



# National Fire Heritage Center Communications Plan

January 25, 2015

## Executive Summary . . .

The National Fire Heritage Center's (NFHC) Communication Plan was developed to identify which communication mechanisms can be used to attract and inform people interested in our organization's mission. This communication plan is a living document that needs to be reviewed and updated annually by the Board of Directors. By way of definition, it is more appropriate for the NFHC to speak in terms of a "Communications Plan" over a "Marketing Plan," in that we are a non-profit organization. Arguably, we need to establish how we are going to communicate who we are, and why we exist, over trying to "sell" a product or a service.

The Communications Plan recognizes the efforts that are already in process and emphasizes the necessity of sharpening the organizational message for our target audience. Several channels of communication have already been established but the communication effort is not consistent nor completely coordinated. Therefore the cry for an organizational communications plan. The NFHC Communication Plan relies heavily on continuing our working relationships with partner agencies and organizations, along with the integration of computer based technology including: web-based applications and the use of social media. Ideally the NFHC Communications Plan will help build and strengthen the connections we have within our industry.

## Organizational Background . . .

Who we are and why we exist has been established and documented in the founding papers and The NFHC Strategic Plan (10-21-2007). The express purpose of the NFHC is clearly articulated in the mission statement:

*"The National Fire Heritage Center exists to preserve, protect and increase utilization of individual contributors to the body of knowledge of the American Fire Protection Services and allied disciplines through identification, acquisition, preservation, conservation and restoration."*

The mission statement speaks very clearly to a very specific target audience; people who are at the end of their careers and/or lives and who are looking for a place to memorialize their personal industry-related collections of books and papers. The NFHC Executive Board developed a list of the U.S. fire service leadership that falls into this category of interest. However, for the organization to become sustainable, it must also attract a younger demographic. To do so, the collection of archived material must show some relevance to the fire-related industry it serves.



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### Problem Statement . . .

The ability of NFHC to maintain and sustain itself hinges on building its identity and brand to attract funding in the form of membership fees, fundraising events, sale of duplicate materials and merchandise, along with grants. Funding is addressed in another part of the Strategic Plan (add info here). However, developing an identity and brand is the function of the NFHC Communication Plan. Attracting a sustained interest against similar and competing industry interests is a challenge.

The interest in the NFHC however will continue to grow as the collection of material grows and begins to show its true value. It is expected that students, staff, and contractors of the National Fire Academy and National Emergency Training Center will find the collection of material useful for research on class projects. As such, the collection of archived material should also garner not only academic interest but also but become a resource for historical researchers and authors.

The NFHC Library is both physical and digital. The physical location is co-located with Fredrick County, Maryland Fire/Rescue Museum. The Digital is also kept at the museum and can be found on the NFHC website ([www.theNFHC.org](http://www.theNFHC.org)). To date, the library includes:

- The NFHC Newsletter, a communication tool to keep membership aware of our activities by presenting news items of interest.
- The NFHC Collections, a catalog of those who have promised or have already donated material to the NFHC. Bibliographic information for these collections are in both the Museum and on the NFHC website.
- The NFHC Archives, at the Museum's physical site in Emmitsburg, Maryland this includes shelves and pallets of donated materials. On the NFHC website the archives includes bibliographic information segmented by authors, titles, and type of material.

The real value of the NFHC can only be realized once the archived collection is in place and people have access to its contents. As that is still under development other programs have been designed to help generate interest (or buzz) and to help establish our developing identity. The following programs have been initiated to establish our capabilities and value to the membership and to the industry we serve. These are:

- Hall of Legends, Legacies and Leaders – Here historical figures in the fire service and allied fire protection disciplines are spotlighted at the museum and on-line. The brief biographical information provided for each inductee provides visitors with their accomplishments. Understandably there are contemporary leaders who will one day be inducted into the Hall of Legends.



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- Oral Histories, the NFHC recognizes that much of our fire service history is not written down—but part of our oral tradition and passed along in stories told to one another! This institutional knowledge of how things get done and why things are the way they are is slowly disappearing with the passing of every story teller.
- The Benjamin Franklin Writers Award, this program acknowledges that tomorrow's industry related history is being written today. The intent of this program is to attract on a broader demographic to the mission of the NFHC.

The problem is that the organization currently attracts a very narrow demographic. Many younger people in fire protection, fire engineering, fire prevention and related industries do not have the time or interest in all this old stuff. It is therefore imperative to create a need in the minds of these people that the path to the future is begins with an exploration of the past!

### Communication Goal . . .

The communication tools at our disposal must remind people of our existence and show that as we grow we are in turn providing a real value and service to those who came before us, as well as to those who will come after. The goal of the NFHC Communication Plan is to support the core NFHC business and the Mission Statement defined in the NFHC Strategic Plan.

The Communication Plan will help institute the larger organizational goals by crafting the message, identifying the target audience, utilize appropriate communication tools, along with developing the evaluation techniques necessary to gauge the effectiveness of organizational communications. When placed in a table format (next page) the NFHC program initiatives can be viewed in the context of target audience, objective, message, assignment, timing and evaluation. From this perspective new programs can be developed and implemented specific to the needs of our audience.

### Specific Message . . .

Each NFHC program brings an opportunity to spotlight the organization as a whole. A specific message can and will be tailored to detail how a program can positively affect instructors, students, and researchers. Any specific message is a call to action or should encourage a specific behavior to either visit the NFHC collection or to push people towards the website.



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There are a variety of tools that can be employed to get the message to a multi-generational audience that is geographically dispersed and who are already inundated with multiple streams of information! These communication tools include face-to-face, electronic and hard copy communications. The pro's and con's of these tools are shown in the comment section of the following table:

COMMUNICATION TOOLS	
Method	Comments
<b>Face-to-Face</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Word of Mouth</li> </ul>	<p>Pro: The Area and State Ambassador program will allow volunteers to help spread the mission and existence of the NFHC.</p> <p>Con: This concept has recently been proposed but not yet actualized.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meetings</li> </ul>	<p>Pro: Meetings attended by executive board and staff are important to our communications as is meetings and mention of the NFHC by other board members.</p> <p>Con: NFHC discussion should be properly agendaized before being brought up in a meeting.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshops &amp; Events</li> </ul>	<p>Pro: Attending conferences and industry (fire or history) related events help spotlight the NFHC organization and resource.</p> <p>Con: Conferences require a lot of time, expense, and resources.</p>
<b>Electronic</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Email</li> </ul>	<p>Pro: E-mail is often the easiest way to communicate and to set up circulation lists for the various populations that need to receive targeted messages. The NFHC newsletter and other communications are sent out via mass-email.</p> <p>Con: Many people do not have the time to read everything emailed to them and will ignore non-urgent or impersonal messages. To get important messages sent out use an identifiable name. Everyone will read a message from an authority like Ronny J.</p>



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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Press Release</li> </ul>	<p>Pro: Press Releases sent to local and national trade/news media can reach a wider audience.</p> <p>Con: Press releases should be part of a coordinated communications effort to be effective.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Web Site</li> </ul>	<p>Pro: An organization's website is a good way to provide detailed information for those who wish to know more.</p> <p>Con: The website is a "pull" technology. That is, people have to be driven to the website and expected to pull information off of it.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social Media</li> </ul>	<p>Pro: Social media sites push information out to the membership and interested parties. The message should encourage people to visit the website or our collection for additional information. A simple "need-to-know" message in a tweet will drive people to the website for additional information or action.</p> <p>Con: Messages need to be coordinated with the website and staff.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NFHC Newsletter</li> </ul>	<p>Pro: Specific messages can be placed in the NFHC newsletter. The newsletter should drive people to the Museum or to the website for more information.</p> <p>Con: Similar to email, people are inundated with messages.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PowerPoint</li> </ul>	<p>Pro: Executive Staff, Board Members, Area and State Ambassadors will all be provided with a PowerPoint slide show that they can use to develop an interest and membership in the NFHC!</p> <p>Con: Not every NFHC Board Member will be interested in delivering a formal presentation.</p>
<b>Hard Copy</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business Cards, Brochures and Rack Cards</li> </ul>	<p>Pro: Provides a physical reminder of the NFHC along with contact information for future reference.</p> <p>Con: The cost of publication and updating versus actually attracting new members.</p>



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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Museum</li> </ul>	<p>Pro: Easily the best NFHC resource is to visit the collection itself. Staff are well versed on local and industry related history.</p> <p>Con: Not everyone has a chance to visit Emmitsburg.</p>
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## Delivering the Message . . .

The NFHC Communications Plan should not only address specific program areas, but also to help identify new program areas that will attract a wider demographic. In the table below there are multiple program areas previously identified that need to be communicated to our target audience. The objective is to educate and encourage our membership stakeholders to help us achieve our goal of creating a National Resource. As mentioned earlier, the communication plan should be updated annually to include new program areas.

### NFHC COMMUNICATION MATRIX

Proposed Initiative	Target Audience	Communications Objective	Specific Message	Communication Tools	Assigned To	Message Timing	Evaluation & Feedback
NFHC OUTREACH	Any and all Fire related organizations and meetings.	Educate and inform regarding the need and mission of the NFHC	We exist, We are growing, and We need your support	Presentation announcements (promotional fliers) and PowerPoint slide show and handouts.	Executive Board	On-Going	
NEWSLETTER	Membership	Interesting Info	Organizational Updates	Web-Email-Tweet	Executive	Triannually	
NFHC LIBRARY	NFA/NETC Instructors, Students and Staff	Resource materials available and hours of operation	Instructors- encourage written research assignments that rely on the archived material.  Students- hours for research.	Email, Newsletter, Website, Ambassadors, Social Media	Staff on Location	On-Going	



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Hall of Legends	Students/ Historians	Spotlight industry leaders and their accomplishments	Demonstrates and spotlights individual accomplishments	Website and Presentations		Annually	
Oral History	Students and Researchers	Record the oral histories of industry related personnel	Record cultural values and norms of behavior.	Email, Website, and Conducting Interviews			

## Proposed Initiative . . .

The NFHC Communications Matrix shows existing and on-going initiatives. The matrix can be expanded as the organization grows into additional areas or develops other outreach efforts. The purpose of the matrix is to help Executive Board Members and NFHC Staff develop a coordinated communication plan for every new initiative they propose. If the idea can be viewed from this matrices then its chances for success will significantly improve.

## Target Audience . . .

Clearly, the Executive Board needs to mine a wider demographic to help fulfill the long term mission and goals of the organization. Students, instructors and staff at the NFA and NETC are obvious targets. But how do we get people in fire houses, research facilities, manufacturing, and installation involved as well? Just as importantly how do we sustain the interest and commitment of our membership! These are a challenge for the communications plan.

## Communication Objective . . .

Each new and existing initiative should have a clearly defined communications objective. The Franklin Award for example is intended to attract the very people who would benefit from the NFHC Collections, historians, researchers, writers, and publishers. Redoubling the effort to make the Franklin Award a premier form of recognition will require a renewed focus on this objective.



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## Specific Message . . .

An effective message should be written concisely; simple to understand and interesting to our targeted audience! Each NFHC initiative should be articulated in the most compelling and simplest of ideas. Board members should share and collaborate their ideas to winnow out the specific message.

## Communication Tools . . .

The table begging on page four identifies most of the communication tools at our disposal. The trick is to select the right tool for the type of initiative, target audience and specific message.

## Assigned To . . .

Coordination of communication should occur with the President and Executive Director. It is anticipated that many of the Executive Board Members will have an opportunity to provide presentations on behalf of the NFHC. These opportunities should be communicated back to the top of the organization for coordination and perhaps support by way of supplies and materials. All members of the organization are authorized to help promote and spotlight the mission and goals of the NFHC.

## Message Timing . . .

How often the message is delivered, and to which target audience is important. We do not want to not over saturate one group at the expense of not reaching another. Some messages like the NFHC newsletter is delivered tri-annually. While other message such as a press release or tweet will express the urgency of the news or information we have to share.

## Evaluation & Feedback Objective . . .

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The Communication Objective should be measurable to enable an evaluation of a specific behavior we are encouraging. Evaluation should be conducted on each of the program areas to be able to rate their relative success. Collecting feedback, by conducting research and analysis on the success or failure of program areas is important to our sustainability.

**DRAFT**