

Strategic Communications Planning Grid

What is a planning grid?

The strategic communications planning grid is a tool used in developing strategy. It is also a systematic approach to developing strategic messages. This is what a planning grid looks like:

Goal: _____

Publics	Stake	Message	Media	Timetable	Monitor	Budget

How to use the planning grid:

- 1 Identify a goal -- just one goal -- you wish to achieve on behalf of your client.** A goal is a statement of the outcome your client hopes to achieve. Think of it as a destination. It is not the strategy or the tactics used in reaching that destination.
- 2 Identify the publics you consider most critical in meeting the client's goal.** In any given scenario, there could be dozens of stakeholders. Remember: You represent the management of your client organization. Do not target yourself. List each in a separate box in the column under the heading "Publics."
- 3 Identify each public's single-most compelling stake as it relates to your client's goals.** Stake is defined as a statement of each public's self-interests. In any given scenario, there could be multiple statements of self-interest. However, for the purposes of this assignment, only one statement per public is requested. Pick the stake that best serves the needs of the client and public -- creating a "win-win" situation. For purposes of clarity, it is recommended that this be stated in a complete sentence. It should be listed in the column titled "Stake" in rows assigned to an appropriate public. *It is understood that some statements of self-interest are appropriate for more than one public.*
- 4 Identify the messages that you want to deliver to the targeted publics.** These messages are both positioning statements and a call to action. They are designed to motivate specific publics to take a desired action. They should take into account both the client's goals and the audience's self-interests (stake).
 - **With primary publics, the message should use parallel language that links the stake and goal.** Typically, its construction is along these lines: "I want this public to take an action that will advance my goal because it also advances that

public's stake." *Example: KU wants an increase in state funding. It is targeting the legislature. It has defined the legislature's stake as: "Legislators want to be seen spending state tax dollars wisely." So, the message from KU to legislators is: "Increase KU's budget so you will be seen wisely spending taxpayer dollars."*

- **With intervening publics, remember that the goal has changed.** By definition, primary publics are the only people who are decision-makers who decide whether you can achieve your goal. By definition, intervening publics seek to influence the primary publics. Therefore, the construction of the message is typically along these lines: "Influence (primary public) to take an action that will advance my goal because it advances your stake." Even with this modified goal, you should still use the same language used in the stake. *Example: KU wants an increase in state funding. It is targeting students as an intervening audience that can influence the legislature. Students want to keep down the cost of tuition. Therefore, the message is: "Write legislators in support of increased funding at KU because it will help keep down the cost of tuition."*

In any given scenario, you may be required to deliver multiple messages. For purposes of clarity, it is recommended that this be stated in a complete sentence. It should be listed in the column titled "Messages" in rows assigned to an appropriate public. *It is understood that some message statements are appropriate for more than one public.*

- 5 Identify the media appropriate for communicating with the targeted publics.** Identify the channels of communications you feel are best for reaching these publics. In any given scenario, there may be multiple channels appropriate for reaching a given public. Your choice of medium should be listed in the column titled "Media" in rows assigned to an appropriate public. *It is understood that some media are appropriate for more than one public.*
- 6 Determine the timetable for delivering your messages using the media you have selected.**
- 7 Determine how you will monitor the progress of your plan.** This is the evaluation phase of the public relations process.
- 8 Determine the budget for the actions you have proposed.**

Planning Grid Tips

These are based upon problems common to student planning grids:

- Goals should express only the desired outcome. They should not express the strategies and/or tactics used in achieving them. When you do this, you run the risk of muddying the message.

- Express only one goal and/or stake at a time. Clarity is the purpose of this exercise. If you attempt to jam in too many points, you run the risk of muddying the message.
- Be explicit when identifying publics. Remember, there is no such thing as a general public. For stake and message, it is recommended that you use complete sentences. Complete sentences are, by definition, a complete thought.
- Do not target yourself. You are representing the management of the client organization. While it is OK to target your client's employees or membership, do not target its management or board of directors. The assumption here is that you already have control in these areas.
- When describing each public's stake, describe it in terms of that public's motivation -- not your own needs. For example: Just because you need volunteers, that doesn't mean that the public's stake is "a need to volunteer." People volunteer for a reason. What is it? In other words, the stake needs to address the motivating force that volunteering would satisfy.
- Use precise, explicit language. While some goals, stakes, messages and media are self-evident and require little or no explanation, that is not always the case. If the meaning or context of your answer is not clear, it will be marked as being incorrect.
- Use parallel language. The message must reflect the language used in the goal and the stake.
- Don't confuse tactics with media. Media are the specific channels of communication used to carry out the tactics.