



NATIONAL COALITION
for **HOMELESS VETERANS**

ENHANCING STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS TO BETTER SERVE VETERANS

2025 Optimizing Operations Webinar Series

JULY 24 | 2PM

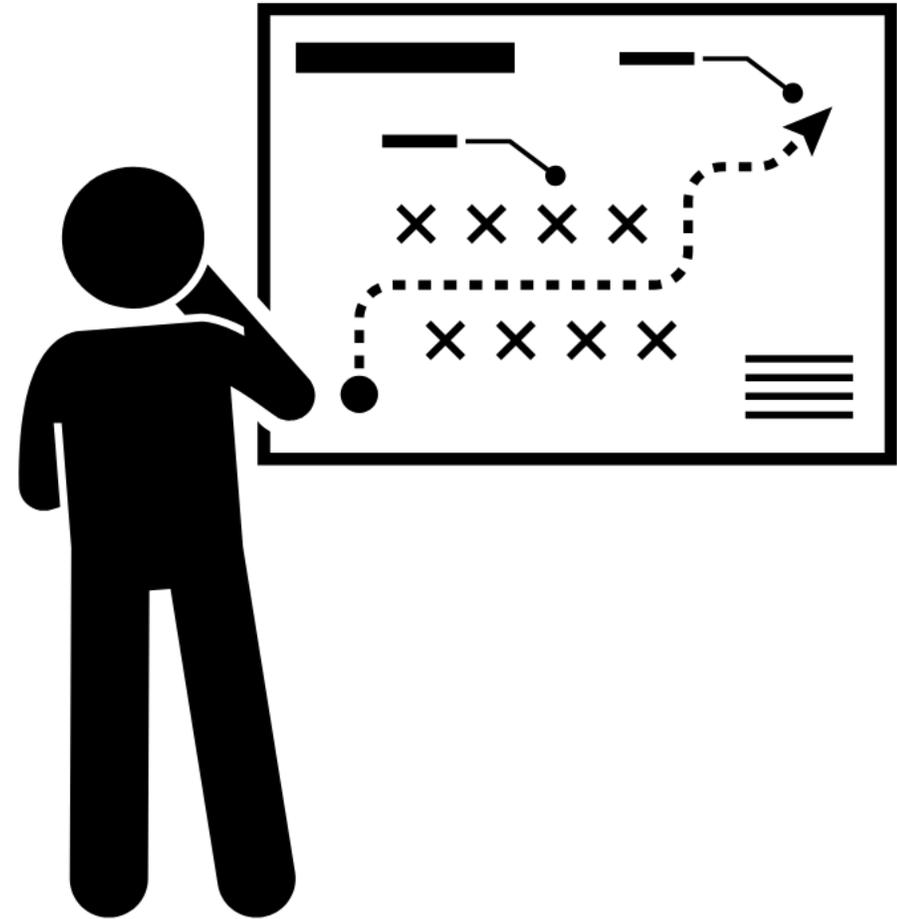


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ENHANCING STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS FOR SMALL ORGANIZATIONS

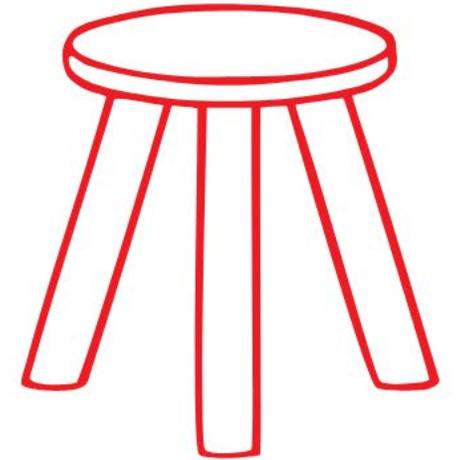
DAVID HIGGINS
Communications Specialist





THE THREE-LEGGED STOOL OF SMALL-ORG COMMS

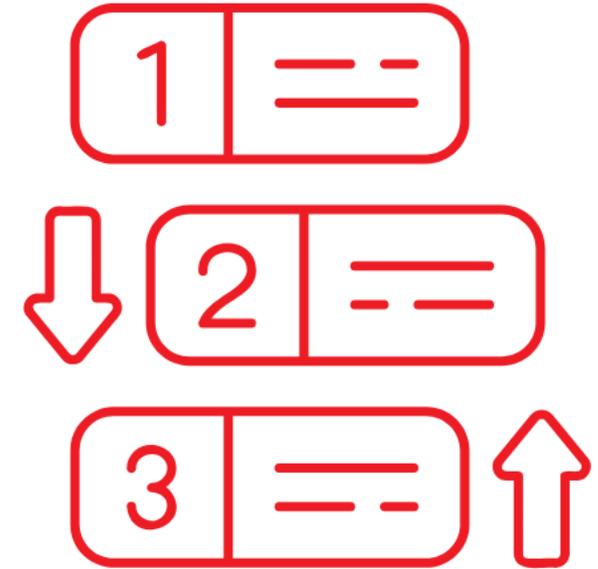
- Prioritize by strategic goal or goals
- Accept “good enough” as a discipline
- Make comms accountable to outcomes.



PRIORITIZE BY STRATEGIC GOAL

Start with: What are we trying to achieve?

- More partners?
- Greater visibility with funders?
- Moving policy?
- Reaching underserved audiences?



Then ask:

What comms channels and tactics get us closest to that outcome?



EXAMPLE - STRATEGIC PRIORITIZATION

Example: Prioritizing Policy Wins

Goal: Build momentum for the DOLE Act

Comms Focus:

- Explainer post
- Video of CEO Speech at press release.
- Equip stakeholders with shareable language

ACCEPT 'GOOD ENOUGH' AS A DISCIPLINE

- “Perfect is the enemy of done.”
- Use templates and repeatable structures
- Don’t over-design
- Know when speed matters more than style
- Some posts can be fast, scrappy, and still effective





EXAMPLE GOOD ENOUGH IN PRACTICE

Using Reusable Formats

- Branded templates
- Social Media Management Platforms



MAKE COMMS ACCOUNTABLE TO OUTCOMES

- Don't confuse engagement with success
- Tie posts and projects to actual goals
- Use metrics that match your mission





EXAMPLE OUTCOME-ORIENTED COMMS

Strategic Email Targeting

Our email list: a little over 34k subscribers

Main goal: Drive registration for webinars and trainings

Strategy:

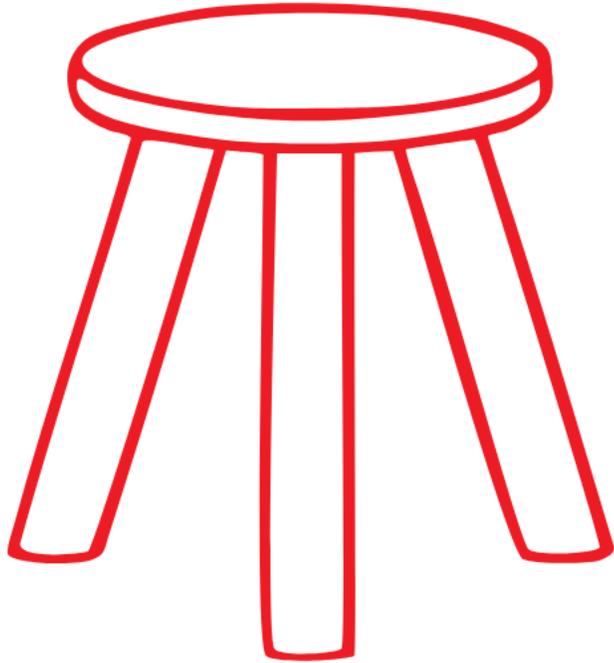
- Targeted sends to past conference attendees and past webinar registrants
- Broader sends follow later

Outcome: Consistent growth in webinar registration season after season

Lesson: Focused, audience-aware outreach > generic mass sends



MAKING THE MOST OF THE STOOL



Ask these three questions:

- Does this connect to a strategic goal?
- Is “good enough” good enough here?
- What outcome are we actually chasing?

THANK YOU!



NCHV WEBINAR PRESENTATION

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS (ON A BUDGET)

BUILDING SUPPORT TO END VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

LANEY KAPGAN
VP, DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNICATIONS



About U.S.VETS, Philanthropy & Speaker

U.S.VETS is on a mission to prevent and end Veteran homelessness. With boots on the ground at 46 residential site and service centers nationwide, U.S.VETS serves more than 5,500 Veteran and families per night with housing, counseling, career services, meals and wraparound support.

U.S.VETS launched fundraising and communications activities about 12 years ago, growing impact and visibility annually to expand programs, operations and housing.

Laney Kapgan has led development & communications at U.S.VETS since 2017. Prior, she served as Chief Development & Communications Officer for Venice Family Clinic, part of UCLA Health System, and Director at Chrysalis and GLAAD. Over 25 years, Kapgan has raised nearly half a billion dollars to expand housing and safety net services across the nation.



GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1) Refining your brand identity and strengths.

2) Building communications strategy with lean resources.

3) Telling your story to your audience.

4) Leverage partnerships to amplify your impact and outcomes.

U.S. VETS HOUSTON

*Refining Your
Brand Identity &
Strengths*



REFINING YOUR BRAND IDENTITY

BRAND IDENTITY:

- ▶ Consider your visual brand elements: logo, colors, typography, imagery, tagline and messaging. (Try out free program: Canva)
 - ▶ Is your logo clearly identifiable?
 - ▶ Are your branding elements and collateral consistent across efforts?
 - ▶ Do logo and messaging clearly communicate your impact?
 - ▶ U.S.VETS primary logo utilizes a tagline as we work to build brand awareness.
 - ▶ U.S.VETS prioritizes client imagery, outcomes statements, declarative calls to action.
- ▶ Develop a consistent and authentic core message that conveys your mission and impact on Veteran homelessness.
 - ▶ Ensure that staff and Board leadership are training to articulate this message to media, constituents and partners.
 - ▶ Clear consistent messaging builds recognition and trust over time.



IDENTIFYING YOUR BRAND STRENGTHS

STRENGTHS

- ▶ Incredibly meaningful and deserving client population.
- ▶ Tangible metrics to demonstrate impact.
- ▶ Ability to tell broad range of stories and show outcomes.
 - ▶ Interview Veterans your nonprofit has helped.
 - ▶ Stories: share compelling stories of Veterans who have overcome homelessness and other barriers with the support of our programs.
 - ▶ Images: A picture is worth a thousand words – about our clients, work, values, and impact.



Jakedria, U.S. Navy Veteran
U.S.VETS Ventura



Philip, Veteran
U.S.VETS Long Beach



Calvin, U.S. Army (Ret)
U.S.VETS Outreach



Ray, U.S. Army Veteran
U.S.VETS Inglewood

PERSONAL VETERAN NARRATIVES

- ▶ Evoke emotion, empathy and hope
- ▶ Encourage connection
- ▶ Move people to act
- ▶ Encourage giving

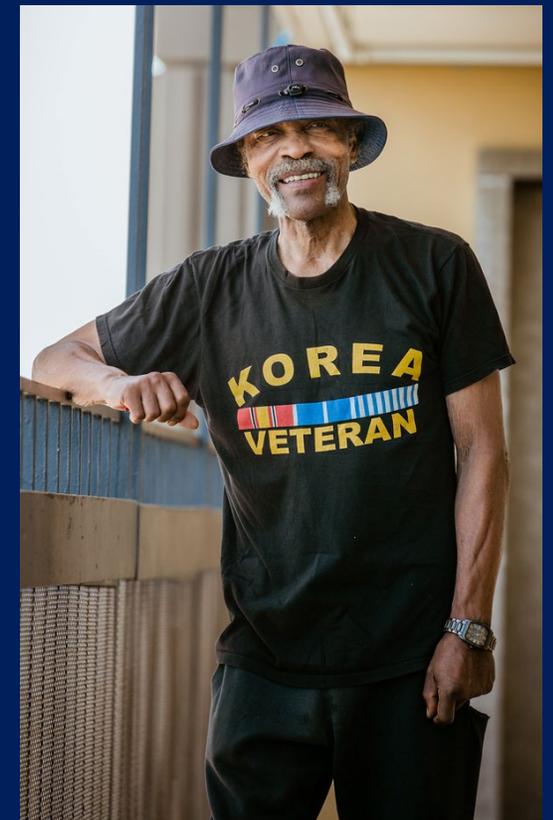


*Building
Communications
Strategy*

BUILDING COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY IN THE FACE OF LEAN RESOURCES

STRATEGIES:

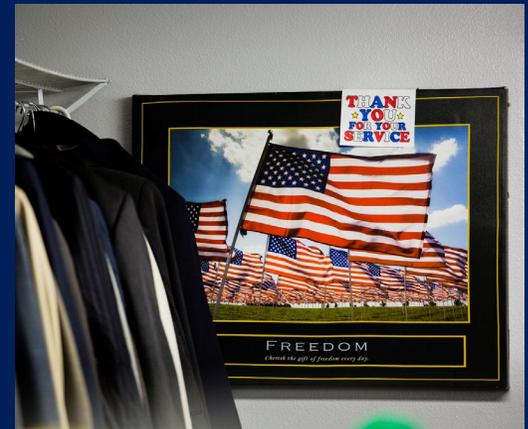
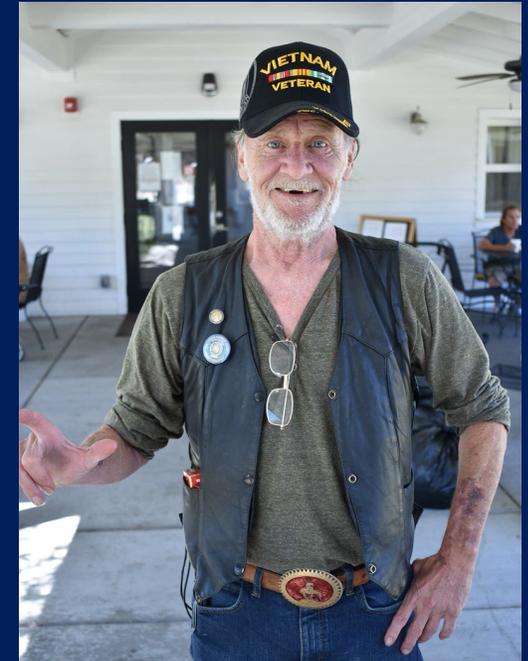
- ▶ Create an annual calendar for communications activities: digital, print, social media, owned & earned media channels. (Free programs include Google Calendar, Trello; Also Outlook)
 - ▶ Aim for a lean and consistent content plan.
 - ▶ Focus on 2-3 priority channels with regular updates – you can't do it all!
 - ▶ Schedule 1-2 updates per week + 1 story or Call to Action per month.
 - ▶ Share a mix of human impact stories, data outcomes, events and appeals.
 - ▶ Highlight measurable impact per dollar. Provide clear statistics with context
- ▶ Build relationships with local and issue-focused media.
 - ▶ Leverage events, eg Veterans Day and holidays, issues of national focus or local priority, policy cycles, data releases: media seek timely stories on these topics.
 - ▶ Invite local media to program graduation, volunteer events, Stand Down or holiday activity.
 - ▶ Consider your size a strength. You can be nimble without a cumbersome approval process.
 - ▶ Timely messaging about emergencies, awareness months, or policy change (budget proposals, legislation), can make you a key media resource. Be responsive but strategic.
 - ▶ Create “rapid response” templates for eblasts, social, and press to quickly inform your network and mobilize action. Partners are a key resource for this!



BUILDING COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY IN THE FACE OF LEAN RESOURCES

STRATEGIES:

- ▶ Utilize and (re)populate content across channels.
 - ▶ Event speaker may also agree to share their story in media, direct mail and/or e-appeal, social post and grant quote.
 - ▶ Impact statistic from program report may be used in appeal, eblast, social media and media pitch following PIT count.
 - ▶ Use simple formats: a quote + a photo, or an infographic can be very powerful.
- ▶ Lean into what you already do well:
 - ▶ Proximity to community. We are genuine, local and invested.
 - ▶ *“We may be small, but every week our team is here for local Veterans, including families and seniors, who rely on us for meals.”*
 - ▶ Let Veterans tell their stories. They are our most powerful communicators. Engage (and train) staff to capture client impact.
 - ▶ Consistency is better than perfection. It’s better to post regularly than to wait for perfect material.



*Telling Your
Story To Your
Audience*

TELLING YOUR STORY TO YOUR AUDIENCE

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES:

- ▶ Focus on your core messaging & storytelling.
 - ▶ Develop a consistent message that conveys your mission and impact on veteran homelessness.
 - ▶ Use Veteran-centered, mission-focused stories to highlight your program breadth & impact.
 - ▶ Balance personal journeys with statistics and outcomes.
 - ▶ Lead with your strengths. Constant crisis messaging can have short-term results & erode long-term confidence. Be transparent without communicating despair. We will press forward together!
 - ▶ Show measurable progress. Together we were able to...
 - ▶ Spotlight the roles of dedicated team members, volunteers, partners and community.

Authenticity is key. People engage with organizations they can trust.

Use a personal and trustworthy voice that reflects your care and respect for our nation's Veterans. Your credibility is driven by your ability to communicate your impact, values and vision.

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." - Maya Angelou

TELLING YOUR STORY TO YOUR AUDIENCE

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES:

- ▶ Start with owned channels:
 - ▶ Share client and partnership stories on your website, social media, newsletter, appeals, funder communications and at in-person events.
 - ▶ Utilize media clips, advocacy Call to Action, client testimonials, end of year outcomes to create eblasts without significant new content creation.
 - ▶ Try AI tools to create draft content for social media, newsletters or appeals. (Free programs include ChatGPT or ClaudeAI).

FUNDRAISING TIE-IN:

- ▶ Use stories to highlight program impact; how donations create change.
- ▶ Always add clear call to action: Donate Today. Sign Up. Share Post. Contact Rep. Donor becomes partner in ending veteran homelessness.
- ▶ Know your program numbers, needs, program costs and funding gaps!
 - ▶ E.g. \$50 is the gap for one night of housing for one Veteran
 - ▶ \$1.67 is the gap per Veteran per meal.



*Leveraging
Partnerships*

**TEAM
DEPOT**

LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS TO AMPLIFY YOUR IMPACT & OUTCOMES

STRATEGIES:

- ▶ Utilize partners to amplify your voice and reach their audience with your message.
 - ▶ Sharing partner events and stewardship on social media allows you to reach their constituents as well as yours.
 - ▶ Press releases or media pitches about partnership activities can offer access to partner communications resources.
- ▶ Capitalize on coalition and advocacy partners who create messaging, calls to action, and news updates by sharing these with your constituents.
 - ▶ Provide simple talking points for community outreach and media. Encourage partners and local orgs to amplify your message.
 - ▶ Utilize pre-written templates to post quickly when news breaks. *Here's how this affects local Veterans...*
 - ▶ Set up Google alerts, sign up for newsletters from NCHV, VA, HUD or other sources to stay on top of news or policy decisions.



LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS TO AMPLIFY YOUR IMPACT & OUTCOMES

STRATEGIES:

- ▶ Leverage relationships with electeds to raise visibility and educate the community on complex issues.
- ▶ Build media partnerships with local radio, TV, print outlets to secure free PSA advertising inventory and coverage.
- ▶ Ask corporate partners to support media or advocacy by engaging their public affairs or PR teams to amplify.
- ▶ Engage in-kind public affairs and communications experts to train your leadership on media, messaging, advocacy.
- ▶ Raise your profile through partnership: consider Board, honorees, elected engagement, local business leaders, veterans groups.
- ▶ Communicate how changes in policies and funding have increased need for vulnerable Veterans and families.
 - ▶ Acknowledge unknowns while reaffirming commitment to Veterans.
“We don’t know what the next policy cycle will bring but we do know veterans need affordable, supportive housing now.”



**CONSIDER
YOUR
CURRENT
STATE**

**What are your biggest
communications challenges?**

**How can we better support
each other in this work?**



THANK YOU!



LANEY KAPGAN
VP, DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNICATIONS
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Q&A



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