



# Chapter Communications Toolkit

# Chapter Communications Toolkit

Thank you for taking on the important role of communications for your ATD chapter! As the communications leader, you and your committee volunteers contribute greatly to increasing awareness about ATD, your local chapter, and the talent development profession in your community.

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide a framework for an annual communications plan as well as templates and samples that chapter leaders can use as they develop their own materials. This toolkit also provides suggestions and guidelines for a chapter's communications committee and how it may contribute to the chapter's annual goals and objectives and determine key messages, delivery methods, and how to measure the results.

## GETTING STARTED

The chart below suggests relevant chapter committees that may be included as part of the initial stages of your communications planning. Adjust as appropriate for your chapter board.

Sample Chapter Communications Project Plan: Yearly Committee Involvement

Role of Committees	Owner	Committee members	Notes on the relationship between this committee and comm./marketing committee
Communications and Marketing	VP, Communications		
Program Committee	VP, Programs		
Event/meeting Committee	Director of Administration		
Membership Committee	VP, Membership		
Executive Leadership	Chapter President		

The annual communications plan is a big picture overview of the chapter's upcoming marketing and communications activities for the year, paired with the professional development events, meetings, and services to publicize. The communications components are aimed at increasing awareness and building relationships in the local community.

The basic components included in the chapter communications plan are: setting goals and objectives; determining target audiences; creating key messages; selecting the best delivery methods; and measuring the results. The communications plan is often initially formed in conjunction with key committees such as programs/professional development, membership, chapter leadership, and administration so that everyone contributes to and agrees on the communications strategies necessary to achieve the chapter's goals.

Internal communication is typically communication to chapter members. There are a variety of vehicles chapters may use: newsletters (printed or online), annual reports, direct mail, email, and the website.

External communication takes place between the chapter and the local community, business leaders, the media, non-members, and other groups or individuals. The same vehicles can be used to communicate to this audience, in addition to press releases, media advisories, fact sheets, and more.

## DESIGNING A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

The communications plan is a natural outgrowth of the chapter's annual plan. In order to begin the communications plan, consider the following questions:

- What are the chapter's goals and objectives?
- With whom will the chapter communicate in the coming year (target audiences) to reach these goals?
- How often will communication reach this audience and what key messages will be used?
- What type of delivery vehicles will be used (e.g. emails, newsletter, press release, direct mail, social media)?
- What is the budget for these activities?
- When is the best time to send communication to certain audiences and how will the chapter measure the results?

By coordinating these efforts with several key committees in the chapter, everyone can work together to determine how communication happens and when. As the committee leaders outline the big picture goals for the year, the communications committee can determine the tactics to reach those goals. Each chapter event, message, or product/service should have its own plan that details how the chapter will communicate with internal and external audiences.

## Measurement and Evaluation

Determining whether the plan was successful, if the goals were met, what worked and what did not work is important. An evaluation of this year's program is the beginning of the analysis phase for next year's program.

The communications plan should include schedules, descriptions of communication pieces, anticipated costs and budget, and the key volunteers and/or committees who are responsible for the project. The example below illustrates one way to create and implement a project plan for PR materials to support a membership marketing campaign.

**Example of a project plan for a chapter communications project**

<u>Sample project: PR materials for membership mktg. campaign</u>	<u>Key steps</u>	<u>Target audiences</u>	<u>Start date</u>	<u>End date</u>
	Begin committee planning for implementation of initial membership drive announcement		March	June
	Work with committee members to determine target audiences	All targeted groups lists	Mid March	Early April
	Letter to nonmembers - invitation to attend chapter webcast to understand the benefits of membership	Local business community, nonmembers	Late March	Late April
	Create chapter PR materials for handouts throughout the year to guests and nonmembers who attend meetings		March	Ongoing
	Outline the agenda and components of the presentation/workshop for webcast in May		March	May Target: webcast date
	Outline brochure about the benefits of membership in the chapter and ATD	All groups	Mid May	Mid June
	Work on design for banners to distribute at meetings	Chapter meetings	Mid May	Late May
	Complete presentation for webcast	Local groups/nonmembers	Mid April	Late April
	Final copy of brochure due to all committee stakeholders for distribution	Handouts for upcoming meeting	Mid June	Ongoing

	Brochures to the printer		Mid May	Late May
	Membership brochures available for meetings	Chapter leaders	May	Ongoing
	Obtain list of ATD members who are not chapter members and mail brochures late Sept.	Targeted non-member lists	Early Sept.	Late Sept.

## Target Audiences

When determining the target audiences for your chapter messages, it's best to direct your communications to the audiences that would be MOST interested in receiving these messages and who are crucial for the chapter's success. These groups likely would include current members, prospective members, members of the media, local business leaders and managers, community partners, and educational partners.

Before developing key messages, consider conducting some audience analysis. By taking time to identify and analyze your audience, you can create the best messages for each group so that they will be well received. When planning each of the communication tactics, consider which techniques will work best with each audience so that they are more likely to take action.

For example, if the audience you want to reach is not comfortable receiving email, then online communication may not be the best approach. You could re-tool your efforts to use a variety of techniques and media to reach the audience most efficiently. This will get the attention of more people, and spur more "change of action and attitude," than a tactic that relies solely on one medium or message. Each of your key messages should be a succinct statement or statements tailored to the specific audience.

## Delivery Methods for the Chapter Communications Plan

The communications timeline includes both internal and external communications, which can be delivered by several basic methods such as the annual report, newsletter, PR or marketing pieces, website resources, as well as chapter meeting announcements.

To develop a communications plan, it is best to set a timeline. If you are marketing something that has a deadline—like a conference or workshop—it will drive your timeline. You need to be sure to send communication to the audience in plenty of time so that an individual or group may plan for the event in their budgets and schedules.

## EXECUTING A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

### Internal Communications

Keeping your members informed about what is going on in the chapter will encourage them to participate in chapter activities. Typically, the higher the participation, the more engaged—and hopefully satisfied—your audience is.

The most effective communication is timely, requiring chapter leaders to establish timelines that allow members to plan appropriate budgets and schedules. A variety of tools and techniques are available for communicating with chapter members.

## **External Communications**

Look carefully at your chapter programs. What is newsworthy about them? What would interest the media? Is there a way to link something your chapter is doing on the local level with a national trend or a key message from ATD? What is the most effective and efficient method for getting this information out to the public? Once you have determined the programs or messages on which to focus for your chapter goals, decide which medium is most appropriate to use for communication.

In order to get to know your local media, it is important to read, watch, and listen to the news sources in your area. Monitor the stories that are in the news and the reporters who cover them. Look at the press as a partner to help your chapter establish long-term programs and develop a working relationship that will be beneficial for everyone involved. It's important to understand and work within the media's deadlines!

### **Media Mailing Lists**

One of the first things you need to create is a mailing list of reporters for each type of the media to whom you will send your meeting announcements, press releases, story proposals, etc. Your list should include the following:

- Name of the writer/editor
- Title
- Publication
- Address
- Phone/fax numbers
- Email address
- Beat (the types of stories that he or she typically covers)

Also, include any special contact information about the reporter's preferred format – whether email, telephone, or mail - and the deadline that the contact typically works on (every Wednesday, for example).

### **Meeting Announcements**

The chapter meeting announcement should be sent out on a regular basis to both internal and external audiences, and contain the following information:

- The meeting topic and speaker – is there a connection to a current trend or issue that you can highlight?
- Time, location, and directions
- Agenda (this can be a brief overview)
- Cost, if any, for attending the meeting

- RSVP policy (including whether there is a discount for registering in advance)

Calendar meeting announcements are one way to communicate to your local community about your meeting. You can use the meeting announcement to invite members of the local community and the media to attend.

## Delivery Methods

Consider using a combination of these types of delivery methods to communicate your messages to internal and external audiences:

- Press Releases
- Meeting announcements
- Fact sheet
- Annual report
- Email
- Social media
- Newsletters
- Collateral materials such as flyers and brochures for special events

### Press Releases

The best vehicle for sending announcements to the media is a press release. A press release provides the editor, reporter, or producer with well-written, concise, and clear information regarding your chapter and event. Visit the ATD Press Room to view current press releases ([www.td.org/ATD-in-the-Media](http://www.td.org/ATD-in-the-Media)).

Often, you can tailor a message for your local community with a connection to a national or international trend. For example, when ATD publishes a research report, your chapter may be able to describe the impact of those trends on local companies. This makes the information much more relevant to local newspapers and business publications.

The basic format for a press release is relatively straightforward. If your chapter has letterhead, use it for the top of the release. Or, you may want to create an electronic masthead specifically for press releases. Keep releases uniform so reporters can begin to recognize materials from your chapter. Samples of press releases can be found in the samples and templates section at the end of this toolkit.

A news release should include these elements:

- “News Release” typed on the top of the page (this may already be included in the masthead)
- Date before which the release should not be used, or if there is no need to hold the information, type “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE.” (Generally, this is positioned in the upper left-hand corner.)

- The lead paragraph. The first paragraph should start out with the five Ws: who, what, where, when, and why. A catchy lead, plus general brevity and clarity, are the most important attributes of a successful press release. If the event is going to have a special keynote speaker whose name the public would recognize, you may want to mention that in the lead as well.
- Body of the press release. Following the lead should come two or three paragraphs elaborating on the information in the lead.
- Closing paragraph. Always include a brief background paragraph near the end of the release explaining what the chapter does, its purpose, and information about ATD.

### **Meeting Notices in Local Newspapers**

Most chapters have their meetings and programs announced each month in community news or the business news section of local papers. You also may wish to suggest feature stories for the newspaper, write letters to the editor, or provide an op-ed piece. Newspapers typically publish information on the website about how to submit material for those columns and the names of the appropriate editors.

Are there any local business journals or weekly newspapers in your area? Publications like these generally have a section for local meetings in which you can use the chapter material. Also, check the community and suburban newspapers and contact your local chamber of commerce to request a media list for the various publications in your area.

### **Fact Sheet**

Fact sheets provide an overview about your chapter. It should explain what the chapter does, membership information, and other relevant facts and information. A sample fact sheet and template are included at the end of this toolkit.

### **Annual Report**

The chapter's annual report should summarize the previous year's goals and progress toward those goals, successes, financial status, membership statistics, key projects, activities and products/services. And, creating an annual report is a Chapter Affiliation Requirement (CARE). The annual report should summarize the chapter's performance in key areas. A sample annual report is included at the end of this toolkit.

### **Newsletters**

A newsletter, either printed or electronic, is an excellent means of providing information about developments in the chapter and the industry. Many chapters use the newsletter to provide information about upcoming meetings and events, as well as more in-depth content like interviews with leaders in the field or Q&A with an expert on a particular trend. A sample newsletter is included at the end of this toolkit.

### **ATD Resources**

While this is not an exhaustive list, these are some of the resources available at ATD that may help you in your local communications efforts. You can find press releases about many research reports, *TD* articles, ATD award winners, and more online at the ATD Press Room ([www.td.org/ATD-in-the-Media](http://www.td.org/ATD-in-the-Media)). ATD communicates its key messages about talent development trends through its communications channels.



### ATD State of the Industry Report

ATD provided organizations with opportunities to benchmark their training investments and practices through a benchmarking survey. Aggregate data from thousands of organizations have been published in ATD's annual *State of the Industry Report*. Your chapter is encouraged to share these trends with your local talent development community. Visit the State of the Industry website for more information ([www.td.org/Professional-Resources/State-Of-The-Industry-Report](http://www.td.org/Professional-Resources/State-Of-The-Industry-Report)).

### ATD Awards

ATD presents awards to individuals and organizations, including for-profit and not-for-profit organizations and government, for outstanding achievements in the talent development field. ATD provides four categories of awards in which to apply: Advancing the Workplace Learning and Performance Profession, Advancing ATD, Excellence in Practice, and BEST Awards. Visit the ATD Awards website for more information ([www.td.org/About/ATD-Awards](http://www.td.org/About/ATD-Awards)).

### ATD Magazines

Publishing is one of ATD's largest operations, encompassing the creation and distribution of books, magazines, newsletters, and research reports. Through its publications, ATD leads the field with content that advances new thinking, highlights proven practices, and raises awareness of the value of talent development. Learn more: <https://www.td.org/Publications/Magazines>

For 65 years, the award-winning **TD** magazine has heralded and even led the evolution of the profession with the purpose to deliver to its readers the emerging trends and proven best practices. Indeed, since its debut in 1947 as the *Journal for Industrial Training*, what is now called *TD* magazine has chronicled the issues and ideas, the pains and passions of a growing profession.

**The Public Manager** is a unique journal for public sector learning professionals who want to create effective federal leadership by fostering knowledge, vision, professionalism and best practices at all levels of government. The journal is a monthly digital publication.

### ATD Press

Bringing you publications by respected leaders of training and development, ATD leads the field with content that advances the profession, highlights proven practices, and raises awareness of the value of developing talent. Browse our latest [books](#), [research reports](#), and [magazines](#), or sign up for [newsletters](#) delivered directly to your inbox. Learn more: <https://www.td.org/Publications>.

## SAMPLES AND TEMPLATES

- Annual report
- Chapter meeting or event advisory
- Press release
- Fact sheet
- Newsletter and Blog

### Annual Report

As part of ATD's Chapter Affiliation Requirements (CARE), chapters are required to produce an annual report and share it with members. It should include, but is not limited to data and information on: membership growth and retention, financial performance, and progress toward or achievement of the annual goals. Annual reports may also be a year-end wrap-up on the state of the chapter, remind members about the benefits and services the chapter provides, and how the chapter board is working to meet members' needs.

Providing this information is a key communication vehicle to make sure members understand the state of the chapter including goals and strategies, successes and challenges, and how members can become involved in the chapter's activities and take advantage of the professional and career development opportunities that are available.

#### Overall

- Produce the report in a simple format (Word is fine) with clearly defined sections and easy-to-read charts and graphics. Your chapter's annual report does not need to be a lengthy document.
- Consider formatting the report based on your chapter's annual goals and/or strategies. Provide additional detail or charts within each section to explain progress toward the goals.
- When you complete the report, be sure to share it with your members in more than one communication vehicle. Consider posting it on your chapter's website, emailing a PDF attachment with a note from the president, handing out a hard copy at monthly meetings, or including it (or an executive summary) in your monthly newsletter.

### Suggested sections for your annual report

#### SECTION ONE

Use a cover page with the chapter's logo, name and year, as well as the name of the report. (Ex.: ATD Greater Detroit Chapter, Annual Report 2015)

#### SECTION TWO

Letter/message from the chapter president. The president may want to include a brief letter (four to five paragraphs is fine) to the members about the progress of the chapter during the previous 12 months, financial highlights, membership highlights, and programming highlights during the year. This letter is also an opportunity for the chapter president to acknowledge the board of directors.

### SECTION THREE

In this section, you may want to get creative! If your chapter had annual goals sorted by the portfolio of each board member (membership, finance, professional development, for example), then you may want to structure the content that way. Or, you may want to highlight areas that members utilize the most (an online job bank or supplier directory, for example).

No matter how you decide to structure this section, be sure to include the goal or strategy that was originally developed by the board and the chapter's progress and accomplishments toward that goal. For example, if one of the chapter goals was to increase membership by 10 percent and your chapter overachieved in that area, briefly explain how this was accomplished and by what types of methods and activities. Doing so will help you recognize a board member and/or committee that was responsible for the achievement.

### SECTION FOUR

In this section, you may want to review your annual awards program, conference, series of professional development events, or anything else that was particularly noteworthy during the year that required the support and involvement of many people, especially the chapter's volunteers.

This is a good area to talk about a partnership with another organization, recreational event (a chapter golf outing, perhaps!), or your chapter's involvement ATD programs, managing volunteers for the ATD International Conference & Exposition, or spearheading the passage of a proclamation about Employee Learning Week in your city/town.

### SECTION FIVE

If you haven't included this elsewhere, it's a good idea to wrap up the report by recognizing the volunteers, sponsors, and contributors who devoted time and resources to the chapter and who helped the chapter run smoothly and achieve success.

#### **Sample Annual Report (Kansas City):**

<http://files.astd.org/ChapterServices/%21CLC%20New%20Website/Resources/Sharing%20Our%20Success/SOS%20Success%20Stories/Communication/2015/Kansas%20City%20-%20Annual%20Report%20with%20Infographic/2014%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

### **Chapter meeting or event advisory**

The purpose of the chapter meeting advisory is to announce an upcoming chapter event or meeting to the local media, external organizations, and learning professionals in your area. These announcements can take many forms. This example is geared toward the media or would be something your chapter may use to announce an upcoming conference or event. Decide what format and style is best for your chapter and use it!

Suggested format for a media advisory:

**Chapter logo/name at the top**

**Chapter contact:** (Assume this person may be contacted by the local media, external organizations, or non-members)

**Phone number:**

**Email address:**

(Date)

**ATD CHAPTER Announces a One-Day Conference for Talent Development Professionals**

*National experts from (company name) will speak about trends in the field*

**WHAT:** Event name/information, and other relevant details

**WHEN:** Date, time, etc.

**WHERE:** Location information

**WHO:** Who will speak at the event, what companies will be featured?

Provide information about who should attend – “...professionals who want to understand how trends in the field are impacting talent development in their organizations...” (for example)

**HOW:** Include the member/non-member cost, and any other important details such as how to register for the event (online, email, phone, etc.).

Conclude with a brief “About ATD CHAPTER” here and your website address. Ideally, this advisory will be one page or less in length.

###

(Use ### or -30- to signify the end of the information/advisory)

## Press release

Press releases can be used to announce an upcoming meeting, special event, or new service that your chapter is offering. You may want to use several press releases (timed every few weeks or every month) to count down to an upcoming chapter conference or event, such as Employee Learning Week or a well-known speaker visiting your chapter.

Press releases typically follow a similar format:

### Chapter logo/header at the top

### For Immediate Release (top, aligned left)

### ATD (chapter name) contact person:

Phone:

Email:

### Headline (bold)

*Subhead (if appropriate)*

**(City, State), Date:** The lead paragraph should announce your news and like the rest of your press release, the lead should be succinct, clear, and concise. The rest of the detail that you are trying to communicate should go in the remaining paragraphs. Think of the lead paragraph as a way to draw in your audience ... if someone read only the headline and the first two sentences, what do they absolutely need to know and how would they act on the information? Envision the format of your release to be an inverted pyramid with the general information at the top followed by details at the bottom.

The remaining paragraphs can include all of the details that are necessary to communicate ... in order of importance.

Be sure the end of your press release includes information about your chapter, the speaker you're announcing, or details that must be communicated (how to register for an event, directions to a location, etc.).

Signify to the reader that he or she has reached the end with the **###** or **-30-** symbol.

*Note: Unless the topic is complicated or includes a great deal of research/data, most press releases should be one-to-two pages in length. If an initial draft of your press release is three pages long, consider what content is more appropriate to include in a separate attachment, bio, or fact sheet.*

---

**Sample Press Release Template for Employee Learning Week**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media contact: Name

Phone

Email

**(Name of Chapter / Organization) To Recognize Employee Learning Week 2015**

**(City, state) Date** – To increase awareness about the strategic value of learning in organizations, the Association for Talent Development (ATD), formerly ASTD has declared December 7 – 11, 2015, as “**Employee Learning Week.**” This is an opportunity for organizations to showcase the important link between developing employees’ skills and achieving organizational results.

ATD research shows that organizations continue to invest in growing the knowledge and skills of their workforce. “Increasingly, business leaders realize that the most important asset in our knowledge economy is talent, and a skilled workforce is the key to realizing results. We encourage all organizations to demonstrate their commitment to learning by recognizing Employee Learning Week,” says Tony Bingham, ATD President and CEO.

*(Add an optional paragraph describing how your chapter or organization will recognize Employee Learning Week.)*

To learn more about the *(chapter/organization name here)* recognition of Employee Learning Week, contact *(contact name and email)*. For more information about ATD Employee Learning Week 2015, visit [www.employeelearningweek.org](http://www.employeelearningweek.org), or email to [elw@td.org](mailto:elw@td.org).

About ATD

The Association for Talent Development (ATD), formerly ASTD, is the world’s largest association dedicated to those who develop talent in organizations. These professionals take the knowledge, skills, and abilities of others and help them achieve their full potential.

ATD’s members come from more than 120 countries and work in public and private organizations in every industry sector. ATD supports the work of professionals locally in more than 125 chapters, international strategic partners, and global member networks.

Started in 1943 as the American Society of Training Directors, this organization evolved to become the American Society for Training & Development. As the scope and the impact of the training and development field has grown, the profession’s focus has broadened to link the development of people, learning, and performance to individual and organizational results. For more information, visit <http://www.td.org>.

###

## Fact sheet

Fact sheets are useful to communicate information about an organization, product, or service. Using a brief one or two page format, you may want to create a fact sheet about your chapter and print hard copies on your chapter letterhead and post it on your website. Be sure to update the fact sheet regularly as you add new services, your membership grows, or you want to add information about the chapter's incoming board of directors.

### Sample Fact Sheet:

<file:///C:/Users/cjones@td.org/Downloads/CPLP%20Fast%20Facts%20v1-%202014%20ATD.pdf>.

## Newsletter and Blogs

Newsletters and website blogs are excellent ways to provide information, news, and updates to members or prospective members about chapter activities, events, and professional development opportunities, as well as news about the talent development trends.

The newsletter content can include, but is not limited to these types of information:

- Information from the chapter's leadership (president or other members of the board) about the health of the chapter and progress toward chapter goals
- Upcoming events and meetings, including background about the speakers who will be featured at meetings
- Background about the chapter, new or existing membership benefits, and job openings
- New information from ATD such as conferences, certificate programs coming to the area, new publications, and so forth
- Updates from chapter committees
- Information about awards programs or best practices by chapter members

The chapter newsletter can also feature brief articles about new members and programs, volunteer opportunities, partnerships within the local community, as well as industry conferences and resources.

### Samples:

Blog (Orange County): <http://www.atdoc.org/ChapterBlog>

Newsletter Sign-Up Page (San Diego): <http://www.tdsandiego.org/signup>

Video Newsletter/President's Message (Greater Philadelphia): <http://www.tdphl.org/page-1074077>

Leader Connection Newsletter (ATD): [www.td.org/lcn](http://www.td.org/lcn)

Find more chapter best practices at [www.td.org/SOS](http://www.td.org/SOS)

