

ATTACHMENT 4B – TIPS ON INTERNET BASED COMMUNICATIONS

Increasingly, NPOs are incorporating the Internet-based communications—including email, websites, blogs and social media-- as part of their communications programs. Internet-based communications open up many new possibilities for NPOs:

- With Internet-based communications, your NPO can significantly increase the number of people it communicates with, at little expense.
- Many people now use the Internet as their primary way of getting information, and are more likely to rely on email and social media than “traditional”, non-Internet communication formats.
- You can easily tailor your Internet-based communications to meet the needs of different audience groups.
- Through social networking, your NPO can develop a “virtual community” of supporters who are informed about your NPOs activities and motivated to step forward to help. The community is strengthened by the ability to network and communicate with you and other supporters on an ongoing basis.
- Internet-based tools make it easy to get feedback from stakeholders about your NPOs activities and effectiveness.
- Social media and email make it easy for people to “spread the word” about your NPO to their friends and communities.
- A good website provides complete and up-to-date information about your NPO. This information is available 24/7. Email and social media can be used to direct people to your website.
- If people can easily and securely donate to your NPO on-line, you significantly increase your potential for getting donations.

However, Internet-based communications have their drawbacks as well:

- Not everyone has access to the Internet. So Internet-based communications will simply not reach some audiences. Alternative methods are required to communicate with these audience groups.
- Nowadays, people receive communications from many NPOs via email, to the point where many communications are never read. It is easy to delete an email without looking at it.
- Just because you have a website, a blog or a Twitter or Facebook page doesn’t mean that people will go to it. You need to continually put effort into making sure people know about your sites, and making it worthwhile for them to go there.
- If you do not keep websites, blogs, and social network pages up-to-date, it will look like your NPO is no longer active. This will reflect negatively on your NPO.
- Interactive on-line conversations are a good way to engage people in your NPO. However, there is always the risk of people posting inappropriate comments. These conversations need regular monitoring to make sure that they are on-point and appropriate.

The following table summarizes Internet-based communications techniques. It also includes text messaging, which is not Internet based, but has similar capabilities.

Communication Form	What it provides	Advantages	Disadvantages
Email	Communications from your NPO directly to people's email inboxes. Emails can be sent directly by your NPO. However, if you send emails to a large number of people (for example, 100 or more) you may wish to use an email marketing service (like Vertical Response, My Emma, or Constant contact,). Sending your communications through these services saves time, and their emails are designed to enhance your NPO's professional image. These services typically charge on a per-email basis.	Communication comes directly to person—they do not need to go to your website or Facebook page. Emails can easily be customized to meet the needs of different audience groups. You can include links to your website or social networking site.	Some audience groups do not have access to email. Many emails go unread. It is easy to just delete an email. Obtaining and updating email addresses may be difficult and time-consuming. If too many emails are sent, people may become annoyed with your NPO.
Website	Platform for sharing comprehensive information about your NPO. Opportunity to share your mission, activities, etc.	Gives your NPO presence and credibility. People with interest in your NPO can quickly learn about it. Can provide links to your Facebook page, etc.	Designing a good website takes skill and can be expensive. Websites need to be maintained and kept up-to-date Just because you have a website doesn't mean that people will go to it.
Blog	A blog is a web-based discussion and informational site about your NPO. Blogs are different from websites because they are designed to be interactive, with content and comments provided by the blog sponsor and by followers. Blogs can be hosted by	Blogs provide the space to share stories and more fully share your NPO's activities and for followers to comment, make suggestions, and enter into discussions.	A blog is only worthwhile if it has followers. It takes time and effort to attract followers to a blog.

	services such as Google Blogger or WordPress.		
Facebook	Facebook is a social networking site that helps your NPO keep people informed about upcoming activities and events on a daily basis. It allows you to post pictures of your event and in other ways build your community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is easy to set up a Facebook Page. • Through Facebook, you can get quick feedback from your network. • People can raise questions and get answers quickly. • It is easy for your friends/followers to forward information to their networks. • It is possible to direct specialized posts to people who meet certain criteria (e.g., people in Vietnam, people in HCMC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some people do not have access to Facebook, or they do not want to use it. • Posts must be short. • With lots of information on your Facebook page, important information can be lost. • It takes time and effort to maintain a Twitter site.
Twitter	Twitter is a social networking site that lets users instantly post entries of 140 characters or less, known as Tweets.	<p>NPOs can use their Twitter sites for multiple purposes, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announcing upcoming events • Linking users to their website (for example, directing users to position openings listed on their website) • Generating discussion and getting feedback from followers. • Helping new people learn about their NPO. • Users can easily send your notices to their networks, virally expanding the number of people you have access to. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some people do not have access to Twitter, or they do not want to use it. • Posts must be no more than 140 characters. • It takes time and effort to maintain a Twitter site.
Text message	Short messages delivered on mobile phone	Can provide reminders of events, etc. in a format that is almost sure to be read.	People may find frequent text messages annoying.

Tips for planning Internet-based communications

- ✓ Determine what communication form is appropriate for your user audience
 - o Do they use Internet-based communications at all?
 - o If they do, do they use social networking? Do they use email? What form of Internet-based communication is likely to be most effective?

- ✓ What is the goal of your communications? The goal of your communications will influence the communications format use. For example:
 - o If you are just interested in conveying information about your NPO, a website might suffice.
 - o But if you want to engage the community in your NPO, using an interactive approach, Facebook or Twitter will encourage those types of interactions.
 - o If your main use of Internet based communications is to announce and remind people of events, you might look to text message or email.
- ✓ Does your NPO have staff or volunteers with the necessary skills (and time) to set up and update your electronic communications? If you need to bring in specialists to help you set up and maintain your Internet-based communications, what will this cost?
- ✓ How will you get people's attention, and make sure they pay attention to your messaging? How will you distinguish your message from the many electronic communications that people receive everyday?
- ✓ How will you monitor your social network platform to guard against inappropriate communications?
- ✓ How can you use electronic communications to supplement/complement more traditional communications efforts? (For example, using email or Twitter to announce a forthcoming in-person informational event that your NPO is hosting.)
- ✓ If you are using email, how will you obtain and maintain lists of email addresses? Similarly, if you are using text messages, how will you obtain and maintain lists of phone numbers?
- ✓ Will you provide recipients of emails or text messages with the opportunity to "opt out" if they don't want to receive your messages?
- ✓ Are your communications attractive, clear, and easy to read? Do they clearly express your message? If you want the reader to take an action (for example, contribute, attend an event, share information about your NPO with others), do they make it clear to the reader what he/she is being asked to do?