



Building Your Communications Team

Building a comms team is like building a house. You need a solid foundation, functional spaces, and a few smart upgrades that make everything work better (and look damn good while doing it). Whether you're hiring, reorganizing, or just trying to sanity-check what you've got, this breakdown shows what you need now, what you'll probably want next, and what will help you stay ahead as the game keeps changing.

💡 Use the Google Doc Tabs on the left or links below to quickly move throughout this doc

Meet your General Contractor (AKA Comms Bestie):



Hi, I'm Gab Ferree. Former VP of Global Comms at Bumble, ex-Salesforce, and the person who's led comms teams through hypergrowth, layoffs, crises, IPO prep, and everything in between. I created this org design guide because I've been the one asked to "build the team" with no roadmap and no support. Now I help comms pros grow faster, lead smarter, and build teams that actually work in my private membership community, [Off the Record](#).

Table of Contents:

1. [Comms Organization Pillars](#)
 - [🏠 Foundational Functions \(Your Load-Bearing Walls\)](#)
 - [Comms Strategy + Planning 🧠](#)
 - [Internal Communications 🏢](#)

Want to learn more or did someone forward you this doc? Check out [Off the Record](#)

- [Buyer Communications \(Product, Consumer, Donor Comms, etc.\)](#) 📦
 - 🏠 **[Specialized Roles \(Your Rooms That Actually Work\)](#)**
 - [Corporate & External Communications](#) 🗨️
 - [Leadership Communications](#) 👤
 - [Stakeholder & Audience Comms](#) 🤝
 - [Reputation & Impact](#) 🌍
 - [Social & New Media](#) 📱
 - [Comms Operations](#) ⚙️
 - ✨ **[Emerging & Differentiating Roles \(Your Smart Upgrades + Designer Finishes\)](#)**
 - [Content & Storytelling](#) 📺
 - [AI & Comms Innovation](#) 🤖
 - [Trust, Safety & Ethical Comms](#) 🛡️
 - [Creative & Visual Comms](#) 🎨
2. **[Quick Start Comms Org: How Your Team Evolves](#)**
- 🐣 [Stage 1: Scrappy Startup / Early Growth \(1–2 people max\)](#)
 - 🚀 [Stage 2: Scaling Org / Product-Market Fit \(2–5 people\)](#)
 - 🧱 [Stage 3: Mid-Size / Multi-Product Org \(5–10 people\)](#)
 - 🏢 [Stage 4: Enterprise / F500+ Org \(10–25+ people\)](#)

Comms Organization Pillars

We've broken up how to build your comms team into three key areas:

1. 🏠 **Foundational Functions** (*Your Load-Bearing Walls*)
 - Whether you're a team of 1 or 100, these roles are non-negotiable. They hold the whole structure together—aligning your message, supporting your leaders, and making sure the right people hear the right things at the right time. If these walls are shaky, everything else wobbles.
2. 🏠 **Specialized Roles** (*Your Rooms That Actually Work*)
 - Once the foundation's in, it's time to make the space functional. These are the roles that add purpose, flow, and structure to your team. You won't need them all at once, but as you grow, you'll want rooms that do more than just exist—they need to work.
3. ✨ **Emerging & Differentiating Roles** (*Your Smart Upgrades + Designer Finishes*)
 - These are the smart upgrades—the roles that make your team future-ready. Think of them as the solar panels, smart thermostats, or built-in espresso

machine. You don't need them to move in, but they're what make your team sharper, faster, and a step ahead of the rest.

Foundational Functions (Your Load-Bearing Walls)

You can't build a house without a solid foundation. And you can't build a comms team without these roles. Whether you're a team of one or leading an entire department, someone has to hold the structure. These are the must-haves: the alignment makers, the message shapers, the ones who make sure the company's not just talking, but saying something that matters.

Comms Strategy + Planning

- **Why it matters:** If your comms team is constantly sprinting but never steering, this is the missing piece. Comms strategy isn't just about making a plan—it's about knowing what not to do. It's the function that ensures your messaging ladders up to company priorities, your channels aren't competing with each other, and your team isn't stuck in endless reactivity.
 -  Think of this as the architect before the builders. Even if this role lives inside another team, the strategic planning lens needs to be present.
- **What it does:** This role keeps you out of the spin cycle. It brings focus to what matters, clarity to what's being said, and alignment across departments that are otherwise pulling in different directions. Without it, launches get chaotic, priorities get murky, and comms becomes a service desk instead of a strategic driver.
- **Org Design:** Not every org has this as a discrete role, but every org *needs* this function. It's the connective tissue that keeps your messaging consistent, your plans aligned, and your team focused. Without someone driving comms strategy you end up reacting to everything and leading... nothing.
- **Tactical roles & responsibilities:**
 - Build and maintain comms calendars that align to company priorities and product roadmap
 - Create messaging frameworks and ensure consistency across internal, external, exec, and social channels
 - Run planning processes: quarterly or annual comms planning, prioritization, and cross-functional alignment

- Partner with marketing, product, and HR to align messaging and avoid duplication or misfires
- Own intake processes and project scoping for new requests
- Track, measure, and report on comms effectiveness
- Maintain comms playbooks, channel strategy, and best practices

Internal Communications

- **Why it matters:** Internal comms is often overlooked (especially in startups) but it's not a "nice-to-have." It's a business essential. If employees don't understand how their work ties to the company's mission, you don't have a team; you have silos. And if your executive team can't agree on internal messaging? You don't just have a comms problem, you have a strategy problem.
 - 💡 Strong internal comms does more than inform. It aligns. It builds trust. It forces clarity from the top. Just like a press release can reveal confusion in a product launch, internal comms often surfaces what still needs to be figured out. When done well, this function earns a seat at the table—and uses it to make the whole company smarter.
- 🧠 **Pro Tip:** In my experience, executives always *want* internal comms, even when they say they don't. Who says no to help writing better emails, running all-hands, and making them look good on LinkedIn?
 - Your first internal comms hire should support the whole company, with a special focus on the CEO. As demand grows from HR, Finance, Product, or others, you can build from there.
- **Org Design:** Internal comms reporting lines vary wildly. Sometimes it's in Comms, sometimes HR, sometimes embedded within the teams they support. No matter where it lives, it needs dotted-line access to the broader comms org to stay connected and consistent.
- **Tactical Roles & Responsibilities:**
 - Draft and distribute executive emails, announcements, and company-wide updates
 - Plan, script, and run All Hands or Town Hall meetings
 - Build internal content calendars and own storytelling across intranet, Slack, or newsletters
 - Partner with HR, IT, and department heads on major change communications (reorgs, benefits, tech rollouts, exec hires or departures)

- Develop messaging for internal campaigns (values rollouts, DEI efforts, engagement surveys)
- Monitor employee sentiment and surface comms gaps
- Coach execs on internal tone, transparency, and message delivery

Buyer Communications (Product, Consumer, Donor etc.)

- **Why it matters:** If your company doesn't sell, it doesn't exist. That's true whether you're moving software, consumer products, donor-funded programs, or policy outcomes. Communications can't live in a brand bubble. Someone needs to own the messaging that helps move the business forward.
 - This is the team focused on communicating with your core external audience—the one that funds your mission:
 - Tech company → product buyers
 - B2C company → end consumers
 - Nonprofit → donors or partners
 - Government agency → constituents
 - This function works in lockstep with Sales and Marketing—while those teams go direct and paid, this team drives influence and credibility through earned and strategic channels. Think: product PR, launch messaging, donor stories, thought leadership, and more.
-  **Hot take:** Don't get precious about earned vs. paid. The two are converging fast. Influencers blur the lines every day. If paying gets your message on the “main feed,” not just the ad sidebar, it's often worth it. Just do it strategically.
- **Tactical Roles & Responsibilities:**
 - Own messaging for product launches, feature updates, and go-to-market moments
 - Draft press releases, blog posts, customer stories, and product FAQs
 - Coordinate with PR agencies, influencers, or analysts on announcements and reviews
 - Develop buyer personas and tailor comms to each segment's needs and pain points
 - Support campaign development with earned/owned strategies that complement paid efforts
 - Pitch stories to media or develop thought leadership around product vision and customer impact

- Partner with product marketing, customer success, and growth teams to align messaging across funnel stages

Specialized Roles (Your Rooms That Actually Work)

Once the house is standing, it's time to make it livable. These are the functions that bring flow, comfort, and structure to your day-to-day. Not every team needs all of them at once, but most growing orgs will find themselves craving a few. This is where you stop duct-taping solutions and start scaling with intention.

Corporate & External Communications

- **What it can include:**
 - Corporate Communications
 - Media Relations
 - Crisis & Issues
 - Public Affairs
- **Why it matters:** This is the function that shapes how the world sees your company (on a normal day and on your worst day). It owns your narrative across earned media, protects your reputation during crises, and builds trust with the audiences that matter most. Without this function, you're at the mercy of whatever headline hits first.
- **Tactical roles & responsibilities:**
 - Write and pitch press releases, media advisories, and op-eds
 - Build and manage relationships with key journalists
 - Lead crisis response messaging and escalation playbooks
 - Manage media training and prep for spokespeople
 - Coordinate public statements and regulatory comms
 - Develop corporate narrative and anchor messaging
 - Run PR agencies, analyst relations, and global outreach

Leadership Communications

- **What it includes:**
 - Executive Comms
 - Investor/Financial Comms
 - Thought Leadership
 - Board & Shareholder Comms
 - CEO/Founder Brand Building
- **Why it matters:** [When leaders speak, the whole company listens (so do investors, employees, the media, and potential recruits). This function makes sure your leadership shows up with clarity, consistency, and credibility. It turns strategy into language, and values into action. If your execs are saying different things to different people, it's your reputation that pays for it.
- **Tactical roles & responsibilities:**
 - Draft speeches, LinkedIn posts, letters, and op-eds
 - Ghostwrite for CEO/founders and coach them for visibility
 - Craft earnings messaging and investor-facing narratives
 - Build board decks and shareholder updates
 - Support exec appearances at conferences, media, and internal events
 - Align internal and external leadership narratives

Stakeholder & Audience Comms

- **What it includes:**
 - Government Relations & Lobbying
 - Customer Communications
 - Your Niche Comms (Developer, Industry Analyst, Partner, Channel, Sales, etc.)
 - Industry Engagement & Coalition Building
- **Why it matters:** Your business doesn't just need to talk to "the public." It needs to speak directly to the people who fund, partner, advocate for, or regulate your work. These audiences have different goals, different expectations, and different languages - and this function knows how to speak all of them. This is where influence gets personal.
- **Tactical roles & responsibilities:**
 - Develop tailored messaging for key stakeholder groups

- Coordinate comms with sales, customer success, or partner enablement
- Build trust with policymakers, analysts, and niche media
- Craft specific audience-facing docs, FAQs, and enablement content
- Manage high-touch updates for key customers or government entities
- Align messaging across advocacy, lobbying, or partner coalitions

International & Regional Communications

- **What it includes:**
 - In-region Comms Managers or Leads
 - Multilingual / Market-Specific Messaging
 - Local Media & Influencer Relations
 - Regional Internal + External Comms Execution
 - Cultural Nuance + Time Zone-Savvy Strategy
- **Why it matters:** Comms isn't one-size-fits-all, especially when you're operating globally. Your global narrative may be tight, but if it doesn't land locally, it doesn't matter. Regional comms pros are your on-the-ground translators (not just of language, but of culture, context, and nuance). They're the ones who know whether your CEO's keynote will resonate in São Paulo or Singapore, and they're often the first to spot issues before they blow up globally.
- **Tactical Roles & Responsibilities:**
 - Localize messaging for key markets (not just translate)
 - Build in-region media and influencer relationships
 - Execute product launches and crisis comms in-market
 - Adapt internal comms for cultural context and relevance
 - Act as bridge between HQ and local teams to ensure alignment
 - Provide "boots on the ground" insight on sentiment, trends, and blind spots

Reputation & Impact

- **What it includes:**
 - ESG & Sustainability Comms
 - DEI Comms

- Corporate Activism & Purpose Comms
- Brand Stewardship
- Employer Brand (if not handled by HR)
- **Why it matters:** These are the comms that shape your long-term reputation. They don't always drive a product launch, but they define how people feel about working with you, for you, or funding you. From climate pledges to equity goals, the way you show up in the world is your brand, and it needs to be thoughtful, truthful, and aligned.
- **Tactical roles & responsibilities:**
 - Develop and communicate ESG goals, reports, and progress
 - Support DEI initiatives with authentic messaging and reporting
 - Manage purpose-driven storytelling (values, impact, transparency)
 - Collaborate with legal and people teams on sensitive or identity-driven content
 - Write brand guidelines and maintain tone of voice
 - Partner with recruiting on employer brand and talent-facing messaging

Social & New Media 📱

- **What it includes:**
 - Social Media Comms
 - Influencer Comms
 - New Media Strategy (podcasts, YouTube, Substack)
 - Community Platforms (Reddit, Discord, Slack groups)
 - Real-Time Comms & Trend Response
- **Why it matters:** This is where the conversation is already happening (with or without you). Social and new media are no longer “channels” - they're full-blown ecosystems. The right post, share, or creator collaboration can reach more people than a press release ever will. This function keeps your brand culturally relevant, fast-moving, and in control of its own voice.
- **Tactical roles & responsibilities:**
 - Write and schedule content across social platforms
 - Engage with audiences in real time (moderation, listening, response)
 - Build relationships with influencers and content creators
 - Manage and grow communities on niche platforms
 - Monitor trends and news cycles to craft timely, relevant posts
 - Partner with brand and product teams for integrated campaigns

Comms Operations

- **What it includes:**
 - Planning & Prioritization
 - Metrics, Reporting, and Insights
 - Budget Management
 - Vendor & Tool Management
 - Team Coordination & Process Design
- **Why it matters:** Comms teams love a story. But without operations, the story doesn't ship. This is the engine room. It's how you keep your work aligned to business goals, resourced correctly, and measurable in real terms. Without ops, things fall through the cracks. With it, your team gets to be focused on the work that drives impact (instead of the work of the work).
- **Tactical roles & responsibilities:**
 - Own campaign calendars and planning cadences (e.g. QBRs, H1/H2)
 - Track success metrics, run postmortems, and deliver insights
 - Build intake forms and workflows for scalable execution
 - Manage vendors (agencies, freelancers, tools) and handle invoicing
 - Set team goals, OKRs, and performance benchmarks
 - Support org-wide dashboards and impact storytelling
 - Build workflows and automations to streamline repetitive tasks

✨ Emerging & Differentiating Roles (Your Smart Upgrades + Designer Finishes)

These are the features that take your house from basic to badass. Solar panels. Heated floors. That closet island you saw on TikTok. You don't need them to move in, but future-forward teams bring these in early. They make your team sharper, faster, and way more prepared for what's next. And they're the reason people walk in and go, "Wait... I want this."

 *In many companies these functions exist outside of communications. Make them your #1 partners.*

Content & Storytelling

- **What it includes:**
 - Content Marketing
 - Owned Newsroom Strategy
 - Editorial Director / Managing Editor
 - Long-Form Brand Journalism
- **Why it matters:** Not everything worth saying fits in a post or a press release. This function owns the stories that shape perception over time: blog posts, interviews, videos, reports, and more. It fills the space between big announcements and builds the kind of brand affinity that paid media can't buy.
- **Tactical Roles & Responsibilities:**
 - Run content calendars and manage multi-format storytelling
 - Partner with product and brand for integrated narratives
 - Oversee internal or external writers, video producers, or designers
 - Own the blog, newsroom, or microsite strategy
 - Pitch and publish stories that ladder to company themes and values
 - Turn insights and data into audience-ready stories

AI & Comms Innovation

- **What it includes:**
 - AI Strategy & Enablement (your "AI Czar")
 - Tooling & Workflow Automation
 - Generative Content QA / Governance
 - Prompt Engineering
- **Why it matters:** AI is already changing how we write, plan, and measure. But without ownership, it turns into the Wild West. This role makes sure AI tools are being used responsibly, strategically, and in a way that makes your team *better*, not just faster.
- **Tactical Roles & Responsibilities:**
 - Evaluate and implement AI writing, summarization, and scheduling tools
 - Train team members on AI best practices and productivity hacks
 - Build prompt libraries and test outputs for brand tone and accuracy
 - Ensure ethical use of generative AI, especially in sensitive content
 - Partner with Legal, IT, and brand teams to develop guidelines and governance

Trust, Safety & Ethical Comms

- **What it includes:**
 - Trust & Safety Comms
 - Crisis Prevention & Risk Scanning
 - Misinformation & Reputation Monitoring
 - Ethics & Transparency Messaging
- **Why it matters:** We don't just communicate what's safe—we communicate what's *right*. This function steps in before things break, keeps your brand out of the “bad news” cycle, and helps you respond with speed and clarity when values or ethics are questioned. If brand trust is currency, this is your risk manager.
- **Tactical Roles & Responsibilities:**
 - Monitor for reputation risks and potential misinformation
 - Own messaging on security, privacy, or policy issues
 - Partner with Legal and Security on external narratives
 - Create holding statements and issue response plans
 - Develop transparency reports or value-driven content
 - Advise on platform content risk (e.g. comments, reviews, reposts)

Creative & Visual Comms

- **What it includes:**
 - Creative Direction
 - Design & Brand Systems
 - Motion/Video/Audio Production
 - Templates, Toolkits, and Visual Standards
- **Why it matters:** You can have the best message in the world, but if it looks like I designed it in Microsoft Paint, no one reads it. This team translates strategy into scroll-stopping creative. They make sure everything your team ships *looks* as good as it *sounds* - from pitch decks to town hall slides to launch visuals.
- **Tactical Roles & Responsibilities:**
 - Build and maintain brand visual identity
 - Design presentations, campaigns, and social assets
 - Support internal events, company swag, and recruiting materials
 - Create scalable design systems or Notion/Figma/Canva templates
 - Lead art direction for product launches or editorial content
 - Partner with external creative agencies and freelancers

Quick Start Comms Org: How Your Team Evolves

You don't need everything all at once. But you do need coverage. Here's how a comms org might grow across different stages—without getting bloated or stuck.

Stage 1: Scrappy Startup / Early Growth (1–2 people max)

- **What matters most:** Cover your foundations, keep your head above water, and start building trust with execs.
- **Core Functions Covered:**
 - Internal Comms
 - Buyer Comms (whatever that means for your business)
 - Comms Strategy (as part of someone's role)
- **Typical Titles:**
 - Head of Comms
 - Comms Manager or Generalist
- **What this looks like:** One person running point on everything from product launches to All Hands decks. Media relationships are light or reactive. Content is ad hoc. Social media is shared with marketing or left on autopilot.

Stage 2: Scaling Org / Product–Market Fit (2–5 people)

- **What matters most:** Get out of reactive mode. Start specializing. Build some structure.
- **Core Functions Covered:**
 - Media Relations
 - Internal Comms (maybe split from exec comms)
 - Buyer Comms (whatever that means for your business)
 - Comms Strategy & Planning (owned by the comms leader)
 - Social Media
- **Typical Titles:**
 - Director of Comms

- Internal Comms Manager
- Product Comms Manager
- Social/Content Lead
- PR Lead
- **What this looks like:** You're launching products more frequently, execs are more visible, and the CEO wants help with LinkedIn. Maybe you're running a blog or experimenting with influencer campaigns. Planning starts to matter. So do templates.

Stage 3: Mid-Size / Multi-Product Org (5–10 people)

- **What matters most:** Operate like a newsroom. Add strategy, measurement, and scale across departments.
- **Core Functions Covered:**
 - Everything in Stage 2, plus
 - Crisis & Issues
 - Executive Comms
 - International Comms
 - Comms Ops
 - Customer or Niche Comms (e.g. Developer, Partner)
- **Typical Titles:**
 - VP of Comms or Head of Comms
 - Head of CxO Communications
 - Director of [Region] Communications
 - Crisis Comms or Issues Lead
 - Comms Program Manager
- **What this looks like:** You're supporting multiple execs, managing agencies, and fielding 10+ inbound requests a week. You're being asked for ROI and impact. Comms Ops starts to matter *a lot*. People assume you own everything (but now, you actually kind of do).

Stage 4: Enterprise / F500+ Org (10–25+ people)

- **What matters most:** Influence at scale. Sophistication across specialties. Differentiation and thought leadership.
- **Core Functions Covered:**
 - All foundational + specialized, plus:

- Trust & Safety
- DEI/ESG Comms
- AI/Innovation Enablement
- Creative Studio
- Government Relations
- Full Channel Strategy + Measurement
- **Typical Titles:**
 - SVP of Comms / CCO
 - Directors by Audience (Employee, Product, Brand, Stakeholder, etc.)
 - AI Comms Strategist
 - Editorial Director
 - Social/Influencer Lead
 - DEI/Impact Comms Lead
- **What this looks like:** You're in a constant state of launch, pivot, and spin-up. Comms is embedded at the executive level and in cross-functional pods. You have dashboards, playbooks, and pre-built narratives. The org's voice is consistent (but never stale). And your team has the tools (and headcount) to actually deliver

✨ Want to go Deeper?

Join our FREE Comms Masterclass: From Winging it to Running It: Comms Leadership Secrets No One Shares. [Learn more here:](#) 📌

FREE 60-MINUTE TRAINING WITH GAB FERREE

From Winging It to Running It 3 Comms Leadership Secrets No One Shares

I've led comms at some big-name companies. I grew from individual contributor to VP Global Comms in six years. But here's the truth: I spent a lot of it winging it.

I was working late searching "how to write CEO talking points," trying to sound confident while navigating exec egos, reactive work, and unclear expectations. I was doing the job, but with no roadmap.



WITH YOUR COMMS BFF & OFF THE RECORD FOUNDER GAB FERREE

Friday, August 8 2025, 12:00 PM (to be a good comms pro, I wanted to be a leader. Pacific Time (US and Canada) has got green!!!) whose calendar isn't packed with [VIEW MORE DATES](#) live chaos, who earns trust and autonomy without burning out.

So I figured I put 3 of my secrets to create leadership success

00 02:23:07
DAYS HOURS MINUTES SECONDS

REGISTER NOW

