

Agenda Item 13. 2021 - 2022 Communications Plan

2021-2022 Communications Plan

Pages 13-2 thru 13-12

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

Communications Plan For FY 2021 - 2022

Executive Summary

The Nebraska Environmental Trust is a State program dedicated to the conservation of Nebraska's natural environments. 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 and publicity in the last 8-10 years.

Since the beginning, the Trust has embarked on a public relations and communications drive in the furtherance of its 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 exploring more advertising and public relations opportunities for the coming 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 and more and more people are recognizing the Trust's logo 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, however this has been severely impacted by Covid-19 restrictions this past eight months.

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 down. Although the Trust seems conservative in its approach in not investing large amounts of advertising dollars the past 28 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 a 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 FY2021-2022 Public Information Budget will be increased about 15% if the Board approves and more funds will be channeled toward advertising and PR efforts. 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 that is statewide as well as the Nebraska Press Association. 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.

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 in turn affects the disbursements to the Trust. 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 2022. We will adjust accordingly if needed with direction from the board.

The Trust works with the 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 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 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 2021-2022 will continue to see event participation through social media and a physical presence (where allowed) to continue our on-going presence as directed by the Board. The Trust will continue to take part in public events and exhibitions, where possible 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 Categories Roundtable meetings recently in September/October 2020 to revisit the funding categories of the Trust. A total of three meetings were held via zoom, one in each congressional district. We reached out to many Nebraskans during these meetings who gave us valuable input that will be presented to the Board. Our upcoming Annual Report entitled “**Investing In Partnerships**” will showcase projects that we have done with grantees and how we have built on long lasting relationships with our partners through the five funding categories. Planning for our 2020 Annual Report is underway and will be distributed statewide by early 2021.

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.

The Trust website, being a large publicity and grant administration tool, has been highly effective in delivering the desired results for the Trust. We have completed our electronic grant application process and are continuing with maintenance. The review process is being streamlined and integrated with our database as a whole. The Trust also has Facebook, Twitter and You Tube accounts that help with the delivering of our messages. The website has worked well for about 10 years now and we are looking at upgrading the website to a WordPress site in the near future.

The Communications Plan for 2021-2022 is proposed to be increased by \$10,000 annually for the coming fiscal year. 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 2021-2022. 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
- 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
- Academia

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 as directed by the Board. 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
 - Work with board members, public and other interested parties in providing valuable input in the administration of the Trust and Trust funds
 - 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 Lottery proceeds designated for environmental improvements

Brand Image and Positioning

Audience members will be reminded that the Trust is a partner with many diverse groups of people and that our grants allow our partners to do important conservation work. The Trust has to work together to bring different ideas to the table and work with potential grantees to help in the entire grant process from application to implementation. 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 2021-2022, 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 but planning will all depend on developments surrounding the pandemic situation. 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 the “Resource” newsletter to highlight some of the projects and activities done for the month. This newsletter is delivered via e-mail to more than 3,600 individuals and organizations. The electronic newsletter has also been re-designed to have a more contemporary look to represent the Trust. 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. Our broadcast emails are used regularly to keep in touch with Board members, grantees and other interested parties. Additional public relations activities will focus on advertising and editorial contributions as well as media purchases in local newspapers and on local radio.

Purchased 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. 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 positive 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, and co-promote events put together by our grantee organizations when these return in their original or modified form. 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 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.
- Redesigning and maintenance of our website with improved user-friendly features on WordPress.
- 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. Will be planning towards re-building in WordPress.

Social Media

- In the past few 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. However, we have to be very careful in managing our social media platform selectively, as it can generate both positive and negative publicity. 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. Grantees have used this channel as a way to “tag” the Trust in grant funded projects.
- A point to note is that social media platforms require constant monitoring to prevent negative comments or untruthful postings. The Trust only has five staff members that multi-task and it is difficult to dedicate a considerable amount of time to social media alone.

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

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

	General Nebraskans	Partner Organizations	Policymakers	Media Outlets
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	Exhibition at the Capitol Rotunda.	
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 2021-2022 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 2021 - 2022

Purchased Media = \$29,000

- 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 = \$22,000

- 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 = \$16,450

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

Total: \$79,900.00

Past Year's Budget

	<i>Public Information Budget</i>			
<i>Year</i>	<i>21-22</i>	<i>20-21</i>	<i>19-20</i>	<i>18-19</i>
<i>Purchased Media</i>	<i>\$29,000</i>	<i>\$25,000</i>	<i>\$25,000</i>	<i>\$25,000</i>
<i>Direct Marketing</i>	<i>\$22,000</i>	<i>\$20,000</i>	<i>\$20,000</i>	<i>\$20,000</i>
<i>Events</i>	<i>\$12,450</i>	<i>\$12,450</i>	<i>\$12,450</i>	<i>\$12,450</i>
<i>PR & Promotions</i>	<i>\$16,450</i>	<i>\$12,450</i>	<i>\$12,450</i>	<i>\$12,450</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$79,900</i>	<i>\$69,900</i>	<i>\$69,900</i>	<i>\$69,900</i>

APPENDIX II - MEDIA SCHEDULE & CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2021

Event	Date	Description/Organizer	Venue
Rain Water Basin Joint Venture Informational Seminar	February, 2021	Rain Water Basin Joint Venture	Grand Island
NET – 1 st Quarter Board Meeting	February 2, 2021 (Tuesday)	Nebraska Environmental Trust	TBA
Nebraska Crane Festival	March, 2021	Audubon Society	Kearney
NET – 2 nd Quarter Board Meeting	April 8, 2021 (Thursday)	Nebraska Environmental Trust	TBA
Lincoln Earth Day 2018	April 2021	City of Lincoln	UNL 12 th & R streets, Lincoln (TBA)
Earth Day Omaha 2018	April 2021	Earth Day Omaha Coalition	Elmwood Park, Omaha
Gallup's Earth Day	April 2021	Arbor Foundation	Gallup, Omaha
NET – 3 rd Quarter Board Meeting	Aug 2-3, 2021 (Mon-Tues)	Nebraska Environmental Trust	TBA
Nebraska State Fair 2019	August/ Sep 2021	State Fair Board	State Fair Park, Grand Island
World O! Water Festival	September 2021	City of Omaha/ Papio-Missouri NRD	Wehrspann Lake, 154 th Street and Giles Road
Heron Haven Wetland Festival	September, 2021	Heron Haven	120 th and Maple, Omaha
Missouri River Outdoor Expo	September 2021	NGPC	Ponca State Park
NET – 4 th Quarter Board Meeting	November 4, 2021 (Thursday)	Nebraska Environmental Trust	Ferguson House, Lincoln

Appendix III: Research and Analysis

Situation Analysis

Analysis of Previous Efforts

The FY 2020-2021 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 continue to increase with the current subscription management system we have adopted. Our subscription numbers continue to rise. 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 2020-2021 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 we will also be receiving a preliminary report and a final report on Categories Roundtable meetings that were recently held. The Board will be given copies of these reports when they are available.

Problems and Opportunities

The problems facing our organization are similar to those listed in the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis from the 2020 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 2020-2021 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>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Large, supportive base of grantees ● Efficient: low overhead costs ● Funded by the lottery, not tax dollars ● Citizen driven and accessible to all ● Fulfills an essential need in our state ● Emphasizes projects across Nebraska ● Proven record of partnerships with other conservation organizations 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funding subject to reallocation ● State agency, not a traditional non-profit ● Limited resources for public information efforts ● Dependent on Lottery Sales that fluctuate
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participation in many public events once things re-open ● Expand public information activities to encourage public participation ● Expand publicity efforts through collaborative initiatives with grantee organizations and other agencies. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Misconception that the Trust uses tax dollars for projects ● Limited public awareness despite promotion ● Possible decrease in grant funds due to legislative actions or lottery sales