

Agenda Item 10. 2017-2018 Communications Plan

a. 2017-2018 Communications Plan

Pages 10-2 thru 10-14

The Finance Committee met via teleconference on Thursday, July 21, 2016. The plan was also presented at the August Board meeting. The Finance Committee recommends approval of the attached 2017-18 (FY 17-18) Communications Plan.

***Possible Action: a motion to accept, modify and accept or deny the Plan.***

## Communications Plan For FY 2017 - 2018

### **Executive Summary**

The Nebraska Environmental Trust is a State program dedicated to the conservation of Nebraska's natural heritage. Reputed to be one of the main driving engines in promoting environmental consciousness and conservation in Nebraska, the Trust was started in 1992 with a modest communication budget to promote the Grants program. Although the budget allocated for its public relations and communications plan in its formative years was relatively modest, the Trust has allocated more funds towards communications for the last 15 years.

Since 2001, the Trust has embarked on a public relations and communication drive in the furtherance of its environmental objectives. Through its past Communication Plan the Trust has reached a broad range of Nebraskans and it is the intent of the future plan to promote the Trust further by participating in various community activities and events throughout the year. The Trusts' participation in these events in the past decade has paid off considerably and more and more people are recognizing the Trust's logo and mission in Nebraska although there is a fraction of the community that is still unaware of the Trusts' existence and what we do. The Trust participates in about 15 - 20 events on average in a year which has certainly heightened our visibility in the community.

The Communications Plan has evolved to reflect what it is today, relying heavily on feedback and experiences derived from grantees, members of the public and partners of the Trust. Year after year significant improvements and changes have been made to the Communications Plan to fulfill the objectives of the Trust, so as to adapt and cater to the needs of direct and indirect beneficiaries of the Trust. The Communications Plan has been largely influenced by budgeting factors the last few years to keep the Trust's operational cost minimal. Although the Trust seems conservative in its approach in not investing large amounts of advertising dollars the past 15 years, the publicity generated by the Trust has been significant. A fair amount of publicity has been generated statewide at all levels especially through statewide media coverage on variety of issues such as grant projects as well as the direction and administration of the Trust. Publicity by grantees and the Nebraska Lottery play a part of our Communications Plan.

The FY2017-2018 budget proposes a modest increase of the public relations budget by \$12,180. This was suggested at the August board meeting. We will continue to work actively with Broadcast Media. The Trust has already put in place, various Underwriting Agreements with Broadcast Media for statewide coverage. Underwriting agreements are already in place or currently in negotiations with the following entities: METV Lincoln, NET Radio, KRVN, NETV, METV Omaha and KZUM. We will continue in this large milestone of reaching all of Nebraska. We are once again in negotiations with Nebraska Press Association to place statewide ads. We plan on expanding our promotional exercise appropriately with various TV stations when Campaigns for Ad Spots are ran to maximize our dollar to value spending.

We would also like to be mindful of the fact that Lottery funds are not guaranteed and they are always susceptible to reallocation by the Legislature or a decrease in revenue. Although the plans are mapped

out for the next two years, we are constantly revisiting the Communications Plan and strategy to ensure that all Trust goals for publicity are met moving into the coming year and 2018.

In the past, the Finance Committee has suggested that the Trust work more with the Lottery in increasing publicity efforts for both entities. Since then, the Trust has incorporated the Lottery logo on all Trust publicity materials and signage including the Trust website. We have worked with the Lottery and their advertizing firm to get the Trust mentioned in many of their ads and at no cost to the Trust and we plan to continue to work with the Lottery and their advertizing firm over the next two years to promote the Trust. The Lottery has reciprocated in many ways by highlighting the Trust in some of the major advertising campaigns such as football programs, TV and Radio advertising campaigns.

The Communications Plan for 2017-2018 will continue to see active event participation thus strengthening collaborative efforts, partnerships and joint ventures with other government organizations, non-profit entities, grantees and corporations to co-promote initiatives befitting the environment. The Trust will continue to take part in public events and exhibitions to raise its profile in an effort to reach all of Nebraska. The Trust has been participating in an average of 15-20 events annually the past nine years. Specific emphasis will be placed on the following areas:

- i) Participation in statewide events for continued publicity of the Trust as an entity that provides grants for environmental projects.
- ii) Promoting environmental awareness and conservation to a broader spectrum of audiences.
- iii) Environmental advocacy for the betterment of Nebraska in general.
- iv) Promoting environmental collaboration among various institutions and organizations through the grant making process.
- v) Promoting environmental education to further instill environmental consciousness and values in fellow Nebraskans through the Public Information and Education (PIE) Grant program that is currently administered by the Nebraska Academy of Sciences.
- vi) Active publicity campaign through marketing communications, social media and broadcast e-mail.
- vii) Efforts to provide information about the Trust to elected officials, especially the legislature through discussions and broadcast email.

We held our Categories Roundtable in 2015 to revisit the funding categories of the Trust. A total of three meetings were held, one in each congressional district. We reached out to many Nebraskans during these meetings and were given valuable input, which was presented to the Board. Our upcoming Annual Report entitled "Explore Nebraska" will showcase the diversity, beauty and uniqueness of our state through some of the grants that we have funded. Planning for our 2016 Annual Report is underway and will be distributed statewide by early 2017.

The Trust will continue with partner collaborations from a public relations perspective to include cross promotional exercises at events and exhibitions with various partner and grantee organizations. This will be done through collaborative advertising and exchange of promotional material. Collaborative efforts will reveal new public information partnerships with other organizations including co-sponsoring of events through non-profit organizations, universities, colleges and schools to target the next generation and participation with members of media to maximize on free publicity and sponsorship opportunities.

Various media opportunities will be identified to promote the visibility of the Trust in mainstream media in Lincoln, Omaha, Kearney, Grand Island, Scottsbluff and other areas.

The Trust website, being a large publicity and grant administration tool, has been highly effective in delivering the desired results for the Trust. We are currently moving towards an electronic grant application process in collaboration with the School of Raikes and our database Consultant, Marie Gregoire. The Trust also has Facebook, Twitter and You Tube accounts that help with the delivering of our messages. The website has received positive feedback and has attracted more hits and visitors in comparison to past years. The website is easy to navigate, easily managed and kept current. We are also able to track the number of visitors on a monthly-basis. The Facebook page continues to get daily visitors.

As stated at our August Board meeting, the Communications Plan for 2017-2018 planned for a 20 percent increase to our current Communications budget to cope with the expansion and purchase of new promotional material for booth displays. The 20 percent (\$12,180) increase brings the existing budget from \$60,900 to \$73,080. The publicity allocation will be earmarked for various marketing communications activities including the Annual Report, advertising, events, promotional materials such as banners, brochures and the purchase of promotional items to be used for Trust activities in 2017-2018. There are no plans to upgrade the website for the time being as the current website has been serving the Trust and grantees well.

### **Work Plan**

The following work plan relates to awareness building activities to be completed by the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

### ***Goals and Creative Strategy***

Building a successful brand is a continuous process. It is imperative to set both short-term and long-term goals as a constant guide for our communications. These goals are different from our organizational vision in that they reflect how external audiences should perceive the Trust.

#### ***Short-Term Goals***

- Continually revise our media strategy to evolve with current trends to maximize our publicity efforts across Nebraska.
- Instill a sense of guardianship and responsibility in fellow Nebraskans for environmental issues and concerns.
- Increase collaborative events with grantee organizations as well as other agencies.

#### ***Long-Term Goals***

- Ensure that the Trust's role as a beneficiary of the Lottery is communicated clearly to legislators and the public at large.
- Continue to remain a backbone in Nebraska for environmental restoration through its grant program.
- Greater visibility of the Trust and its activities to the public at large.
- To play a pivotal role in Nebraska's conservation activities.

## *Audience*

The primary target audience will be:

- Nebraska residents
- Academia
- Those who have a high level of interest in the environment, natural resources, wildlife, outdoor recreation, agriculture or community improvement and consider environmental protection worthwhile as a way to support such activities.

Within this broad primary audience, three distinct secondary audiences have been identified.

- Partner organizations, including Trust grantees and other state agency partners
- Policymakers/ Legislators
- Media Outlets

These subgroups belong to the primary audience but have specific information needs that should be addressed. All audience members will receive the same communications messages; however, the delivery of these messages will be different for each group.

## *Communications Messages*

Mass communications will emphasize the importance of Trust funding in the conservation activities of Nebraska. The strategy will show that, while the Trust is not directly involved “on-the-ground” in such activities, funding or seed money from the Trust makes these projects possible. Public relations elements will build credibility and reinforce the idea that the Nebraska Environmental Trust is an essential organization for the protection of Nebraska’s natural resources. To encourage this development, the following themes will continue to be incorporated in all our communications plans and materials:

- Essential to Nebraska
  - Fulfill a need for funding; without Trust grants, many projects would not be possible
  - Provides the seed money needed to gain other matching funds
  - Builds partnerships with like-minded organizations to share resources
  - Projects funded by the Trust provide benefits that the public can enjoy today and into the future across Nebraska
- Citizen Driven
  - Approved by the voters of our state in 1992 and again in 2004
  - A majority of citizens make up our board of directors
  - Citizen driven local initiatives
- An efficient organization
  - 97% of our budget goes to grant funding; less than 3% is utilized for administration
  - Opportunities to find cost-sharing strategies with partner organizations
  - Access State resources to prevent duplication of natural resource efforts

- Building a legacy for the future
  - Our natural resources are the gifts we give our children; the Trust works to conserve these resources for the future.
  - The Trust emphasizes local involvement to solve resource issues in communities across Nebraska.
  
- Deserves public support
  - The Trust historically and consistently turns away three in every four dollars requested due to lack of funds.
  - When appropriate, remind the public the funds provided to the Trust are continuously subject to reallocation.

### ***Brand Image and Positioning***

Audience members will be educated that the Trust is a partner with many of the conservation groups they are familiar with and provides grants that allow our partners to do their important conservation work. The financial support of the Nebraska Environmental Trust makes the difference in taking these projects from concept to reality.

### ***Message Delivery***

In developing a message delivery plan for 2017-2018, an evaluation of our past activities revealed that there is still room for improvement in providing information to a larger audience in an efficient and timely manner. The Trust will look at participating or co-hosting events on a larger scale to maximize publicity to its target audience. Press releases and media interviews with local & state press members will be expanded, where primarily in the past they focused on the Trust grant cycle as required by Trust policies, but provided little information about local projects of interest for readers.

An enhanced delivery system using a combination of traditional and electronic formats will be used to deliver messages to the audiences described earlier. The Trust continues to build on “Resource”, our newsletter to highlight some of the projects and activities done for the month. This newsletter is delivered via e-mail to approximately 2,000 individuals and organizations. The newsletter has also been re-created to have a modern feel and look to represent our image. It generally focuses on one or two grantee projects, provides up-to-date information about the Trust and activities and notifies the public and grantees of upcoming events and deadlines. This information is also made available to media outlets via press release and our website.

This strategy should result in an increased frequency of contact with our audience members at a lower cost. Additional public relations activities will focus on cultivating relationships with reporters and editorial boards, in combination with media purchases in local newspapers and on local radio.

Purchase media buys in commercial TV, radio and local newspapers will be used on a wider scale to reach audience members not reached in previous communications efforts. Although the Trust has explored Public Service Announcements in the past years, we have found that more and more radio stations are offering that as a paid service these days. It has been a challenge trying to get PSAs without a cost involved. We have however compensated that by finding great deals during sale campaigns. Advertising will focus on how each community benefits from Trust grants. Additionally, in combination with the public relations activities described previously, these media buys will increase

awareness of our organization and should result in more news stories written about the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

As a beneficiary of the Nebraska Lottery, the Trust will continue to work with the Nebraska Lottery to spread its message through Lottery events and their promotional road shows. We are always working with Lottery staff and its new Director to provide information about the projects that we fund and how to integrate our projects with their advertising efforts.

We will continue to participate at the Nebraska State Fair, Missouri River Outdoor Expo, Earth Day celebrations, World O' Water Fest, Children's Groundwater Festival, UNL Nature Palooza and co-promote events put together by our grantee organizations. The Trust's promotional materials are distributed widely at these events.

The Trust website continues to provide a constant point of reference for Trust grantees and the public. It will continue to be updated regularly with relevant content. Resources for grantees on the site will continue to expand with the continued availability of reporting forms that can be downloaded and completed electronically and returned for processing.

#### *Advertising*

- Advertising through broadcast media, selected magazines and print media.
- Grantee advertising in local media outlets (radio and newspaper)

#### *Direct Marketing*

- General Trust brochure that is distributed to at all events and distributed to grantee organizations.
- Resource newsletter delivered via broadcast e-mail (E-News).
- Annual Report: distributed to mailing list and provided to partner organizations for distribution.
- Distribution of Trust materials by partner organizations.

#### *Website*

- Monthly news flashes.
- Maintenance of our website with improved user-friendly features.
- To continue with updates with new grantee stories and content development.
- To retain and track usage of electronic versions of quarterly forms, Trust logos and other relevant information.
- To build on current database of contacts.
- To monitor popularity of website such as the number of visits and hits.

#### *Social Media*

- In the last two years the Trust has embarked on promotions through social media and it is in our plans to continue with our presence on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The pages have been a great tool in interacting with our grantees and Trust contacts although primary modes of communications such as e-mail and the website still takes precedence.

**Public Relations**

- Press releases about grantee projects in targeted markets
- Sponsorship of Radio/TV stations for environment related programs
- Development of joint public relations projects with selected grantees
- Incorporate PR opportunities with scheduled site visits
- Meetings between media members and the Trust's Executive Director

**Event Sponsorship**

- Work with partners to distribute Trust materials at events or share event sponsorships
- A list of events to be participated in is reflected in Appendix 1.

**Breakdown of Message Delivery by Audience**

	<b>General Nebraskans</b>	<b>Partner Organizations</b>	<b>Policymakers</b>	<b>Media Outlets</b>
Advertising	*Advertising in local media outlets – print and electronic			
Direct Marketing	*Annual Report *Trust Brochure *Lift-out on NET *Resource newsletter	*Annual Report *Trust Brochure *Lift-out on NET *Resource newsletter	*Annual Report *Trust Brochure *Lift-out on NET *Resource Newsletter	
Events	*Event sponsorships	*Potential collaborators for events		
Internet	*Website *Broadcast emails *Facebook *Twitter *You Tube	* Website *Broadcast emails *Facebook *Twitter *You Tube		* Website *Broadcast emails *Advertising campaigns
Public Relations	*Press releases *Radio & TV advertising		*Personal contact with Executive Director	*Press releases *Meetings with editorial boards

**Conclusion**

The 2017-2018 Communications Plan will continue to build on the recognition of the Nebraska Environmental Trust as a key funding agency for environmental causes within Nebraska. The marketing communications campaign is tailored to be cost-effective yet comprehensive and far reaching to spread the message of the Trust through out Nebraska and give it the credibility it deserves.

**Appendix I: Budget and Estimated Expenditures for FY 2017 - 2018**

***Purchased Media = \$25,080***

- Radio sponsorships (NET Foundation for Radio, KVRN, KZUM)
- KOLN- KGIN sponsorship (MYTV Sponsorship)
- Advertising in local radio, newspapers, internet and other print media

***Direct Marketing = \$15,000***

- Printing of Annual Report
- Exhibition Material, New Posters & Banners
- Grant Applications Folder for Grants
- Miscellaneous printing of materials as needed

***Events = \$15,000***

- Participating in local recognition events
- Husker Harvest Days, Nebraska State Fair, Earth Day, Groundwater Festival, World O! Water, Missouri River Outdoor Expo at Ponca and others.

***PR & Promotions = \$18,000***

- Marketing communications material for Nebraska Environmental Trust and the Ferguson House
- Public relations activities
- Web site maintenance

**Total: \$73,080.00**

**(FY 2017- 2018)**

**Past Year's Budget**

<b><i>Public Information Budget</i></b>			
<b><i>Year</i></b>	<b><i>16-17</i></b>	<b><i>15-16</i></b>	<b><i>14-15</i></b>
<b><i>Purchased Media</i></b>	<b><i>\$18,900</i></b>	<b><i>\$16,000</i></b>	<b><i>\$17,000</i></b>
<b><i>Direct Marketing</i></b>	<b><i>\$15,000</i></b>	<b><i>\$15,000</i></b>	<b><i>\$15,000</i></b>
<b><i>Events</i></b>	<b><i>\$15,000</i></b>	<b><i>\$15,000</i></b>	<b><i>\$15,160</i></b>
<b><i>PR &amp; Promotions</i></b>	<b><i>\$12,000</i></b>	<b><i>\$12,000</i></b>	<b><i>\$12,000</i></b>
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>\$60,900</i></b>	<b><i>\$58,000</i></b>	<b><i>\$59,160</i></b>

**APPENDIX II - MEDIA SCHEDULE & CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2016-2017**

<b>Event</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description/Organizer</b>	<b>Venue</b>
Rain Water Basin Joint Venture Informational Seminar	February, 2017	Rain Water Basin Joint Venture	Grand Island
NET – 1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter Board Meeting	February 9, 2017 (Thursday)	Nebraska Environmental Trust	Ferguson House, Lincoln
Nebraska Crane Festival	March, 2017	Audubon Society	Kearney
NET – 2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter Board Meeting	April 6, 2017 (Thursday)	Nebraska Environmental Trust	Ferguson House, Lincoln
Lincoln Earth Day 2015	April 2017	City of Lincoln	UNL 12 <sup>th</sup> & R streets, Lincoln (TBA)
Earth Day Omaha 2015	April 2017	Earth Day Omaha Coalition	Elmwood Park, Omaha
Gallup's Earth Day	April 2017	Arbor Foundation	Gallup, Omaha
Annual Nebraska Children's Groundwater Festival 2014	May 2017	Central Platte NRD & The Groundwater Foundation	Central Community College (CCC) & College Park, Grand Island
NET – 3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter Board Meeting	Aug 7-8, 2017 (Mon-Tues)	Nebraska Environmental Trust	TBA
Nebraska State Fair 2015	August/ Sep 2017	State Fair Board	State Fair Park, Grand Island
World O! Water Festival	September 2017	City of Omaha/ Papio-Missouri NRD	Wehrspann Lake, 154 <sup>th</sup> Street and Giles Road
Heron Haven Days	September, 2017	Heron Haven	120 <sup>th</sup> and Maple, Omaha
Missouri River Outdoor Expo	September 2017	NGPC	Ponca State Park
NET – 4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter Board Meeting	November 2, 2017 (Thursday)	Nebraska Environmental Trust	Ferguson House, Lincoln

\* Site visits will include media opportunities with local radio, newspapers.

## ***Appendix III: Research and Analysis***

### **Situation Analysis**

#### ***Analysis of Previous Efforts***

The FY 2016-2017/FY2017-2018 Communications Plan outlines a media campaign using a combination of purchased media, direct marketing and event sponsorships. A majority of the suggested tactics has been and will be implemented over the course of two years: the newsletter circulation will be increased to a broader target group with the new subscription management system we have adopted. We have seen many new subscriptions this past year since the change. The Trust website will be maintained regularly highlighting some of the key projects funded by the Trust in the current fiscal year.

#### ***Outcomes from FY 2015-2016 Efforts***

As a communications management tool, the Trust will continue to undertake surveys or obtain feedback where possible. Evaluation and feedback forms are always circulated at our grantee seminars and there were also surveys done after Categories Roundtable in 2015. The response to the survey was very forthcoming and many grantees, contacts and members of the public expressed more visibility in terms of Broadcast Advertising. Most expressed that the Trust was doing a good job in getting its message out and the communications strategies adopted thus far had been effective.

In conducting further surveys, the Trust may also collaborate with NASIS Survey (Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey) to study recent behavioral patterns and sociological experiences encountered by various study groups in Nebraska.

This data, while unscientific, has been used to tailor the communications strategy for the current Communications Plan.

### **Problems and Opportunities**

The problems facing our organization are similar to those listed in the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis from the 2017 Communication Plan. In addition, through observation and research the following issues have been identified:

- There is still a lack of understanding of the mission of the Trust, leading to comparisons to other conservation groups. These misunderstandings are hindering our awareness-building efforts.
- There is still a lack of understanding of the benefits that Trust-funded projects provide. The audience does not understand how the projects we fund benefit them today; previous messages emphasized future benefits, implying limited benefits that can be enjoyed now.
- Some do not think that the environment is a priority.

**SWOT Analysis (from FY 2016-2017 Communications Plan)**

The SWOT method is commonly used to identify an organization’s internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats from other sources. This model helps to define and focus our promotional messages for maximum effect.

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Large, supportive base of grantees</li> <li>● Efficient: low overhead costs</li> <li>● Funded by the lottery, not tax dollars</li> <li>● Citizen driven and accessible to all</li> <li>● Fulfills an essential need in our state</li> <li>● Emphasizes projects across Nebraska</li> <li>● Proven record of partnerships with other conservation organizations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Funding subject to reallocation</li> <li>● State agency, not a traditional non-profit</li> <li>● Limited resources for public information efforts</li> <li>● Relatively new in comparison to other organizations</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Expand public information activities to encourage public participation</li> <li>● Expand publicity efforts through collaborative initiatives with grantee organizations and other agencies.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Misconception that the Trust uses tax dollars for projects</li> <li>● Limited public awareness</li> <li>● Possible decrease in grant funds due to legislative actions</li> </ul>