

# **Indigenous Business Toolkit Project**

## **Communication Tools**

Vern Bachiu  
Murray Fulton  
Kristy Jackson

Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy  
University of Saskatchewan  
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# Communication Tools

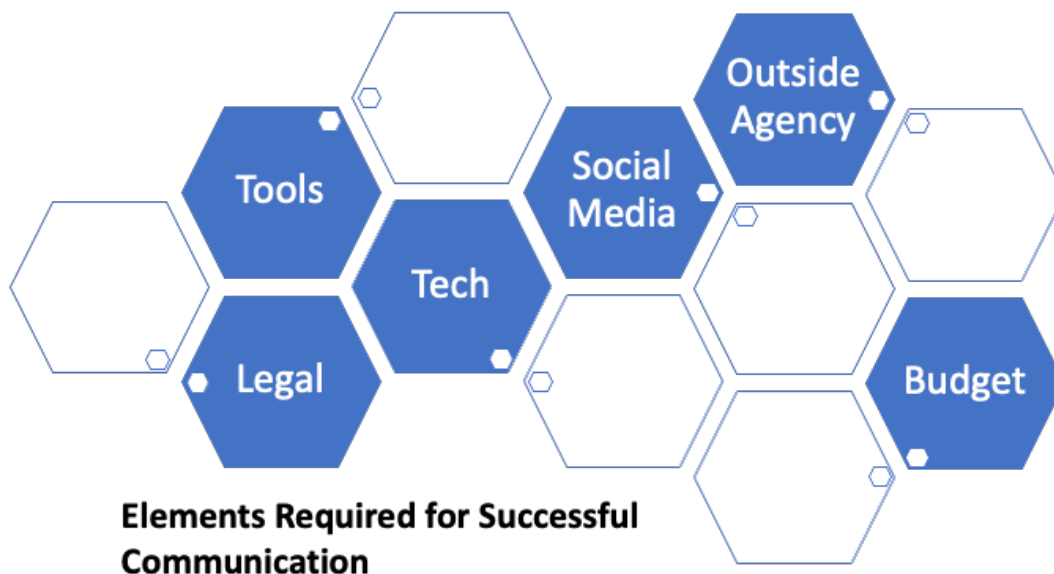
## Summary

When things go wrong in an organization, they're often blamed on poor communications. This is also the case in Indigenous businesses, particularly given the numerous stakeholders who have an interest in the work being done and the outcomes that are expected, as well as the multiple objectives that Indigenous businesses are trying to achieve. But what makes good communications?

The tools and tactics of communication are constantly changing. And there are so many tools available today to help communicate, it's hard to know what and what not to. This module focuses on tools and tips for successful communication, including the tools and technology that you will employ, the use you will make of social media and outside agencies, and the budget you have available.

Communications are complicated and there are many experts available to help you. We recommend consulting with a communications expert to help you navigate, especially around legal requirements. But if you understand the basics, you're better able to help guide the experts you work with to get the results you want and achieve the two biggest goals of communication – to build trust and to tell your story. The guiding principles to follow to achieve these goals are rooted in Cree words:

- **Tâpwêwin.** Speak with precision and accuracy. Be authentic. Always tell the truth!
- **Miyo-wîcêhtowin.** Get along with others. Be respectful and courteous.



## The Basics of Communication

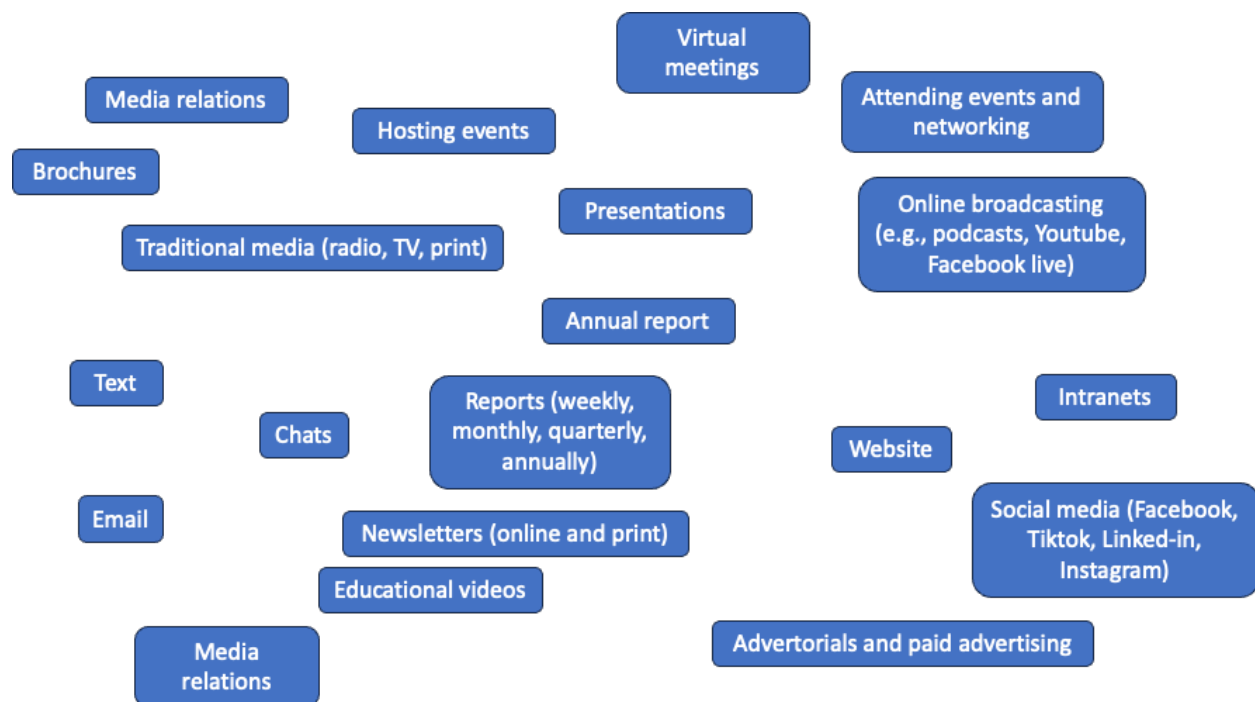
The two biggest goals of communications are to build trust and to tell your story.<sup>1</sup> The guiding principles to follow to achieve these goals are rooted in Cree words:

- **Tâpwêwin.** Speak with precision and accuracy. Be authentic. Always tell the truth!
- **Miyo-wîcêhtowin.** Get along with others. Be respectful and courteous.

These two guiding principles can serve as a simple but effective test for all your communications.

## Communication Tools

There are many communications tools to choose from to achieve these goals. And because these are ever-changing, we're not going to spend a lot of time naming specific tools. Figure 1 presents a few of the ways that businesses use to communicate.



**Figure 1. Business Communication Methods**

You don't have to use all the tools shown in Figure 1. In fact, you shouldn't. The trick is to choose the right tool for the job. Think about your audience first, since that determines what tool you use.

For example, if you want to communicate with your community membership, and most of them are active on Facebook, you should consider Facebook as a tool to reach them. If you know

your Chief is too busy to read emails, and is best reached by text, send a text. For your board, in-person meetings and emails might be the best way to reach them. Since the tools change depending on who you want to communicate with, choose your tools with your audience in mind.

### **Tech Stuff**

We won't get too technical here, and because technology is always changing, we won't get too specific. However, here are some items to keep in mind when you're dealing with the technology side of communications:

- Own your own domain. Do NOT allow the web developer or your IT friend to have ownership of your website domain (If you're wondering 'what's a domain?' great question! A domain is a unique address used to access a website; your email addresses also use a domain. Two examples of a domain are [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and [www.companyname.ca](http://www.companyname.ca)). Whoever controls your domain controls your website and possibly, your emails. Ensure at least two people in your organization have access to the domain registrar. If you need help to set this up, it's perfectly okay to ask a web developer or IT professional to help you set it up; just ensure that you maintain control over the username and password.
- Password manager – These are secure tools to help keep track of all your organization's passwords. You can set it so that more than one employee has access. 1Password is an example of a password manager. Please, please, please do NOT keep all your passwords in a spreadsheet or word document. Hackers love when people do this.
- Social media – Have two people identified as admin for all your organizations' social media accounts.
- Social media management tools – These are fantastic tools that let you schedule posts ahead of time, post everything all in one place, and more. These tools are highly recommended if you have multiple social media channels or are managing social media accounts for others.
- E-mail newsletter list software – These are great tools that help you navigate all the legalities around e-mail marketing, track your results and more.
- Canva – We will mention one specific tool: Canva (<https://www.canva.com/>). Canva allows users to create professional-looking designs with ease, even if they have no prior design experience. As of the time of this writing, it's the best online software for people who can't afford to hire a designer but need a poster, social media post, or other visual.

### **Legal requirements**

There are several legal requirements you should be aware of:

- CASL (Canadian Anti-Spam Law) – If you choose to do an e-mail newsletter, please be aware that you need to get written permission from people in Canada to include them in mass e-mailing. Permission can be granted through a “sign up for our newsletter” online service or even a simple e-mail saying, “please add me to your email list.”
- Permission to include a photo or video of someone – Make sure to get a media release form signed by anyone you include in your videos, social media posts, brochures, and so on.
- Privacy Act and other privacy rules – Be familiar with privacy rules that apply in your situation. One common example is reporting on employment statistics. You cannot publicly include identifying details about specific employees without their written permission.
- Copyright, trademarks, and licensing – There are rules around using music or images from other organizations. In general, you must get permission from an organization before using their logo or photos or anything else that belongs to them. DO NOT do a Google image search and just choose an image, or download your favourite AC/DC song to include in your video. Use the images built into platforms, purchase images from stock photography/video sites, or use music from a royalty fee music library.
- It is illegal to mislead or lie when you advertise. The Canadian Competition Act outlines the requirements and the penalties. However, if you’re following the principle of Tâpwêwin, and always speak the truth, you will be fine.
- Industry-specific regulations – For example, cigarettes, alcohol, cannabis, and gaming all have industry-specific requirements when it comes to what they can and can’t do in their communications. There are rules when marketing to children. Packaging and labeling of products might be required to have both French and English. There are many regulatory bodies that govern different industries. It’s important to be familiar with those that pertain to your business.
- Contest rules. Contests are primarily governed by the federal Competition Act and Criminal Code. It’s important to be familiar with the applicable rules if you are running a contest. This guide does not replace legal advice, but in general, contests must have written rules that are available to everyone, you must follow applicable privacy laws when collecting information, and you must provide a no-cost way for people to participate; as well, participants may be required to ask a skill testing question. Games of chance, such as bingos, are regulated by Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority (SLGA) or Indigenous Gaming Regulators (IGR), depending on where the contest takes place.

### **Working with an Agency**

If you are working with a professional communications agency, that’s great! There are many great agencies to work with who are experts in their field.

Creative work is hard to estimate for, and it’s easy for the hours to creep up and result in a big bill. Some tips for a successful creative project:

- Ask the agency for samples of other projects so you can review their work and decide if you like their style before committing.
- Ask the agency for references. Call them and find out what their experience was like working with the agency.
- Try the agency with a small project before committing long term.
- Creative briefs. Ask the agency to fill out a creative brief for your project before starting, so that everyone knows the scope of the project. Creative briefs are documents that outline questions that communications people need to know to develop a creative project. Each agency usually has their own, but you can find examples by doing a Google search.
- Provide samples to the agency of other work you like and dislike to help them figure out your preferred style faster. The more hours they spend working on your project, the more you will pay.
- Ask the agency to provide you with a written estimate of what the project will cost before you start. Make it clear that you need to pre-approve any additional hours beyond this. Both you and the agency should sign off on this before starting.
- Ask the agency to outline how many concepts and back-and-forths are included in the estimate. For example, the agency might provide two concepts. You then choose one and make changes on it three times. This is two concepts and three back-and-forths. If you end up needing four different concepts and ask them to show it in nine different colours, your invoice will be higher than the estimate.
- Discuss ownership of the files. When the project is complete, do you (the customer) own the files or does the agency? It is recommended that your organization owns the files. This allows you to take work to another agency or your internal staff if needed.
- Allow a lot of extra time. Creative work sometimes takes a few tries to get it “right” and it’s best not to rush. Try to think about six months ahead.

The more you work with a single agency, the faster they will become at working on your projects as they get to know you, your organization, and your brand. And if you have regular work with them (for example, a quarterly newsletter), let them know so they can plan their time.

### **Budget**

You’ve put together a communications plan and you realize it’s going to cost a fortune. You don’t have a fortune. Maybe you have basically no funding for this. Now what?

Communications can be expensive if you’re not careful. But it can also be done very inexpensively if you’re willing to put in the time. That’s why it’s very important to spend time (just a day or two each year) working on an annual plan and decide where you want to spend your time and money.

- First, concentrate on the items you must do, such as any legal requirements.
- Next, see if you can do what you need without spending a lot of money. For example, if you are required to have an annual shareholder meeting, perhaps it can be done by broadcasting online, which saves you money on travel, food, printing, and so on.
- If you have a limited budget or time, choose a few tools and concentrate on using those well. If you have nothing but a Facebook page, because your community members are on Facebook that's okay! Put effort into making sure all the information people want or need is on there.

## Social Media

Social media is a great communications tool and can be a very inexpensive way to get your message out to a wider audience. However, time and effort are required to get the communications right. Here are some tips for using social media as a communications tool:

- **Monitor** – If you're going to be on social media, you must spend time each day monitoring it. The last thing you want is to have a place where people go to post negative comments about you, and you're unaware because you haven't checked the page in a month. If you don't have time or resources to monitor it, don't have a page. It's okay to not have a presence on social media and to use other channels instead.
- **Create a strategy** – Your strategy doesn't need to be complicated. Just spend time thinking about it. Why do you want to use social media? What do you want to communicate? Who will you communicate with?
- **Create a schedule** – This is as simple as printing a calendar for the next 12 months and plotting what you are going to post and when. There are certain days you may want to post, like National Indigenous Peoples Day or dates when you are holding meetings.
- **Create a list of questions** you think you might get from your audience. Include on the list all the hard questions and statements you expect to get (for example: "This organization doesn't do anything for our community!" or, "Why did you hire people from community X instead of ours?"). Write out how you would answer those questions. Having ready answers to the most common questions lets you be proactive instead of reactive.
- **Expect comments** – This isn't like radio or TV, where you just send out a message. Remember that the idea behind social media is that it's social. It's two-way communication. You want people to engage, comment, like and share, and you need to expect feedback.
- **Follow your brand.** To build trust, you want to be consistent. This is where having a branding guide is important.
- **Start with one social media platform** and do it well. It's far better to have one platform that's well managed than four platforms that are not.
- **Dealing with negative comments:**

- Keep calm. It's hard not to get upset or take these personally.
- Don't delay – deal with it right away.
- Answer questions that are legitimate, even if they are hard questions. This is an opportunity to talk to your audience; get your message out there, and show you care.
- Take any specific complaints offline. Respond publicly first so that everyone can see you are taking complaints seriously, then respond directly to the person who is complaining. This is one area where AI tools come in very handy, as you can ask it how to respond and use that as a guide, which helps keep your emotions out of it.
- Don't feed the trolls. Hide or delete comments that are offensive, threatening, or not relevant to what you are doing.
- If you're struggling for ideas on what to post, look at what similar organizations do. For example, FHQ Developments has over 4,000 followers on their Linked-in page and is very active there.

### How Will We Do All This?

If this seems overwhelming, rest assured, you're not alone. Most organizations have a hard time accomplishing all these things with a team of people and a healthy budget, and Indigenous organizations often have significant challenges with resources. This module is a starter guide meant to give Indigenous businesses an overview of communications, and a heads up on some potential pitfalls. This guide doesn't include everything, which is why it's critical to work with a communications professional when you need to. If you can hire one, even better.

The key takeaway is that your goal for communications is to build trust and tell your story. Spend a day or so every year planning your communications activities and be realistic about what you can do consistently. It might take you a few years to build your communications to the point where you want them to be, and that's okay. There will always be a big wish list. First, do the things you are legally obligated to do, then start working on the rest.

And remember the two biggest tests for all your communications:

- **Tâpwêwin.** Speak with precision and accuracy. Be authentic. Always tell the truth!
- **Miyo-wîcêhtowin.** Get along with others. Be respectful and courteous.

### Resources

Bachiu, V., M. Fulton, and K. Jackson. 2024. The Basics of Communications for Indigenous Businesses. Indigenous Business Toolkit Project. Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, University of Saskatchewan. <https://www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca/research-ideas/projects-and-labs/indigenous-leadership-governance-and-development-project.php>.

Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada. 2024. Summary of Privacy Laws in Canada. Accessed at [https://www.priv.gc.ca/en/privacy-topics/privacy-laws-in-canada/02\\_05\\_d\\_15/](https://www.priv.gc.ca/en/privacy-topics/privacy-laws-in-canada/02_05_d_15/).



Government of Canada. 2024. First Nations Communications Toolkit: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100021860/1614352707074>.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> For more details on these two goals, see Bachiu, Fulton, and Jackson (2024).

## **Indigenous Business Toolkit Project**

The Indigenous Business Toolkit Project is designed to provide Indigenous communities and individuals with the practical tools they and their advisors can use to undertake successful economic development. Indigenous economic development is more successful when everyone – community members, community leaders, consultants, business professionals, employees, and/or potential partners – understands its many aspects.

The Toolkit provides step-by-step instructions on selected aspects of economic development based on the best practices of leaders in the field. The modules in the Toolkit cover everything from the role of economic development in nation building, to the importance of business charters, to the various legal forms that can be used to pursue economic development, to the steps needed to identify and negotiate beneficial partnerships, to the governance challenges that economic development must address.

The modules are available for free and for use by anyone. The full set of Toolkit modules can be found at: <https://www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca/research-ideas/projects-and-labs/indigenous-leadership-governance-and-development-project.php>.

The Indigenous Business Toolkit Project is part of the larger Indigenous Leadership: Governance and Development project designed to support long-term Indigenous economic development. In addition to the toolkit, the larger project involves capturing the economic development experience of Saskatchewan Indigenous communities through a series of case studies. The case studies, along with a description of the larger project, can be found at the website listed above.

### **Disclaimer**

The information contained in this document is designed to provide an overview of a particular topic and should not replace legal and other expert advice. Groups wishing to use the concepts discussed should receive the appropriate professional advice necessary to ensure their specific goals and circumstances are considered and recognized.

### **The Authors**

Vern Bachiu, President and CEO of Triall Consulting, is a business consultant with over four decades of experience in working with Indigenous communities in business, governance, and education.

Murray Fulton, professor emeritus with the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy (University of Saskatchewan campus), is an agricultural economist. He has done extensive research and writing on governance, rural development, and co-operative development.

Kristy Jackson, Director of Marketing and Communications at Athabasca Basin Development, (ABD), is a member of Whitefish Lake First Nation #128. Prior to her work at ABD, Kristy was director of communications at the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority.