PROJECT COMMUNICATIONS TABLE

DESCRIPTION/INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMMUNICATIONS TABLE

Mentioned in our Seven Tactics to Increase Project Success article, the concept of our Project Communications Table is simple and fairly easy to construct, with a little planning. Mostly, the Table is a handy tool to help project team members not only understand their communications obligations, but also to provide team members with a plan to help actually carry out the necessary communications.

Before you think about creating a Project Communications Table, sit down and analyze who will be affected by this project—we call this the Stakeholder Analysis. Make a list of all project teams and team members, their supervisors, senior management, customer and end-users, and anyone else who may be affected by the project, such as external vendors or maybe the general public. Try to think long-term, over the life of the project, to ensure you have not secluded any one person or group of people who might not be affected in the project start-up. After you have completed the Stakeholder Analysis, you are ready to create the Project Communications Table.

There are five major categories of our Project Communications Table: content, purpose, delivery methods, frequency/timing, and responsibility. We will take a look at each category individually, although, we recommend when planning a Project Communications Table for your project that you look at items line-by-line, instead of one category at a time.

CONTENT

This category describes exactly what pieces of information need to be communicated. Some examples of necessary information might include software updates, output from meetings (agendas, action items, handouts, etc.), a project calendar, expectations of external vendors, resource requests, and the list goes on. This list will vary widely depending on the scope of the project.

PURPOSE

This category describes what specific objective you will accomplish by delivering the communication content. For example, if you needed to deliver a status report to project supervisors, the purpose may be to communicate progress and the status of the project. Another possible objective for this scenario might be to review the recent project successes and short-term future targets. Analyze your project carefully: each piece of communication should have a specific objective. Otherwise, you will want to evaluate whether or not there is a true need for that communication.

DELIVERY METHODS

This category describes which vehicles, channels, or methods project team members will use to carry out the necessary communications. If you have a team that spreads across organizational or geographical boundaries, think "outside the box" for vehicles to deliver the communication. With the Internet and email, many creative solutions can be found, such as listservs, or a project intranet with postings, updates, and a message board. Seriously weigh the obstacles that confront all the stakeholders of your project before considering which vehicle to use for each communication item.

FREQUENCY/TIMING

This category describes how often the specific communication will take place. When deciding this, think about how often it is necessary to relay the information so that it is effective, without throwing your stakeholders into information overload. This section would also include specific dates if appropriate.

RESPONSIBILITY

This category lists the name of the person, team, or department responsible for ensuring the communication occurs. Whether it is actually initiating the communication or ensuring someone else does, this category establishes ownership of the communication and indicates specific people to hold responsible if the project suffers a delay due to a communication failure.

Breakdowns in communication are unacceptable reasons for project delays when some strategic thinking, planning and use of the Project Communications Table would reduce, if not eliminate, these problems. A little planning up front is worth its weight in gold.

PROJECT COMMUNICATIONS TABLE

Content	Purpose	Delivery Methods	Frequency/timing	Responsibility

SAMPLE COMMUNICATIONS TABLE: COMMUNICATION PLAN FOR ERP IMPLEMENTATION

The following sample communication table uses generic names and information to demonstrate a completed communication plan for an ERP implementation.

Stakeholder: Leadership Council

Content	Purpose	Delivery Methods	Frequency/timing	Responsibility
One Time Communications				
Results of Readiness Assessment	Leadership Council will understand the strength and weaknesses of the University to carry out this project and how it is being managed.	Group presentation at a meeting of the Leadership Council	June/July 2006	Collegiate Project Services' consultants
		Email copy of the assessment report	June/July 2006	Collegiate Project Services' consultants
Overview understanding of ERP and how it functionality	Leadership Council will understand the capabilities of the software.	Presentations at council meetings from ERP experts	August – December 2006	CIO and Collegiate Project Services' consultants
		Demonstration of the ERP at a council meeting	October 2006	Selected ERP Vendor
Benefits to the campus	Leadership Council will understand the benefits of the project to students, faculty, staff, and colleges.	Email	August 2006	Collegiate Project Services' consultants
		Web page posting	November 2006	Information Technology Department
		Program time at Leadership presidents' meeting	November 2006 and periodically as needed	CIO
Ongoing Communications				
Progress reports	Give leadership council members a one-page, "high-level" picture of progress on the project, including successes/issues.	Email, plus more details on web page	Monthly	CIO and Collegiate Project Services' consultants

Ongoing Communications				
Concerns and questions council members have about the project	Gather input from council members regarding their concerns; answer questions they have about the project.	Periodic telephone interviews with randomly selected members	Quarterly, using a different sample of members each time	CIO and Collegiate Project Services' consultants
		Q&A feature on the website	Continuously, updated as needed	Information Technology Dept
Milestone Events	Give council members a "heads up" regarding upcoming events.	Email	As needed, three weeks prior to major milestone events	CIO and Collegiate Project Services' consultants
Stakeholder: Steering Team				
Content	**Purpose**	**Delivery Methods**	**Frequency/timing**	**Responsibility**
One Time Communications				
ERP Readiness Assessment Results	Give steering team the highlights of the readiness assessment report and outline steps that are being taken as a result.	Team briefing	First steering team meeting	Collegiate Project Services' consultants
Ongoing Communications				
Progress reports	Give steering team members a one-page, "high-level" picture of progress on the project, including successes/issues.	Email, plus more details on web page	Monthly	CIO and Collegiate Project Services' consultants
Milestone Events	Give steering team a "heads up" regarding upcoming events.	Email	As needed, three weeks prior to major milestone events	CIO and Collegiate Project Services' consultants
Focus team progress	Advise steering team members on progress of each focus team.	Presentation at steering team meeting	Quarterly	Collegiate Project Services' consultants
Implementation team minutes	Provide a list of decisions made and actions taken by the implementation team.	Email (advising steering team that minutes have been posted on the web site)	Twice a month	CIO and Collegiate Project Services' consultants
		Web page	Twice a month	Information Technology Dept
Questions and Concerns	Gather input from the steering team and answer questions and concerns the team has about the project.	Discussion time at quarterly steering team meetings	Quarterly, or as needed	CIO

Stakeholder: All Project Team Members				
Content	**Purpose**	**Delivery Methods**	**Frequency/timing**	**Responsibility**
One Time Communications				
Project background information	All project team members will understand what is being done, how we're going about it, and organization and goals of Focus Teams.	Web page posting and email notification that web page has been updated	October 2006	Collegiate Project Services' consultants
Readiness Assessment Results	Give project members the highlights of the readiness assessment report.	Email	September 2006	Collegiate Project Services' consultants
		Web page posting of detailed results	September 2006	Information Technology Department
Benefits to the campus	All project team members will understand the benefits of the project to students, faculty, and staff.	Email	February 2006 and again every six months	Collegiate Project Services' consultants
		Web page posting	February 2006, updated as needed	Information Technology Department
Ongoing Communications				
Project Progress Reports	Give all project team members a periodic one-page, "high-level" picture of progress on the project, including successes/issues.	Web page posting and email advising that Progress Reports/Project newsletter are available on the web site	Monthly	CIO and Collegiate Project Services' consultants
Milestone Events	Give all project team members a "heads up" on project milestones.	Web page posting and email	As needed, three weeks prior to major milestone events	CIO and Collegiate Project Services' consultants
Team minutes of the Steering Team and the Project Teams	Provide a list of decisions made and actions taken by Implementation team and Steering team.	Email (advising all project team members that minutes have been posted on the web site)	As meetings occur	Collegiate Project Services' consultants
Focus team minutes	Provide a list of decisions made and actions taken by all Focus Teams.	Web Page posting	Minutes posted after each meeting	Team leaders of Focus Teams
Questions and Concerns	Gather input from the project team members and answer questions and concerns.	Project team meetings and minutes	At project team meetings and minutes provided one week after meeting.	Project Team Leaders and Collegiate Project Services' consultants

Stakeholder: Faculty

Content	Purpose	Delivery Methods	Frequency/timing	Responsibility
One Time Communications				
Project background information	Faculty will understand what is being done, how we're going about it, and organization and goals of Focus Teams.	Web page posting and email notification that web page has been updated	September 2006	Project Communications Specialist and Collegiate Project Services' consultants
Benefits to the faculty	Campus Faculty will understand the benefits of the project to students, faculty, and staff.	Email	September 2006, and again as needed	Project Communications Specialist and Collegiate Project Services' consultants
		Product Demonstrations	August – December 2006	Selected ERP Vendor
Ongoing Communications				
Progress Reports	Give faculty a periodic one-page, "high-level" picture of progress on the project, including successes/issues.	Web page posting and email advising that Progress Reports/Project newsletter are available on the web site	Quarterly	Project Communications Specialist and Collegiate Project Services' consultants
Progress Updates	Give periodic updates to faculty.	Program time at College meetings	When needed	University President
		Campus newspapers and faculty newsletters	When needed	Project Communications Specialist
Milestone Events	Give faculty a "heads up" on project milestones.	Web page posting and email.	As needed, three weeks prior to major milestone events	Project Communications Specialist and Collegiate Project Services' consultants
Questions and Concerns	Gather input from campus faculty and answer questions and concerns faculty have about the project.	Telephone interviews	Quarterly, with a random sample of faculty	Project Team Leaders and Collegiate Project Services' consultants
		Web Page	Post results of concerns and answers to questions from faculty interviews	Collegiate Project Services' consultants

Stakeholder: Students				
Content	**Purpose**	**Delivery Methods**	**Frequency/timing**	**Responsibility**
One Time Communications				
Project background information	Students will understand what is being done, how we're going about it, and how the project will improve their student experience.	Web page posting	September 2006	Collegiate Project Services' consultants
		Ads in campus student newspapers referring students to the website	October 2006	Project Communications Specialist
Ongoing Communications				
Benefits to the students	Students will understand the benefits of the project.	Special Student link on web page	September 2006, and updated as needed	Project Communications Specialist
		Student newspaper ads advising students of the website	October 2006, and updated as needed	Project Communications Specialist
Questions and Concerns	Gather input from students and answer questions and concerns students have about the project.	Telephone interviews	Semi-annually	Project Communications Specialist
		Post questions and answers on the web page, based on telephone interviews	Semi-annually or as needed	Project Communications Specialist
Milestone Events	Give students a "heads up" on project milestones that specifically relate to students.	Web page posting and ads in the campus newspaper	As needed, three weeks prior to major milestone events	Project Communications Specialist