

ODOT Communications Standards

Purpose of this document

To set standards that ensure communication from the agency, both internal and external, is produced with excellence and in accordance with department communication goals. These standards apply to agency staff as well as consultants and contractors who perform communications functions on behalf of the department.

Media relations

The ODOT Communications Section, division, or region management must coordinate all media communication. Contractors and consultants may not act as media points of contact on behalf of the department. Consultants must work through the designated region/division public information officer, division, or region management for media contacts.

Clear Communication

- The language used in communications should be relevant and understandable to the intended audience. Oregon law requires the use of plain language in all documents aimed at the public. This can be summarized as using:
 - **Simple, everyday words.** This includes avoiding the use of too many words and staying away from jargon.
 - **Short sentences** and paragraphs limited to one topic.
 - **Active voice** instead of passive voice.
 - **First person** instead of third person (e.g. We/you instead of ODOT/people).
 - **Correct grammar and punctuation.**
 - **Good graphic design/layout** that makes understanding easier.
- Benefits-orientation: Through plain language, we help people understand the benefits of our work.
- Customer focused: By using simple stories and good visuals, we focus on the customer's experience in explaining our work.
- Plain language should be used in written material and on the [web](#), including these channels and others:
 - Project pages, webpages.
 - Brochures, fact sheets, one-pagers.
 - Executive summaries of more complex projects, programs or papers.
 - Letters, memos, materials for the Oregon Transportation Commission, emails.
 - News releases, social media posts, newsletter articles.
- Associated Press Style: The Communications Section follows the [Associated Press Stylebook](#).

Communication plans

Communication endeavors need a communications plan to show how the effort supports the agency's strategic communication goals. Plans may be broad or concise, formal or informal, to match the scope of work. Consultants and contractors of ODOT Highway Division public involvement efforts must adhere to ODOT's Public Involvement Expectations for Project Delivery, known as the [PD-12](#)ⁱ.

The ODOT Communications Section can provide guidance on communications planning. Generally, communicators need an approved plan to launch a body of work that:

- Demands Communications Section resources such as funding, media channels, staff time or oversight.
- Is a named project under an ORS.

The ODOT staff responsible for public communications such as the ODOT Communications Section, Highway Division Communications Section or Community Affairs staff, prior to their execution, will approve communication plans. Evaluation results are part of responsible communications planning.

Plan guidance

Follow the accepted public relations [R.P.I.E.](#)ⁱⁱ format:

- Research.
- Planning.
- Implementation.
- Evaluation.

Plan elements

Communication plan elements include the following:

- **Problem statement** (be specific about what problem you are trying to solve).
- **Situation analysis** (summary of research – list the [type of research](#)ⁱⁱⁱ and whether it is formal or informal. This can be brief, depending on what problem you are trying to solve).
- **Goals** (for each goal, address the following):
 - Public/audience(s) – “general public” is not a valid audience target.
 - Objectives – the end result, quantifiable, time-based (the *what*).
 - Strategies – the general direction, *how* you will move towards achieving the objective.
 - Messages – key statements of belief you want the identified audience(s) to know/embrace.
 - Tactics – specific methods used to accomplish the strategy, ways you will use resources to *carry out* strategy.
 - Budget (staff and monetary resources).

- Staffing & key roles.
- Timeline.
- Evaluation metrics and instruments.

Department strategic communication goals

Goal 1 - Capable Steward: ODOT customers trust the Oregon Department of Transportation as a capable creator and steward of a collection of programs and systems, both digital and physical, which provide for the safe and reliable transportation of people and products in and through the state.

Goal 2 - Responsible Use: ODOT customers take personal and community responsibility for the safe and effective use of the transportation system.

Goal 3 - Trustworthy Guide into the Future: ODOT customers depend on the Oregon Department of Transportation for vision and guidance to provide for reliable and safe transportation that fosters a prosperous Oregon.

Goal 4 - Vehicle of Benefits: ODOT customers experience tangible benefits in their lives that result from our work.

Guiding Principles

Data driven

We base communication activities on data regarding the current and desired state of value, belief, opinion and behavior of specific publics affected by the program or project.

Goals should focus on outcomes, not outputs

Communication plans and actions will measure outcomes (changes in value, attitude, opinion or behavior) over time, not just in communication products or magnitude of activity (such as views, budget, reach, etc.).

Each goal needs to be SMART^{iv}:

- **Specific.** General goals are hard to achieve or measure.
- **Measurable.** If possible and measurable, the plan should gauge whether behaviors or opinions changed as a result of the communications plan, noting that it is supremely difficult to correlate a communications plan with a change in behavior. Measures should include pre- (baseline) and post-campaign.
- **Achievable.** Goals, strategies and tactics should be able to be accomplished given available resources.
- **Relevant.** A relevant goal means it's meaningful in your current situation. It should be effective to be relevant.
- **Time-based.** Set a time frame for accomplishing the goal.

- **Effective.** Goals, strategies and tactics should show that they will actually help achieve goals through research. Goals should show how they will move public awareness, opinions, beliefs, and values toward modifying behavior.

ODOT voice

- **Engaging.** We want interaction with our customers. We listen and respond.
- **Transparent.** We are honest and open about our processes, decisions and information.
- **Accountable.** We show our work and the results of our efforts. We are transparent about and learn from our mistakes.
- **Clear.** We speak and write in the language of our customers and explain complicated concepts in a way that promotes understanding. We focus on problems and opportunities we are trying to address and communicate how the outcome will make life better for our communities.
- **Accessible.** Our communication efforts and products meet our customers where they are and are readily accessible through digital tools.
- **Compassionate.** We understand and empathize with the point of view and feelings of our customers and show that we care.

Standards documents included by reference

- [R.P.I.E](#) (PRSA).
- External [web writing toolkit](#).
- Internal [plain language resource site](#).
- [Plain Language ORS 183.750^v](#).
- Internal [web-writing resource site](#).
- ODOT Brand Styleguide.
- Contact Communications Section for PDF copies of our Plain Language Guide, Writing for the Web Guide and Brand/Publishing Standards Guide.

ⁱ https://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/Engineering/Doc_TechnicalGuidance/PDLTNotice12.pdf

ⁱⁱ <http://www.praccreditation.org/resources/documents/APRSG-Planning.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2006_Planning_Eval.pdf

^{iv} <https://www.workamajig.com/blog/project-communication-plan-set-goals>

^v <https://www.oregon.gov/DAS/Pages/writingplainlanguage.aspx>