Communications Plan For FY 2020 - 2021

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 in the last 8-10 years.

Since the beginning, 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. We also have a social media presence that helps us promote our events and grants. The Trusts’ participation in various activities 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 segment 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, board members and partners of the Trust. Year after year 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 and to keep up with times.

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 20 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 and grantee projects. Although there was a slight decrease in print media coverage, there has been more visibility in other avenues of publicity through social and electronic media. Publicity by grantees, partnering organizations and the Nebraska Lottery has played a major part of our Communications Plan.

The FY2020-2021 Public Information Budget will remain the same as last year. This was discussed at the August board meeting. The reason for this is the increased cost we have incurred in developing the online grant portal, the online reviewing system and migrating our database to the new system. 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, Froggy 98 and KZUM. We will continue in this large milestone of reaching all of Nebraska. We plan on expanding our promotional exercise appropriately with various TV stations when Campaigns for economical Ad Spots are ran to maximize our dollar to value spending. We are also trying to spread out our coverage to all counties by advertising in the Midwest Messenger.

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. This holds true as Lottery sales were down 1/4 last year and the Trust was only transferred $4,022,092 in the 3rd quarter. This amount has decreased
from the last three 3rd quarters and has been the lowest since 2015. Since there was no Finance Committee meeting due to lack of appointments, we are seeking approval from the board directly for this upcoming Fiscal year. 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 2021. We will adjust accordingly if needed with direction from the board.

The Trust works with Nebraska Lottery in increasing publicity efforts for both entities. 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 advertising 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 advertising firm over the next two years to promote the Trust. The Trust also attends the Lottery beneficiary meetings to be actively involved with them. The Lottery has reciprocated in many ways by highlighting the Trust in some of the major advertising campaigns such as the MVP flyers that get circulated to over 30,000 people.

The Communications Plan for 2020-2021 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 ten 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 last Categories Roundtable in 2015 to revisit the funding categories of the Trust and will do so again in 2020. A total of three meetings are planned to be held, one in each congressional district. We reach out to many Nebraskans during these meetings who give us valuable input, which will then be presented to the Board. Our upcoming Annual Report entitled “Embracing Our Mission” will showcase projects that we have done with grantees and how they have transformed lives through our five funding categories. Planning for our 2019 Annual Report is underway and will be distributed statewide by early 2020.

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 public information partnerships with 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 moving towards the third year of our electronic grant application process and are continuing with the third phase of development, such as at the review process and integration of our database. 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 continues to attract more hits and visitors yearly. 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 and likes.

The Communications Plan for 2020-2021 will maintain the budget from the 2019-2020. 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 2020-2021. The budget will also help cover some of the IT and Communications cost for the agency with the upgrade to online grant portal and continued improvements to the database. 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. Trust funds commonly are used as State matching funds that allow grantees to bring federal funds to Nebraska. 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 two to 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 2020-2021, 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 2,700 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 to be used on a wider scale to reach audience members not reached in previous communications efforts. Although the Trust has explored Public Service Announcements (PSAs) in the past years, we have found that more and more radio stations are offering this 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.

We will continue to participate at the Nebraska State Fair, Missouri River Outdoor Expo, Earth Day celebrations, World O’ Water Fest, Heron Haven Wetland Festival, Lincoln Water Fest, Natural Legacy Conference, Ponca Expo 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.
- Recently migrated website to a more secure https URL.

**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
- Press releases for new Chairman, new board members, re-appointments and major Trust events.
- 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Nebraskans</th>
<th>Partner Organizations</th>
<th>Policymakers</th>
<th>Media Outlets</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Advertising</strong></td>
<td><em>Advertising in local media outlets – print and electronic</em></td>
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<td>*Lift-out on NET</td>
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<td>*Lift-out on NET</td>
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<td></td>
<td>*Resource newsletter</td>
<td><em>Resource newsletter</em></td>
<td><em>Resource Newsletter</em></td>
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<td><strong>Events</strong></td>
<td>*Event sponsorships</td>
<td>*Potential collaborators for events</td>
<td>Exhibition at the Capitol Rotunda.</td>
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<td><strong>Internet</strong></td>
<td><em>Website</em></td>
<td><em>Website</em></td>
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<td><strong>Public Relations</strong></td>
<td><em>Press releases</em></td>
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<td><em>Personal contact with Executive Director</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>*Radio &amp; TV advertising</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Press releases</em></td>
<td><em>Meetings with editorial boards</em></td>
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## Conclusion

The 2020-2021 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 throughout Nebraska and give it the credibility it deserves.
Appendix I: Budget and Estimated Expenditures for FY 2020 - 2021

Purchased Media = $25,000

- Radio sponsorships (NET Foundation for Radio, KVRN, KZUM)
- KOLN- KG1N sponsorship (MYTV Sponsorship)
- Advertising in local radio, newspapers, internet and other print media

Direct Marketing = $20,000

- Printing of Annual Report
- Exhibition Material, New Posters & Banners
- Online Grant Portal Management
- Miscellaneous printing of materials as needed

Events = $12,450

- Participating in local recognition events
- Nebraska State Fair, Lincoln Earth Day, Omaha Earth Day, World O! Water, Missouri River Outdoor Expo at Ponca, Heron Haven Wetland Festival, Lincoln Water Fest and others.

PR & Promotions = $12,450

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

Total: $69,900.00

Past Year’s Budget

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Public Information Budget</th>
<th>19-20</th>
<th>18-19</th>
<th>17-18</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Purchased Media</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>$25,080</td>
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<td>Direct Marketing</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
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<td>Events</td>
<td>$12,450</td>
<td>$12,450</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>PR &amp; Promotions</td>
<td>$12,450</td>
<td>$12,450</td>
<td>$18,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$69,900</td>
<td>$69,900</td>
<td>$73,080 (later decreased due to Budget cuts)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Description/Organizer</td>
<td>Venue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rain Water Basin Joint Venture Informational Seminar</td>
<td>February, 2020</td>
<td>Rain Water Basin Joint Venture</td>
<td>Grand Island</td>
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<td>NET – 1st Quarter Board Meeting</td>
<td>February 4, 2020 (Tuesday)</td>
<td>Nebraska Environmental Trust</td>
<td>Ferguson House, Lincoln</td>
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<td>Categories Roundtable 2020</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Nebraska Environmental Trust</td>
<td>TBA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nebraska Crane Festival</td>
<td>March, 2020</td>
<td>Audubon Society</td>
<td>Kearney</td>
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<tr>
<td>NET – 2nd Quarter Board Meeting</td>
<td>April 2, 2020 (Thursday)</td>
<td>Nebraska Environmental Trust</td>
<td>Ferguson House, Lincoln</td>
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<td>Lincoln Earth Day 2018</td>
<td>April 2020</td>
<td>City of Lincoln</td>
<td>UNL 12th &amp; R streets, Lincoln (TBA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Earth Day Omaha 2018</td>
<td>April 2020</td>
<td>Earth Day Omaha Coalition</td>
<td>Elmwood Park, Omaha</td>
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<td>Gallup’s Earth Day</td>
<td>April 2020</td>
<td>Arbor Foundation</td>
<td>Gallup, Omaha</td>
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<td>NET – 3rd Quarter Board Meeting</td>
<td>Aug 3-4, 2020 (Mon-Tues)</td>
<td>Nebraska Environmental Trust</td>
<td>TBA</td>
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<td>Nebraska State Fair 2019</td>
<td>August/ Sep 2020</td>
<td>State Fair Board</td>
<td>State Fair Park, Grand Island</td>
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<tr>
<td>World O! Water Festival</td>
<td>September 2020</td>
<td>City of Omaha/ Papio-Missouri NRD</td>
<td>Wehrspan Lake, 154th Street and Giles Road</td>
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<td>Heron Haven Wetland Festival</td>
<td>September, 2020</td>
<td>Heron Haven</td>
<td>120th and Maple, Omaha</td>
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<td>Missouri River Outdoor Expo</td>
<td>September 2020</td>
<td>NGPC</td>
<td>Ponca State Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>NET – 4th Quarter Board Meeting</td>
<td>November 5, 2020 (Thursday)</td>
<td>Nebraska Environmental Trust</td>
<td>Ferguson House, Lincoln</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Site visits will include media opportunities with local radio, newspapers.
Appendix III: Research and Analysis

Situation Analysis

Analysis of Previous Efforts
The FY 2019-2020/FY2020-2021 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 current 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 2019-2020 Efforts
As a communications management tool, the Trust will continue to 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 2019 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 do 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 2019-2020 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Strengths</strong></th>
<th><strong>Weaknesses</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Large, supportive base of grantees</td>
<td>• Funding subject to reallocation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Efficient: low overhead costs</td>
<td>• State agency, not a traditional non-profit</td>
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<td>• Funded by the lottery, not tax dollars</td>
<td>• Limited resources for public information efforts</td>
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<td>• Citizen driven and accessible to all</td>
<td>• Dependent on Lottery Sales that fluctuate</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fulfills an essential need in our state</td>
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<td>• Emphasizes projects across Nebraska</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Proven record of partnerships with other conservation organizations</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Opportunities</strong></th>
<th><strong>Threats</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Participation in many public events</td>
<td>• Misconception that the Trust uses tax dollars for projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expand public information activities to encourage public participation</td>
<td>• Limited public awareness despite promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expand publicity efforts through collaborative initiatives with grantee organizations and other agencies.</td>
<td>• Possible decrease in grant funds due to legislative actions or lottery sales</td>
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