

NONPROFIT AUSTIN **at ACC**

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

Nonprofit Austin – Strategic Communications Certificate

Fall 2026 Cohort

Tuesdays | HBC 103.4 | 9:30 am – 3:30 pm, with a 1-hour lunch

Date	Facilitator	Session Topic
September 8	Rebecca Fox	Foundations of Rhetoric & How Communication Works
September 15	Lisa Chang	Communicating Value and Impact
September 22	Lisa Chang	Stakeholder Engagement, Influence and Partnership
September 29	Gary Susswein Yael Avnaim	Fixing Internal Misalignment & Communications Breakdowns
October 6	Gary Susswein Yael Avnaim	External Communication, Media & reputation
October 13	Jennifer Stevens	Events & Experiences as Strategic Communication Tools
October 20	Meme Styles	Digital Communication, Social Media & Analytics
October 27	TBA	AI for Strategic Communication & Execution

Session Descriptions

Session 1: Foundations of Rhetoric & How Communication Works

This session introduces the core principles of rhetoric and audience-centered communication. Participants will learn how messages are interpreted, how meaning is constructed, and how to design communication that influences perception and action. Participants also strengthen professional communication skills that support effective leadership and collaboration.

Competencies:

- Communication, Marketing & Public Relations
- Personal & Professional Development

Outcomes:

- Apply foundational rhetorical principles (ethos, pathos, logos) in communication
- Recognize how audience perception shapes message effectiveness
- Structure communication for clarity, relevance, and influence
- Initiate development of a strategic communication plan framework

Session 2: Communicating Value & Impact

This session focuses on developing clear, consistent messaging that communicates organizational value and impact to funders, partners, and the community.

Competencies

- Communication, Marketing & Public Relations
- Financial Resource Development & Management
- Foundations & Management of the Nonprofit Sector

Outcomes:

- Develop clear and compelling value propositions
- Communicate organizational impact effectively to different audiences
- Translate mission and outcomes into consistent messaging

Session 3: Stakeholder Engagement, Influence & Partnerships

This session focuses on how organizations build relationships that drive results. Participants will learn how to engage stakeholders, apply principles of influence, and develop strategic partnerships. This Session strengthens leadership through stakeholder engagement, relationship building, collaboration, and inclusive communication across diverse communities and organizational partners.

Competencies

- Governance, Leadership & Advocacy
- Communication, Marketing & Public Relations
- Cultural Competency & Diversity

Outcomes:

- Identify and prioritize key stakeholders and partners
- Apply principles of influence and persuasion in nonprofit contexts
- Build and maintain long-term, trust-based relationships
- Develop partnership strategies that extend organizational impact

Session 4: Communication Alignment, Risk & Reputation

This session examines how communication moves across internal and external audiences and shapes organizational trust, credibility, and reputation. Participants will learn how to align messages across stakeholder groups, reduce communication breakdowns, identify communication risks, and respond effectively in high-stakes situations. The Session recognizes that communications intended for an internal audience can quickly become external and that organizations must communicate with consistency across an increasingly interconnected stakeholder environment. Participants develop ethical communication practices that strengthen organizational transparency, accountability, reputation management, crisis communication, and public trust.

Competencies

- Legal & Ethical Decision-Making
- Communication, Marketing & Public Relations
- Governance, Leadership & Advocacy

Outcomes:

- Identify and address gaps or inconsistencies across internal and external communication
- Align messaging across employees, board members, partners, funders, media, and community stakeholders
- Assess communication risks and their potential effect on organizational reputation
- Prepare for and respond to high-stakes or crisis communication situations
- Strengthen organizational trust, credibility, and message consistency
- Communicate effectively with media and other external audiences

Session 5: Leading Change Through Communication

This session focuses on the role communication plays in helping organizations navigate change successfully. Participants will learn how to explain the need for change, engage affected stakeholders, anticipate resistance, and create communication approaches that build understanding, trust, and commitment throughout the change process.

Competencies

- Governance, Leadership & Advocacy
- Volunteer & Human Resource Management
- Personal & Professional Development

Outcomes:

- Identify the communication needs created by organizational change
- Develop clear messages that explain the purpose, impact, and benefits of change
- Anticipate stakeholder concerns and sources of resistance
- Engage employees, board members, partners, and other stakeholders throughout the change process
- Design communication strategies that support understanding, participation, and adoption
- Maintain trust and message consistency during periods of uncertainty

Session 6: Events & Experiences as Strategic Communication Tools

This Session focuses on how to use events as a core communication and relationship-building strategy. Participants will learn how to strategically design events that drive engagement, strengthen partnerships, and support organizational goals.

Competencies

- Communication, Marketing & Public Relations
- Financial Resource Development & Management
- Program Development

Outcomes:

- Design events aligned with communication and organizational goals
- Use events to build relationships and stakeholder engagement
- Integrate events into broader communication strategies
- Evaluate the effectiveness of events as communication tools

Session 7: Digital Communication, Social Media & Analytics

This Session focuses on managing digital communication and social media effectively, including how to prioritize efforts and measure performance. Participants develop digital communication strategies while exploring emerging technologies, analytics, and data-informed decision-making that strengthen nonprofit effectiveness.

Competencies

- Communication, Marketing & Public Relations
- Future of the Nonprofit Sector

Outcomes:

- Develop and manage social media strategies
- Apply best practices in digital content and communication
- Use analytics to evaluate communication effectiveness
- Prioritize digital efforts based on impact and resources

Session 8: AI for Strategic Communication & Execution

This Session examines how nonprofit organizations can use artificial intelligence to strengthen communication, expand capacity, and improve execution without losing human judgment, organizational voice, or stakeholder trust. Participants will explore the evolving landscape of AI tools and identify practical applications across research, audience analysis, message development, content creation, campaign planning and communication measurement. Through hands-on exercises, participants will learn how to select appropriate tools, write effective prompts, design repeatable human-in-the-loop workflows, evaluate AI-generated outputs, and establish responsible practices related to accuracy, bias, transparency, privacy, copyright, and the use of sensitive organizational information.

Competencies

- Future of the Nonprofit Sector
- Communication, Marketing & Public Relations
- Legal & Ethical Decision-Making

Outcomes:

- Identify high-value uses of AI and select appropriate tools based on organizational goals, capacity, privacy, and cost
- Develop effective prompts and use AI to support research, messaging, content creation, planning, and measurement
- Design repeatable workflows that combine AI-supported efficiency with human judgment, review, and approval
- Evaluate AI-generated content for accuracy, bias, credibility, accessibility, privacy, and alignment with organizational value

Session 9: Pulling it All Together

Participants will present their evaluation projects using a template provided by the instructor, and receive feedback from peers and guests. The instructor will also present an evaluation of the course. This session will create space for participants to express their commitments to ongoing evaluation, reflect on what they've learned and celebrate.