

Communications Plan

Year 1: November 2022 - March 2024

Year 2: April 2024 - March 2025



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Background and problem statement

The Rural Development Network (RDN) rebranded from a provincial organization to a national organization in 2019/2020. However, due to its rapid internal growth (the organization has doubled in size in a year), the organization's communications to promote the national expansion have fallen behind.

The RDN Communications Team has struggled to prioritize strategic communications work to advance the organization due to the overwhelming demand for communications support for RDN's several projects and initiatives. This has largely been because of a lack of processes and procedures surrounding communications work to help RDN staff & the Communications Team work smoothly together. This has led to challenges such as*:

- Project/initiative staff not consulting Communications regarding project communications deliverables when planning new projects.
- A lack of communications funding at the time of grant or funding applications resulting in reduced communications capacity to support new projects.
- A lack of advanced planning from RDN staff for their communication needs/requirements (resulting in too many ad-hoc requests).
- Unclear project/initiative priorities - Communications is in the dark about which projects have appropriate communications funding or whether projects have communications deliverables.

While they are a work in progress, processes are currently being developed and implemented to address these challenges and inform the RDN team of how they can best work with the Communications Team to achieve their goals. RDN has grown significantly in the past few years, and prior to this did not have dedicated Communications staff, so there was no roadmap or defined structure for Communications work which we now have the opportunity to define.

Additionally, RDN is also experiencing the following challenges:

- Residual brand confusion for external audiences with the recent rebrand from ARDN to RDN rebrand (some partners/external audiences still think we only serve Alberta).
- Many new projects to communicate to audiences and the Communications Team not having sufficient notice or time to communicate this work effectively and strategically. As a result:
 - Our external audiences are not aware of all of the work we do and the connection between our projects and initiatives (e.g., how do each of our projects support rural development and what aspects?).
 - Our website and its content have not been formatted to clearly communicate our work and how organizations or individuals can get involved, especially for attracting more fee-for-service work.
- And more. For a detailed SWOT analysis, [see Appendix B](#).

With limited capacity and increased demand for communications support due to its rapid growth, RDN has not been able to clearly and consistently communicate its national expansion and who

the organization is today with external audiences (e.g., website, social media strategy, proactive media relations, etc.).

This communications plan for 2022-2025 intends to address and remedy these issues, and more specifically support RDN’s Growth Plan’s Aspirations and Key Focus Areas ([see Appendix A](#) for more information). If successful, RDN will have increased its awareness across the Canadian nonprofit voluntary sector and expanded its client base – demonstrating that RDN is a leader in rural community development.

Target Audience(s)

The following target audiences were identified in a meeting with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in January 2023. [Comms x SLT 2023 Meeting](#)

Primary Audience	Secondary Audience	Tertiary Audience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rural and remote communities and municipalities ● First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and organizations across Canada ● Government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Municipal ○ Provincial ○ Federal ● Current & prospective funders (e.g., CMHC, FCM, AREF, etc.) ● Current project partners ● Community-based organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Media ● Post-secondary institutions ● Rural businesses ● Prospective project partners ● Relevant associations and their members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Urban service providers/organizations ● Developers/consultants ● Rural residents

Note: Based on the January 2023 SLT meeting, RDN Directors also identified that we focus our efforts in the provinces of Alberta, Ontario, British Columbia, Eastern provinces, and Northern provinces and Territories.

Goal

To increase awareness of RDN’s national expansion and elevate our profile amongst our target audiences – to position ourselves as a nationally recognized expert on building thriving, healthy and sustainable rural communities.

We want our primary and secondary audiences to know who we are and how they can get involved or interact with us. We want them to know and understand the value and impact our organization brings to the nonprofit sector and to rural communities across Canada.

Strategy

It's time for RDN to clearly communicate who we are, what we do and why we do it. We plan to accomplish this through:

- Improved internal brand cohesion for external publication.
- Enhanced digital communications & traditional public relations tactics.
- Thoughtfully communicating about our organization's work and impact through human-centred storytelling across communications channels.

Objectives

Objective #1

Improve brand cohesion across the organization and in all external communications by the end of 2023.*

Objective #2

Increase awareness of RDN's national expansion, current projects, and overall impact with target audiences by the end of 2024.*

Objective #3

Increase engagement from and with target audiences for enhanced community and business development by the end of March 2025.*

Note: Objective 3 will depend heavily on internal capacity – tactics and activities are listed below; however, any items not met during the 2023 or 2024 fiscal year will be migrated to the next Communications Plan for 2025.

**For detailed key performance indicators, see Tactics and Evaluation.*