviews, employees felt that some services were not promoted to their fullest extent. We recommend testimonials from patrons, or a "Did you know?" direct mail initiative where members of the community can share how they have utilized valuable AADL services.
- ✓ A focus on finances is also important. People are very skeptical about how public institutions spend their money. It will be important to focus on, just like they do in

their own family budgets, AADL is constantly reviewing its budget to ensure its spending taxpayer money wisely. Whether it's shopping for the best utility or fuel prices or any awards you've received for efficient operations, sharing information on how you've tightened your belt during this tough economy will be important. (More details are included in the "Communicating the Financials" section on page 19).

SECTION 7: KEY COMMUNICATORS GROUP

Key Communicators

Identifying supporters – known as “key communicators” - in your community will help AADL connect with residents and serve as strong advocates for your library. Not only will they be a voice for you in the community, Key Communicators will also provide input and react to the district’s challenges and help with outreach as issues arise.

Criteria for Key Communicators Group

The purpose behind this core group of 10 – 12 residents is to create a network of supporters that are recognized as leaders in the community and have networks of their own to be advocates for your district – whether it be at a community event, in the neighborhood or around town. There is no better way to communicate the activities and issues facing your district than through peer-to-peer conversations and these people are the pulse of the community.

The Key Communicators Group can help with maintaining momentum and community support through consistent communication and continuous outreach. They also help AADL handle communication challenges such as misinformation and rumors.

Work of the Key Communicators Group

Weekly and monthly contact with this group is important to maintain its vitality. Contact shall include emails, phone calls and meetings as necessary. We recommend the group meet once a month for one hour. They shall be provided tasks such as attending board meetings, hosting in-home coffees and sending emails to networks in response to current events.

Value of the Key Communicators Group

The district is prepared and proactive when challenges arise with an established group ready to assist with messaging. Key Communicators ensure that the community is

receiving regular, positive information from the AADL and its priorities from respected and trusted sources. This is especially important as traditional forms of outreach, like newspapers, wither and diminish in importance and outreach. New forms of communication, including the web, feed into the Key Communicators format well.

SECTION 8: COMMUNICATING THE FINANCIALS

There is a definite art to effective financial communications. Communications on financials are frequently given the least attention by government entities, yet this is an area that should remain in the forefront of all communications. AADL is no different in this regard. The key to financial information is that it be communicated frequently, that it is topical, and that it is presented in an easy to understand manner.

How to Communicate the Financials

What does “easy to understand” mean? It means that the financials should be written so that it is clear why the public should care. Pictures and graphs often tell the story best when they are woven as part of the narrative on finances and they are accompanied by clear captions, titles and in the proper prospective.

How Not to Communicate the Financials

Sometimes, in understanding how to communicate information, it is best to look at how *not* to communicate. Communication on the financials should never occur simply through the release of pie charts that simply show, for example, the expenditures and revenues. This information tells little and leaves tremendous gaps, which can then lead the reader to question if the district knows what it is doing. They only lead to more unanswered questions or incorrect conclusions.

AADL should be wary, too, of falling into what sometimes occurs, which is that “any communications is good communications.” In other words, “if we just put any and everything all out there, then we are doing a great job with communications.” Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, what will occur is that those wanting information will become frustrated and others simply will not tune into what the district communicates on finances because it is all haphazard.

Our goal for AADL on its financial communications is to ensure frequency, clarity and for those communications to tell the narrative of AADL's finances. This is a key part of being respectful to the taxpayer.

Recommendations for Communicating the Financials:

- ✓ Financial presentations at board meetings. (done and shared on website)
- ✓ Presentations to the board and key financial occurrences should always be accompanied by a bullet point summary.
- ✓ Presentations made to the board should also be provided to the staff at each branch.
- ✓ Annual Financial Report or a similar report should be published each year.
- ✓ With each newsletter issued by the district, information on the financials should be included.
- ✓ **Share key messages, such as the fact that AADL does not collect the maximum amount of taxes it can charge the taxpayers under law. What a great value!**

Appendix



TO: Josie Parker, Director

FROM: Jennifer Economus
Allerton Hill Consulting, LLC

DATE: August 14, 2013

RE: AADL Communications Audit

The purpose of this memo is to provide an assessment of the Ann Arbor District Library's (AADL) current communications including print and online outreach materials. Doing so allows for the continual improvement of communications so that we are certain to reach people in a way that is highly relevant and efficiently utilizes the district's outreach methods.

Single Core Theme/Branding: Unable to identify single core theme or tag line.

Recommendation: AADL should consider a brand line/tag line to communicate value and service to the community. A tagline is a succinct phrase, situated under or alongside your logo, which communicates a single but powerful brand message designed to resonate strongly with an intended audience. It can enhance the value and relevance of your brand, extend its reach, and give it renewed vigor.

Talking Points: From the audit, you indicated that the ADDL does not have district-wide talking points.

*Recommendation: AADL needs core talking points. Some basics have been suggested in the Communication Plan and would be enhanced by **data driven messages obtained from a***

third-party survey.

Calendar of Events: The district promotes a calendar through its brochures, website and social media. It is prominently posted and updated frequently.

Recommendation: none

Newsletters: From the audit questionnaire, you indicate that AADL does not produce newsletters.

Recommendation: The Communication Plan in Section 6 outlines specific recommendations on direct mail.

Logos: The logo usage is applied consistently in all materials viewed. This is excellent branding.

Recommendation: None

Guest Editorials: AADL is not on a regular cycle with the local paper on guest editorials.

Recommendation: Since there is not a print newspaper serving the AADL area regularly, utilizing local press is difficult. We recommend more usage of direct mail to help market AADL's main themes. Also since board meetings and AADL events get significant coverage from online newspapers, utilizing the Key Communicators to attend and participate in meetings will help with marketing themes and outreach.

Social Media: AADL is ahead of most governmental entities in utilizing social media. However, the RSS feed does not work on the website.

Recommendation: Specific recommendations are outlined in Section 5 of the Communication Plan. In addition, we recommend that social media icons be prominently placed on the AADL website. Since the website is visited frequently, having the icons and Twitter feeds promoted on the website will help attract followers. In addition, social media promotion should be included in all direct mail and brochures.

Website: The site contains a strong representation of the library and events and contains easy-to-understand navigation.

Recommendation: To promote social media and increase cross-marketing, the Twitter and Facebook feeds should be present on the home page.

Promotion of Staff: Behind every great library is a staff member who played a key role in operations. AADL staff carry tremendous credibility with patrons and more promotion of them and key and innovative programs should occur. Each newsletter should contain a key article in which staff members are quoted and relate their comments back to the AADL talking points.

Recommendation: More promotion of staff through newsletters including photos of staff working with patrons.

Staff Newsletter/Communications: Although there was no evidence of a staff newsletter, key communications materials should be provided to staff. A good rule of thumb is to provide them with advance copies of the newsletters and to make sure that they are among the first to know of significant news (events about board meetings). Once a month, the director should email the staff apprising them about critical news and planning.

Recommendation: 1) Provide preview to staff of key publications and make sure that they are among the first to know about news events. 2) Director should offer a once a month email to staff updating them on the work and planning of AADL.

State of the Library Event: AADL has an online Annual Report that is professional and full of good content. Congratulations on your “best of show” award from the American Library Association! Well deserved.

Recommendation: AADL should continue offering a video event but also host in-person events.

TIMELINE/CHECKLIST

October 2013

- Conduct Third-party Survey
- Begin forming Key Communicators Group
- Develop plan to share information with staff in a consistent manner
 - Email?
 - Director's blog?
- Develop outline/calendar for Quarterly Newsletters
 - Graphic Design

November 2013

- Analyze survey data
 - Develop/Finalize talking points
- Key Communicators Group Meets
- Begin Events
 - Establish (with key communicators) a calendar of coffees
 - Create standard presentation
- Begin collecting stories/pictures for first Newsletter
- Begin using social media to cross-market message
 - Establish Director's blog calendar
 - Instagram

December 2013

- Finalize first Newsletter
- Continue cross marketing via social media
- Begin integrating message into brochures
- Key Communicators meet

January 2014

- Staff message training
- Mail Newsletter
- Key Communicators meet
- Continue to cross market via social media
- Begin Coffees/Events

February 2014

- Key Communicators meet
- Develop plan for online webinars (integrate key messages) quarterly
- Coffees/Events
- Cross marketing via social media

March 2014

- Key Communicators meet
- Cross marketing via social media
- Community Coffees
- Promote webinar

April 2014

- Begin planning for second newsletter
 - Focus on Finances
- Key Communicators Group meets
- Cross marketing via social media
- Community Coffees
- Host webinar

May 2014

- Key Communicators meet
- Community Coffees
- Cross Marketing via social media
- Mail Second Newsletter

June 2014

- Key Communicators Group meets
- Cross marketing via social media
- Develop strategy for videos regarding hot topics
- Community Coffees

July 2014

- Cross marketing social media
- Begin taping videos
- Begin writing articles/collecting photos for next newsletter

August 2014

- Key Communicators Group meets
- Community Coffees
- Cross marketing via social media
- Follow up with staff – message training

September 2014

- Community Coffees
- Begin developing next webinar
- Key Communicators Group Meets

- Cross marketing via social media