



Lane Council of Governments COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

draft for Executive Committee and
Communications Committee review

May 31, 2011



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Background

Situation Analysis

In late 2010, Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) secured the counsel of Verb Marketing + PR in order to analyze and respond to a Strategic Goal that grew out of a February 2009 Board planning session. At that time, the Board indicated that improving communications should be a “very high” priority for LCOG. In part, the goal grew out of the Board’s recognition that in its role as the gathering point for multiple jurisdictions, there was significant opportunity to improve communications at a regional level.

Beyond the broad goal of improving regional communications, the Board indicated a desire for LCOG to amplify and clarify its organizational communications efforts. Verb was enlisted to better define this work, and to develop and present recommendations that would set LCOG on a course of action.

At the onset of the communications project, the LCOG management team and communications committee posed the following questions to help define the focus of the work:

- How can LCOG enhance its communications with its 28 member governments?
- How can LCOG enhance its communications with the public?
- How can LCOG enhance public access with LCOG’s member governments, through LCOG?
- How can LCOG better enable communication between local government jurisdictions and state and federal levels of government?
- What role does the LCOG board play in these communications, and how can it assist with communications?

In order to develop this plan, Verb sought information and input from the following sources:

- Audit of past and presently used communications tools (electronic and print, informal and formal)
- Review of LCOG Strategic Plan
- Review of 2009 and 2010 Communications Subcommittee planning documents
- Reference to other COGs' communications pieces for best practices baseline
- Electronic survey with the LCOG Executive Committee and full Board
- Discussions with the LCOG Executive Committee, and full Board
- Electronic survey to LCOG Members' "CEOs" (city managers, etc.)
- Discussions with the LCOG Executive Management
- Discussion with Program Managers
- One-on-one interviews with all LCOG Communications Subcommittee members

The following plan is based on our findings, and is built around proven communications strategies and tactics that have been selected according to LCOG's needs and communications environment.

High-Level Findings

Over the course of the assessment work, it became clear that we were actually reviewing several communications categories--not just one:

- Awareness of LCOG, and communications about LCOG as an organization
- Communications between LCOG and its members
- Communications between LCOG members

The Challenges

The scope of this plan was intended to focus on LCOG communications, but because LCOG is in many ways an amalgamation of its members, it was difficult to separate members' observations and expectations about LCOG communications from members' observations and expectations about their "home" entities. As the review moved forward, it became difficult to discuss "communications" generally because individual members had differing perspectives about where communications were needed most.

There was uniformity in the perceptions that:

1. The greatest communications challenge is that the LCOG member organizations do not know the depth or breadth of the services LCOG provides as part of the membership, or the services that are available to augment their core staffing and expertise. Because of this lack of awareness, LCOG's perceived value is lower than it should be.
2. Because the members' delegates¹/LCOG board members are unclear about the full scope of work the organization conducts it is difficult for them to communicate on behalf of LCOG, particularly to their "home agency". This contributes to the first point.
3. There is little awareness, understanding or appreciation of LCOG among the general public. Although the general public is not the primary audience for LCOG, its support is of value during budget reviews by member agencies.

¹ Note the use of "delegates" throughout this planning document. We use this term to designate the active agency representative who serves on the LCOG Board and as the liaison between the LCOG agency as a whole and the member agency as a whole.

Communications Objectives

All of this demonstrates there is opportunity for LCOG to improve its communications efforts. To those ends, we put forth the following high-level objectives. Later in this document, we provide strategies and tactics to reach these objectives:

1. Improve the breadth and depth of communications from LCOG to LCOG delegates.
2. Ensure members understand the value of their membership by equipping delegates with the tools they need to demonstrate the benefits received or available to their home agency.
3. Seize 'ambient' opportunities to increase the general public's awareness of and goodwill toward LCOG, positioning the agency as one of service and efficiency, not expenditure.
4. Reach out to the media and serve as a resource and a partner in order to better demonstrate who LCOG is and to obtain cooperation rather than criticism. (This will also reinforce LCOG's role as a neutral entity.)
5. Regardless of audience, better articulate and demonstrate the value of regional planning.

Related Opportunities

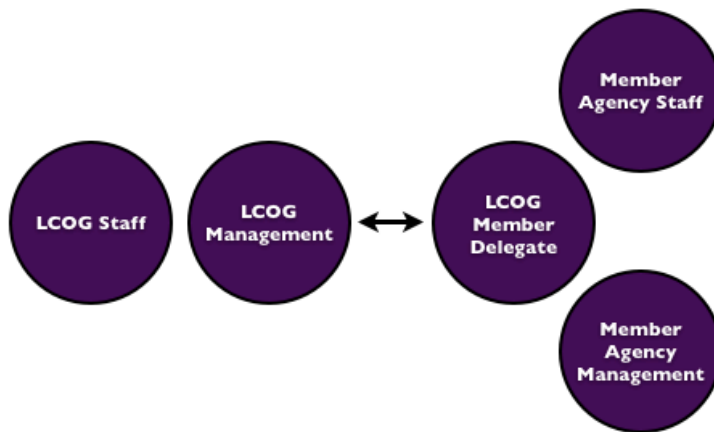
During the planning process, some LCOG members indicated they hoped to gain additional communications support from LCOG. This was more of an issue with the smaller entities, who do not have designated communications staff.

In fact, LCOG is already providing many of these services and the request for such support is a good indication of a chronic issue: LCOG is indirectly or directly responsible for a great number of communications efforts and tools, but is often unrecognized. This is in part because of its decision to be "invisible" as the service provider. It is also connected with the tendency for communications to address its member organizations at only the highest level.

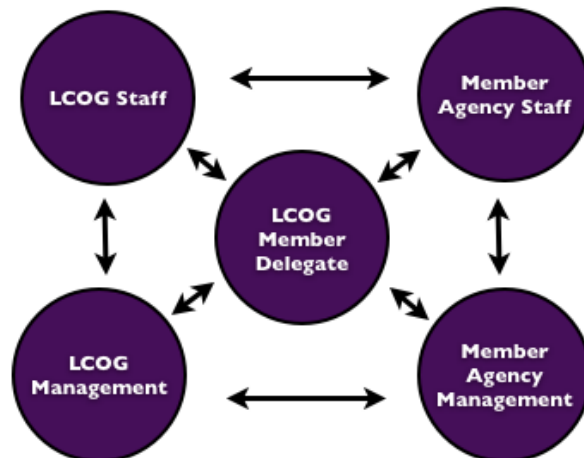
Still, given LCOG's goals of regional success and provision of support at a regional level, it is our opinion that LCOG should consider expanding communications-related services to fill the resource gaps of members and to augment their individual efforts. We recommend you develop a suite of resources to support members in the following communications categories: public outreach and information, advocacy at a state and local level, and grant writing and management.

LCOG's Single Greatest Communications Opportunity

The greatest opportunity facing LCOG is not what it communicates, or how it communicates. It is to whom it is speaking. Presently, the majority of the communication beyond that related to a specific project or issue happens between LCOG management and LCOG delegates. Besides project-specific communications, information doesn't reach far into LCOG itself, or from the delegate into the member agency. Many of the recommendations in this plan are intended to build a communication path that looks less like this:



And more like this:



Objectives and Tactical Recommendations

With this in mind, LCOG should put top priority on its communications to members, and support those efforts through improved outreach to the public, primarily in the form of project-specific media coverage that demonstrates the value of regional planning.

Details follow, and are arranged by objective. Note that recommendations may serve more than one objective. They are placed according to the objective which they most directly support. In most cases, recommendations that address multiple objectives are likely to be the most effective, and this is reflected in the work planning portion of the plan.

Objective #1: Improve the breadth and depth of communications from LCOG to LCOG delegates and enable the communication to extend beyond the Board level and into the organization.

Communications efforts will be implemented to communicate into each organization, as well as to the representative of each member government. (Note the deliberate use of “into” above. As it stands, communications tend to be between LCOG and the member delegate, without penetration into either organization.)

Website/Electronic Recommendations:

1. Re-develop the website to more prominently demonstrate services and feature members of the organization. Visitors should be able to identify services and members on the home page and quickly access information and help. Web equivalents to the material recommendations below should be easy to find and even download in a “resources” section.
2. Consider the addition of blogs to the website. These would be available to members and designated members’ staff only, and would be organized and presented by content area/ service category.
3. Ensure that delegates and the key staff at their agency are “fans” on Facebook. Post relevant, topical content to Facebook each day (but keep it short, using links to the site for details).

Material Recommendations:

1. Develop several single-page information sheets (printed and as PDFs): statistics about services, service listings, testimonials/quotes, profile of member organizations and post these to the website, distribute in paper form, issue to members as PDFs, and later, glean from them for integration into e-newsletters.
2. Establish a twice-monthly e-newsletter to members only. Content could include: updates on high priority regional projects (one paragraph with a link to the website, where full details are available), compiled list of meetings held by members, a short project case study, one staff profile or one member project profile. Consider using a sidebar with links to important information or resources such as legislation updates by a third party.

Programming/Management Recommendations:

1. Assign a single staff person to each member government to serve as a “client services” representative of sorts.
2. Develop a more formal staff-to-staff information program that fosters the formation of collaborative groups such as the existing Regional Information Officers. Each senior-level LCOG staffperson will identify his or her counterpoint at each member agency, and develop relationships that assure the LCOG member feels he/she has a contact within the larger organization, and that he/she considers this LCOG representative a resource. Sample emails and steps to launch these relationships should be provided to staff to coach this effort.
3. Sponsor a monthly “coffee chat” or “brown bag lunch” set up by category of work, and invite membership representatives to take part. (For example, all HR managers could take part on Tuesday mornings at 9, all IT directors at 9 on Wednesday mornings, and so on. LCOG will host these, and the facilitator should be the internal LCOG specialist for the respective groups.)
4. Hold an annual gathering of delegates for no purpose at all beyond the natural development of camaraderie and collaboration. Attendance may be scant at the beginning, but we anticipate that if the event is truly social and convenient, it will become an anticipated event. Keep it simple and hold it after work. Another option is to do a pre-meeting warm-up. (Look to Open Houses of the past for ideas. It is our understanding these are popular and well attended.)
5. Continue to hold the Annual Appreciation dinner, but expand the invitee list and communicate the recognition portion of the program to the media, seeking attention for the award winner. (You don't need publicity about the event -- just the outcome.)



Objective #2: Ensure members understand the value of their membership by equipping delegates with the tools they need to demonstrate the benefits received or available to their home agency.

We envision transforming the role of Board member from an “attendee of meetings” to a “liaison between governments.”

Website/Electronic Recommendations:

1. Add a membership portion to the website and populate it with the directories, fact sheets, e-newsletters and member blogs recommended in various portions of this plan.

Material Recommendations:

1. Develop a service directory/sourcebook for LCOG’s membership. Membership services and services-for-hire services will be included and identified. Distribute this in PDF and printed form. Ensure it goes to all CEOs, program managers with all member organizations and delegates.
2. Develop a “people directory” with LCOG staff names, departments, phones and email. This directory should annotate areas of expertise. The directory should also identify LCOG Board members and their positions and contact information. A separate section could include member’s key staff. (This tool could evolve into a Lane County equivalent of the State Bluebook, of kinds.) Distribute this to CEOs, program managers with all member organizations, delegates, and the media.
3. Develop an information packet for each member agency, profiling the services provided and their value.
4. Develop a short, general use presentation for LCOG delegates and staff. The content should include information about services, functions and the results of its collaborative work. This Powerpoint presentation should be available on the website.

Programming/Management Recommendations:

1. Develop a process and supporting materials to more formally orient new Board members and City Managers to LCOG. Content should include services provided, specifics about the delegate’s organization’s use of LCOG in the past, opportunities for the future.
2. Each year, each LCOG delegate should request 15 minutes at his/her agency’s board meeting. During that annual review, the delegate should review LCOG, and how the entity uses LCOG. LCOG staff should help customize the Powerpoint presentation discussed above and use agency-specific examples. Sourcebooks should also be provided at this discussion.

Objective #3: Increase the general public's awareness of and goodwill toward LCOG, positioning the agency as one of service and efficiency, not expenditure.

These will largely be ambient opportunities. Ambient opportunities are those that you seize when they appear. They are generally passive in nature, and represent an opportunity to embed LCOG into an existing (ambient) presence. These are items that will have impact over time largely thanks to consistency and coherency. The end goal is to eliminate or temper objections to the cost of members' LCOG membership and services.

Website/electronic recommendations

1. Issue an e-newsletter to interested parties and media once per month (rather than the current quarterly update). Be sure to distribute to community leaders, opinion leaders and anyone who requests subscription. The information level will be at the level of a newspaper article.
2. Actively maintain a Facebook page, and invite members, media--absolutely everyone--to become fans. Share an interesting statistic, data point, meeting announcement, invitation for public comment, map with caption to illustrate a trend, etc.
3. Re-post news coverage or links to articles on Facebook.
4. Maintain the role as the facilitator of information by redeveloping the website to better link to member governments and major programs such as Senior & Disabled Services, R-LID, and the Public Safety Coordinating Council.

Material recommendations

1. Forego a traditional Annual Report in lieu of a magazine-style assemblage of success stories that can also be retooled for use in e-newsletters, etc.
2. Develop a short video/long ad with key messaging centering on thinking big/thinking regionally/working together -- and image member projects. Post it on the website and on Facebook.

Programming/management recommendations

1. Become a sponsor of City Club, and ensure LCOG is represented in all regional conversations, whether formally as a speaker, or informally posing a question.
2. Seek opportunities to speak to Rotary and City Club about the value of regional planning. The focus should be increased cost effectiveness and better coordination among government entities.

Branding-specific recommendations

1. Develop an LCOG seal and type claiming “Proud Member of Lane Council of Governments” for use on all websites and support materials.
2. Adopt and utilize common messaging to describe your work. (See page 19 for recommendations.)
3. Consider development and adoption of a tagline. Use it everywhere your logo appears.
4. Follow other brand-related recommendations put forward in this plan.



Objective #4: Reach out to the media and serve as a resource and a partner.

At a time when reporters need support more than ever, LCOG is in a very good position to serve as a resource for media. We suggest LCOG seize this opportunity by:

Tools and Tactics

1. Work with each member agency to establish media protocol and partnership terms.
2. Issue at least one news release each month and follow it up with a direct pitch to reporters. Vary the topic so LCOG's full scope of services and work is demonstrated over the course of time.
3. Post media coverage on the website, use it in e-news (be sure to ask permission to reprint, or just use a link to direct to the article) and post it on Facebook.
4. When media coverage is not received for a story pitch or news release, write your own and include photography. Use in in the next e-newsletter and on the website. Use a "feature" style for greater readability and interest.
5. Develop a "quick list" of topics and categories of questions that LCOG can likely answer for reporters, and share it with assignment editors, editors and reporters.
6. Develop and share in electronic form and online an "expert guide" listing names and bios and areas of expertise of key staff, along with office phone numbers and emails.
7. Hold a media training seminar for LCOG staff to ensure they know and follow the rules of the media road, including the importance of timeliness, what can be shared and what can't, and how to be of use for the media while increasing the odds of them getting the facts right.
8. Keep a media log of inquiries, response provided, and general outcome.
9. Rather than simply maintaining a traditional "clipping book," re-post coverage on the website and on Facebook.

Techniques

1. Develop or update your media list and reach beyond Eugene-Springfield to include smaller papers, and larger media outlets like the *Oregonian*, who cover regional planning issues and trends.
2. Meet with the appropriate reporter from each major local media outlet and introduce them to the information that's available through LCOG. The level of interest will vary from TV reporters who will want to know who to call for quick data points, to *Register-Guard* or *Oregonian* reporters who will be interested in knowing how to access information from R-LID, population studies, mapping data and other demographic or planning details.
3. Establish or renew your commitment to openness with the media. Communicate to employees that playing well with the news media is (1) required (2) fun and (3) will not cost them their jobs when the story doesn't come out quite the way anyone expected. This attitude does not come naturally to most, but in the long run it's the best way to raise your profile.
4. Be innovative about what is "pitched" to the media. Do more than just issue a standard news releases and demonstrate the power of LCOG by considering collaborative information releases using the media. For example, if a project had LCOG mapping the births of immigrant parents in Lane County in the past 10 years, consider bringing a media partner in to cover the project and the outcome. This will ensure high-profile placement on media websites and could be re-tooled for use on LCOG's site, too.

Objective #5: Regardless of audience, better articulate and demonstrate the value of regional planning.

One delegate framed this well when he jotted “What would Lane County look like without LCOG?” This objective will be reached largely through the successful implementation of objectives targeting member governments and the general public. Specifically:

1. Ensure e-newsletters demonstrate beneficial outcomes of collaboration, particularly in the categories of cost effectiveness and convenience.
2. Pitch news articles and coverage portraying the results of a regional approach, specifically related to the quality of result or cost effectiveness.
3. Work to make the agency synonymous with “regional planning” so that anytime a member, reporter or member of the public seeks information in this category, they utilize LCOG as a resource. (Conversely, LCOG must establish itself as an expert on all things related to regional planning, prompting the agency to be the obvious resource for members, reporters or members of the public.)
4. Develop a set of speaking points about the value of regional planning, with quantifiable results associated. These points should be used in all core LCOG pieces, on the website, and as a one-sheet piece that’s shared at meetings. One of the supporting points should be made in each e-news, and supported with an example.

Brand Recommendations

Although this is technically a communications plan, it is short-sighted to overlook the basic shortcomings to the current LCOG brand. These issues -- and recommended solutions -- follow.

Naming

LCOG's name and logo have intentionally been left out of this discussion, as our focus is on communications planning more than branding. However, the following recommendations grew organically out of our audit work, and we are including them here for your consideration:

- The term "Council" in LCOG's name is highly appropriate and indicative of the organization's work. We suggest you consider using it more often, and perhaps in place of the term "L-COG" in many cases.

Tagline

We recommend that LCOG use a tagline with its logo. This provides another way of reminding those who come in contact with the agency of its role and its work. The core content of the tagline should include the concept of "working together for the good of the community".

Hierarchy

The relationships between LCOG and its members, and LCOG and its programs, do not lend themselves to a tidy and easily managed brand hierarchy. We normally make such a recommendation in a communications or brand plan, but in this case we are hesitant because of the case-by-case nature of publicity/communications projects. Rather, we put forth the following guidelines:

- Cease your efforts to be “invisible” on individual projects -- even those conducted for members.
- In cases which LCOG has provided services as part of membership, the agency’s involvement should receive recognition, even if it is subdued. As awareness and recognition of LCOG’s expertise and abilities expands, the LCOG association will actually add value to a member’s work -- not detract from it.
- When LCOG has served as a consultant on a project, it should be identified. Not only will this add credibility to LCOG, it will add a level of endorsement to the member’s project as well. Knowing that an independent party had some level of involvement is likely to benefit the project, not hamper it.
- Make LCOG’s Senior and Disabled Services program much more visible. The goodwill that the SDS program generates, and the visibility it has, offer an opportunity to LCOG. Consider using language like “Senior and Disabled Services is a program brought to you by Lane Council of Governments.”
- Make the relationship with the MPO and similar arrangements more visible. This should be handled through visual and verbal references connecting the two. For example, use language like “The Metropolitan Planning Organization is a program brought to you by Lane Council of Governments.” The connection also needs to be made on the two websites.

Character/Tone

LCOG's communication pieces fall into two categories: those developed on behalf of others, and those developed on behalf of LCOG. When it comes to developing pieces for LCOG, there is opportunity to strengthen the visual brand and styles. Presently, the pieces are straight-forward and informational. However, they are too passive and lack energy. While this is appropriate when developing plans, and we recognize the need to avoid implied bias, it is a missed opportunity to further define the LCOG brand. We recommend that a tone of friendly helpfulness be utilized. For example, rather than using a subhead termed: "LCOG Services" use "How Can We Help?"

Consistency

We recommend LCOG be more deliberate in utilizing consistent imagery, graphic styles and language. This can be best achieved through the use of a style guide and assigned "brand manager" who reviews all communications pieces for consistency. Further, to the extent possible, we recommend that a single point of service be used for all communications tools. We infer there is some hesitancy to send all items to Creative Services because of the "direct/indirect" billing arrangement. Although billing formats fall outside the scope of our assignment, we suggest you reconsider the format used for "internal" clients. Allocating oversight and development of all electronic and print pieces to a single point will ensure efficiency and effectiveness.



Messaging

LCOG's existing "brand statement" or "statement of being" is contained within its mission statement, but is not adequately presented in a manageable or memorable form. The organization and members need an abbreviated form and supporting "elevator speech" about LCOG.

Currently, from the website: "Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) is a voluntary association of local governments in Lane County, Oregon. The agency is a regional planning, coordination, program-development, and service-delivery organization. LCOG helps area cities, Lane County, educational districts, and special-purpose districts reach their common goals."

To date, there is no shared nomenclature to quickly describe LCOG's role or efforts to the uninitiated. The group must identify and embrace a single descriptive phrase that adequately positions LCOG. Fortunately, although the areas of emphasis, word choice and delivery varies greatly, vested LCOG members agree on the general content of the message².

- Convener of local government representatives, coordinating entity
- Collaborative body featuring high level of technical expertise
- A facilitator of shared resources and objectives directed to common goal of regional success gained through intention and planning

However, LCOG delegate Jim Torrey positioned the conversation perfectly when he issued this statement: "*What would Lane County look like if it weren't for LCOG?*" This is where the ability to point at project outcomes becomes integral, and is essential to properly demonstrating the real work LCOG delivers.

² Based on the LCOG Membership survey.

Key Messages

Highest Level

Lane Council of Governments brings local governments together to share common resources and work together for the greater good of residents and the long-term benefit of the county.

Mid Level

Lane Council of Governments brings agencies together to work on behalf of the county as a whole. We offer our members access to specialized services on an efficient, as-needed basis. Our members form a policy board and a working team. Together we provide social services, transportation planning, resource planning and other infrastructure-related services.

Detailed Level

Cities, Lane County, service districts and others belong to Lane Council of Governments and work together to manage the social services, transportation and land use issues that face us. We take a regional approach and focus on working together to create an effective and efficiency network of services and resources for our residents.

Demonstrate the Value

Support the key messages with concrete examples of what LCOG does. Select an example based on the audience to whom you are speaking. We recommend a full listing of examples be developed to meet every category of audience. To begin, here are a few examples:

- Seniors: For instance, you might know of our work as Senior and Disabled Services.
- Educators: For instance, we help Lane ESD, 4J and Springfield Schools project enrollment using our population data and mapping services.
- Elected Officials: One of the roles we play is in regional transportation planning. We are responsible for landing \$XX million in federal transportation funding.
- Social Service Interests: One of the most important things we do is run Senior and Disabled Services.
- Realtors/Developers: You know us because of the data we provide for land inventory surveys and the R-LID system.
- And so on...

Draft Work Plan

The following information is intended to inform LCOG’s work planning process. Recommendations are formed around our judgement of which efforts will have the greatest impact for the most reasonable cost.

Please note: We realize this is an extremely aggressive plan, and that not all portions of the work may be completed within the timelines put forth here. This should be considered a starting point only. We are issuing the recommendations absent information about human or fiscal resources.

Start Work	Finish Work	Project	Objective
April	City of Eugene, County and Springfield no later than June 10. Others ongoing and complete by July	Develop an information packet for each member agency, profiling the services provided and their value	1, 2
March planning	May event, pending convenience for delegates	Hold an annual gathering of delegates/Open House	1
June	Ongoing	Build e-newsletter subscription lists, including names, orgs, emails and “segment” (member, public, media, etc)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5



Start Work	Finish Work	Project	Objective
July	October	Re-develop the website to more prominently demonstrate services and feature members of the organization. Include links to members' sites and relevant issues pages	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
July	October	Add a membership portion to the website and populate it with the directories, fact sheets, e-newsletters and member blogs recommended in various portions of this plan	1
Decide for web development purposes	Implement as second phase of website - December	Consider the addition of blogs to the website	1
July	September	Develop several single-page information sheets (printed and as PDFs): statistics about services, service listings, testimonials/quotes, profile of member organizations	1, 4
July	September	Develop a service directory/sourcebook for LCOG membership	1
July	September	Develop a "people directory" with LCOG staff names, departments, phones and email	1, 4
July	August	Develop a short, general use presentation about LCOG and the results of its collaborative work	1, 2
July	Ongoing	Actively maintain a Facebook page, and invite members, media--absolutely everyone--to become fans	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
July	Ongoing	Re-post news coverage or links to articles on Facebook	2
July	September	Develop an LCOG seal and type claiming "Proud Member of Lane Council of Governments"	2, 3
July	September	Consider development and adoption of a tagline. Use it everywhere your logo appears	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
July	Ongoing	Utilize common language to describe your work	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
August	Ongoing	Assign a single staff person to each member government to serve as a "client services" representative of sorts	1
August	First issue in September	Establish a twice-monthly e-newsletter to members only	1, 2
August	For next incoming delegates	Develop a process and supporting materials to more formally orient new Board members and City Managers to LCOG	1, 2
August	November	Develop a short video/long ad with key messaging centering on thinking big/thinking regionally/working together	2, 3, 4, 5
August	Ongoing	Seek opportunities to speak to Rotary and City Club about the value of regional planning	3, 4, 5
August	August	Develop or update your media list and reach beyond Eugene-Springfield	4



Start Work	Finish Work	Project	Objective
August	September	Develop a set of speaking points about the value of regional planning, with quantifiable results associated	5
September	September	Ensure delegates and the key staff at their agency are “fans” on Facebook. Post relevant, topical content to Facebook each day	1, 2
September	Launch November with “thanks” theme -- ongoing from there	Develop a staff-to-staff information program.	1
September	First issue in October	Issue an e-newsletter to interested parties and media once per month	1, 2, 3, 4
September	Ongoing	Become a sponsor of City Club, and ensure LCOG is represented in all regional conversations	3, 4, 5
September	Ongoing	Issue at least one news release each month and follow it up with a direct pitch to reporters	4, 5
September	Ongoing	When media coverage is not received for a story pitch or news release, write your own and include photography	4
September	September	Hold a media training seminar for LCOG staff	4
September	September	Establish or renew your commitment to openness with the media	4
September	January	Each Board member should request 15 minutes at “home” board meeting to review LCOG, and how the entity uses LCOG. Staff should help customize the presentation and use agency-specific examples	1, 2
October	Launch November with first topic about collaboration opportunities at a staff-to- staff level (coincides with staff-to- staff information program)	Sponsor a monthly “coffee chat” or “brown bag lunch” set up by category of work, and invite membership representatives to take part	1
October	October	Develop a “quick list” of topics and categories of questions that LCOG can likely answer for reporters, and share it with assignment editors, editors and reporters	4



Start Work	Finish Work	Project	Objective
October	October	Develop and share in electronic form and online an “expert guide” listing names and bios and areas of expertise of key staff, along with office phone numbers and emails	4
October	November	Meet with the appropriate reporter from each major local media outlet and introduce them to the information that’s available through LCOG	4
November	March	Forego a traditional Annual Report in lieu of a magazine-style assemblage of success stories that can also be retooled for use in e-newsletters, etc.	2



Evaluation

We recommend a formal evaluation of the communications program after the first year of implementation. It will be important to be realistic about the ability to affect change in that time period, but this will set an important precedent for annual tracking. Based on experience, we suspect that the accumulation of effort will begin to show at a more significant level at Year Three.

- Annually, we recommend you invite participation in a survey based on the “leadership” and “CEO” surveys we issued as part of this planning process. Consider the 2011 survey a baseline, but recall that participation was low. (In practice, the participation rate is an indicator of some sorts. If participation increases, this would demonstrate a greater awareness of LCOG or at least a higher level of engagement.)
- Annually, develop a comprehensive list of communications efforts that were implemented and what remains to be done.
- Calibrate the next year’s work plan based on any findings from this evaluation.

Many of the individual recommendations put forth in this plan can be used as evaluation. Here are some examples:

- Track number of subscriptions (and unsubscribes) to various enews.
- Track enews open rates, click rates and other feedback. Use this information to inform the content of the enews.
- Track website traffic by hits, topical interest and search terms.
- Track media inquiries by reporter, agency, topic and outcome.
- Track Facebook use (you should receive a regular report on this from Facebook)


Background Information



Survey of Materials

Our communications audit took into account formal and informal communications, processes and informal channels, and included a review of a sampling of LCOG-issued materials selected for its “representative nature.” These materials were reviewed for brand hierarchy, brand identity, messaging, tone, verbal and visual cues and content. The following matrix provides a glimpse of the types of materials we assessed.

Material Type	Audience	Component Description	LCOG ID'd?	LCOG logo? Prominent name?	Others ID'd
website	General public Member agencies	LCOG website	Yes	Yes Yes	no
website	General public	Senior & Disabled Services website	Yes - to some degree. Only through “endorsed” style handling of SDS logo, including shared “rays” from LCOG logo. No content about relationship.	No No	yes
website	General public	Metro TV website	Copyright mark only	No No	yes

Material Type	Audience	Component Description	LCOG ID'd?	LCOG logo? Prominent name?	Others ID'd
website	General public Pundits Other agencies -- primarily transportation professionals	Central Lane MPO website	Copyright mark and on sub-level page in answer to "What is the Central Lane MPO?" Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the central Lane County area that includes the Eugene-Springfield metropolitan area and Coburg. The MPO is the lead agency for regional transportation planning and distributing federal transportation dollars for the Central Lane County area. The MPO works cooperatively with local governments and transit providers to set priorities for transportation needs. This process enables our area to receive millions of dollars annually in federal transportation funding. The Governor designated LCOG as the MPO for this area in 1974. The Central Lane MPO is one of approximately 350 MPOs across the country and one of 6 MPOs in Oregon. NOT identified as regional partner	No No	yes
website	General public	Keep Us Moving website	Logo in upper portion of banner. No content or description of role. 	Yes No	Yes

Material Type	Audience	Component Description	LCOG ID'd?	LCOG logo? Prominent name?	Others ID'd
website	General public Member agencies State planning pros	Region 2050 website	As a contact name on home page, not in "related links" Also in copyright notice	No No	No
website	Pundits Other agencies State and local jurisdiction planning professionals	Willamette Livability Forum website	Designed by/copyright mark only ID'd as "c/o" addressee for resource group	No No	No
website	General public	Fly Eugene website	No -- presumably because LCOG only built site?	No No	No
website	General public	City of Creswell website	"Designed by LCOG Creative Services"	No No	City only
website	General public	City of Veneta website	No -- presumably because LCOG only built site?	No No	City only
website	Government users Subscription users Public	Regional Land Information Database website	Yes, as group of logos of integrated resources. Also in "news" item	Yes	Yes
Postcard	Planning professionals Elected/appointed officials	Oregon Planning Institute postcard for "Planning Full Spectrum" training	Return address and website address as the "for updates..." in text	No No	OPI
Bookmark	General public Pundits Other agencies	Central Lane MPO general info	Contact information and logo. Not included in paragraph about MPO	Yes No	Yes -- more prominently
Visitors map	General public	West Eugene Wetlands map	In type in "credits" listings at bottom.	No No	Yes



Material Type	Audience	Component Description	LCOG ID'd?	LCOG logo? Prominent name?	Others ID'd
City map	General public	Creswell map	Small "map layout and design by... with logo"	Yes No	City, Chamber, sponsors
Consulting services proposal	EWEB/Prospective client	Proposal for LCOG to provide land use consulting services for EWEB Riverfront Master Plan	Yes - throughout, as this is a proposal document generated to promote LCOG to interested party	Yes Yes	Partner agencies
Postcard	Members of planning commissions Planning professionals	Oregon Planning Institute postcard for planning commissioner training	Return address and website address as the "for updates..." in text	No No	OPI
Fact sheet	General public	Ready, Set, Testify! sheet from Lane MPO & Preparado, Listo, Testifique!	As line of type at bottom, and blurb that says "Lane Council of Governments is the Metropolitan Planning Organization, the lead agency for regional transportation planning and distributing federal transportation dollars for the Central Lane County area." (This is the first "who is LCOG synopsis" noted except for LCOG website.)	No No	Yes, Central Lane MPO
Fact sheet	General public	Volante Informativo Lo Esencial DE la MPO (This presumably exists in English too.)	Yes, in Q/A portion "Lane Council of Governments es la Organizacion Metropolitana de Planificacion de la zona central del Condado de Lane..." (same as the Ready, Set, Testify sheet).	No In text described	Central Lane MPO



Material Type	Audience	Component Description	LCOG ID'd?	LCOG logo? Prominent name?	Others ID'd
Year in Review	LCOG Members	"Successful Partnerships" 2007 booklet called "Annual Report" by staff, but no financials included. More of an overview of the year, services provided, etc. Useful guide.	Yes, throughout.	Yes Yes	Listing of member governments
Service listing	LCOG Members	2003 (?) 3-paneled brochure profiling LCOG's services and capabilities, letter from director	Yes, throughout.	No (presumably pre-logo?) Yes	No
2010 Annual Report Calendar	LCOG Members	No financials. Reporting of work from 2010 presented in calendar form	Yes, logo throughout, all content re: services	Yes Yes	Listing of member governments
2010 Appreciation Dinner card	Invited guests/ friends of LCOG	1/2 sheet with schedule of events for dinner	Yes	Yes	No
2007 Annual Report	LCOG Members	Booklet called "Annual Report" by staff, but no financials included. More of an overview of the year, services provided, etc. Useful guide.	Yes, throughout.	Yes Yes	Listing of member governments



Material Type	Audience	Component Description	LCOG ID'd?	LCOG logo? Prominent name?	Others ID'd
2009 Annual Report	LCOG Members	Booklet called "Annual Report" by staff, but no financials included. More of an overview of the year, services provided, etc. Useful guide.	Yes, throughout.	Yes Yes	Listing of member governments
Postcard	Public Transportation professionals	Regional Transportation Options Plan postcard with blank back. Seems to be for general use.	Only as sub-line in return address bar	No No	Lane MPO Regionalto.org point2point
Postcard	Planning professionals Elected/appointed officials	Oregon Planning Institute postcard for "From Nuts and Bolts to New Frontiers"	Only as return address and for updates see lcog.org or call LCOG. No official sponsorship designation or relationship ID'd	No No	OPI
Brochure	Commercial subscribers Government users	4-page brochure promoting RLID	As contact for subscription and information	Yes	Yes, other collaborators
Memo	County Commissioners	Flyer-style memo from the Public Safety Coordinating Council with criminal justice system report cards for 2010	Only in text as the web location for the full data book	No No	Public Safety Coordinating Council
Displays	General public	Posters/displays of Ridgeline habitats	No -- presumably because LCOG only designed posters?	No No	City of Eugene and another unnamed logo with skyline including Spencer Butte



Material Type	Audience	Component Description	LCOG ID'd?	LCOG logo? Prominent name?	Others ID'd
Displays	Public	Central Lane MPO display about the Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program	In copy as the lead agency	Yes	MPO
Displays	Public	Central Lane MPO display about the Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program -- "How Does the MTIP Fit In"	No	No No	No

This list represents a representative sampling of materials facilitated by, published by or otherwise informed by LCOG resources, as provided to Verb for audit.



Initial Findings from Audit Stage

This document was developed based on our materials review, and was actively used to form the communications plan

As it stands

Through our review and audit of existing communications, it appears:

LCOG's existing "brand statement" or "statement of being" is contained within its mission statement, but is not adequately presented in a manageable or memorable form. The organization and members need an abbreviated form and supporting "elevator speech" about LCOG.

From the website: *"Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) is a voluntary association of local governments in Lane County, Oregon. The agency is a regional planning, coordination, program-development, and service-delivery organization. LCOG helps area cities, Lane County, educational districts, and special-purpose districts reach their common goals."*

What we observe LCOG really does, in lay terms:

- LCOG is the nexus of local government.
- Local government leaders use LCOG for peer review and discussion.
- Local leaders access LCOG for planning and related services.
- LCOG provides graphic design and video services for local government.
- LCOG is an entry point for all things governmental in Lane County.
- LCOG is a shared resource for local government.
- LCOG simultaneously serves all jurisdictions within Lane County, without being a jurisdiction of its own.
- LCOG houses the county's state-funded Senior and Disabled Services program.
- LCOG serves as the Central Lane Metropolitan Planning Organization.

LCOG’s targeted audiences are appropriately varied. They appear to be:

- A sliver of the general public, generally with vested interests (financially or professionally)
- Other planning organizations
- Board members
- Member governments as a whole
- Member governments’ staff

LCOG’s existing messaging:

- Varies by audience, which is good
- However, there is no shared, high-level messaging for all audiences
- There are few tools that put forth high-level messaging

LCOG’s communications tools are:

- Developed on an as-needed basis (+) with a good eye to the intended audience
- Narrow in focus and intended audience
- More “pundit” oriented than a fast read. (Even elected officials and pundits can benefit from the visual and verbal equivalent to an executive summary.)
- Project-specific; it appears there is no routine outreach besides meetings and the “Regional Focus” which goes to policymakers and official

LCOG’s communications and brand hierarchy is unclear:

- LCOG’s brand hierarchy with its member governments and programs is unclear and not as effective as it could be. The hierarchy needs to be clarified in the communications plan and recommendations.