

Inside Out

Building a Culture of Connection for Stronger Communication and Collaboration

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The core idea

strong external communication starts internally

**Communication is not just the announcement.
It is the alignment before the announcement.**

- What are we trying to accomplish?
- Why does it matter?
- Who needs to know?
- Who is responsible?
- What happens next?
- What does success look like?

Surface-level communication:
“We need to send an update.”

Strategic communication: “What do people need to understand, feel, do, or decide?”



TAKEAWAY

The deeper we get into why we are communicating, the more useful and effective that communication becomes.

Communication is not the last step

it is part of how the work gets done

When communication is treated as an afterthought, organizations create:

- Confusion and rework
- Duplicated effort
- Disengagement
- Vague external messaging
- Frustrated volunteers and staff

When communication is part of the process, organizations create:

- Shared expectations
- Clear ownership
- Better decisions
- Visible progress
- Stronger stories

If we have not defined success internally, it is hard to message clearly externally.

EXAMPLE

A membership campaign can mean **recruitment**, **retention**, **event attendance**, or **sponsor value**. Related? Yes. The same goal? No.



Associations are communication ecosystems

many groups, many priorities, many chances for noise

- Volunteer leaders
- Boards
- Committees
- Executive directors and administrative directors
- Dedicated staff or association management firms
- Sponsors and partners
- Members and allied organizations

**Commitment matters.
But commitment alone
does not create clarity.**

Association work is often deeply important to leaders and volunteers.

But it is not always their full-time job.

That makes clear, consistent internal communication essential.

TAKEAWAY

Associations are filled with people who care. Caring creates energy. It does not automatically create shared understanding.

Good people can still create unclear systems

the association reality

Turnover



New leaders and volunteers cycle in. Institutional memory gets thin. Ideas come back without the context of what has already been tried.

Silos



Committees, boards, staff, sponsors, and partners may each see only one slice of the work.

Hidden work



Progress may be happening in emails, meetings, resource pages, and side conversations, but no one sees the full picture.

STORY CUE

Mid-month leadership digest: same information, fewer barriers, immediate perceived improvement.

ACTIVITY #1

Where Communication Breaks Down

Think of a recent project, committee effort, board discussion, campaign, or event that became harder than it needed to be.

Where did communication break down?

Unclear expectations? Missing context? Duplicated work? A decision that was not shared? A meeting recap no one used? A volunteer or committee working in a silo? A lack of ownership or next steps?

2 minutes solo. 3 minutes table share.

Most communication breakdowns are not personality problems. They are clarity problems.

The silver platter principle

do not make busy people hunt for clarity

Making information available is not the same as making information usable.

- Easy to find
- Easy to skim
- Easy to understand
- Easy to act on
- Easy to revisit
- Mid-month leadership digest
- Designed snapshot of progress, challenges, wins, and future considerations
- Same information, fewer barriers
- Delivered to people instead of buried across systems

TAKEAWAY

Communication improves when we reduce the work it takes to receive the message. Put the information on a silver platter.

The Inside Out model

internal clarity creates external confidence

1. What are we doing?
 2. Why does it matter?
 3. Who is doing it?
 4. What is changing?
 5. What is not changing?
 6. How do we measure success?
- **What story are we trying to tell?**

Internal clarity gives external stories
something real to stand on.

**When the inside is aligned, the outside message feels
grounded, authentic, and connected to real work.**



Communication is culture

culture is shaped by what gets repeated

- If we repeatedly communicate only problems, people learn progress does not matter.
- If we send vague updates, people learn details are optional.
- If we rush through meetings, people learn speed matters more than alignment.
- If we skip recognition, people learn good work is invisible.
- If we don't close the loop, people learn follow-through doesn't matter.

What you
permit is
what you
promote.

What we repeat teaches people what matters.

TAKEAWAY

Problem solvers naturally focus on what is broken. That is useful, but incomplete. If we only name problems, we silently communicate that progress is less important.

The problem with “they don’t need to know”

information is not the enemy. poor framing is.

Fear: people will get into the weeds.

Fear: people will ask too many questions.

Fear: people will slow down the process.

Fear: the update will become a distraction.

**The solution is not less information.
The solution is better framing.**

**Try: “This is for awareness only. No action is needed today.
We will bring a recommendation back next month.”**

TAKEAWAY

People do not need less information. They need clearer instructions for how to use the information.

Stop worshiping urgency

speed is not the same as alignment

- Rushing can create false consensus.
 - Rushing can hide quiet confusion.
 - Rushing can miss real concerns.
 - Rushing can create rework later.
- **A good meeting is not just one that ends early.**
 - **A good meeting creates shared understanding.**

If the goal is only to tell people what has already been decided, you may not need a meeting. You need an update.

TOUCHPOINT

The “I’ll give you five minutes back” moment: valuable when time is protected, dangerous when we rush through the conversation people actually need.

Meetings should extract value

why are we gathering people?

- Test understanding
- Surface concerns
- Invite perspective
- Clarify tradeoffs
- Make decisions
- Build ownership
- Strengthen alignment

Do not use meetings only to read updates out loud.

Gather people to use their experience, ideas, and perspective.

TAKEAWAY

If opening up discussion feels scary, that is useful information. It means the group may need clearer norms and a stronger definition of good participation.

Ask before you assume

the communication platinum rule

Communicate with people how they need to be communicated with.

- What is the best way to keep you informed?
- How much detail do you want?
- What format helps you act?
- When do you want updates?
- What information is easy for you to miss?
- What does a useful recap look like to you?

You can waste time communicating in a way people do not receive, or spend a little time learning what actually lands.

Communication preference map

ask the people you work with to fill in the blank

- I prefer updates by...
- I am most likely to miss information when...
- I need meeting materials to be...
- A helpful reminder includes...
- A useful recap includes...
- I feel prepared when...
- I feel overwhelmed when...

**This is simple.
That is why it works.**

TAKEAWAY

better input about preferences means less frustration and better engagement.

ACTIVITY #2

Communication Preference Map

Choose two audiences you communicate with regularly. Board Members, Committee Chairs, Volunteers, Staff or AMC team, Partners, Members, etc.

“We are launching a new member/client engagement campaign.”

For each audience, answer three questions:

What do they need to know? What format will they actually use? What do they need to do next?

People are more likely to engage with communication that reflects how they actually receive, process, and use information.

Communication Preference Map In Action

Communication Preference Map

“We are launching a new member/client engagement campaign.”

What does the board need?

goal, budget, risk, decision needed.

Format: short executive summary with decision points

Action needed: approve direction or provide guidance

What do committee chairs need?

timeline, responsibilities, talking points, how to support.

Format: short email or checklist

Action needed: sign up, share, invite, or complete a task

What do members need?

why it matters, how to participate, what they get from it.

Format: campaign style email, social post, or event page

Action needed: register, respond, share, or participate

Make progress visible

people lose trust when they have to guess

- What was completed?
- What is in progress?
- What is delayed or at risk?
- What decision is needed?
- What support is needed?
- What happens next?

**The delay is usually
not the problem.**

The surprise is.

**Communicate progress
before people ask.**

TAKEAWAY

Silence creates stories, and those stories are not always generous. If progress is invisible, people assume nothing is happening.

Build the shortcut

busy people need a path of least resistance

- One-page summary
- Short executive brief
- Action-based subject line
- Skimmable bullets
- Decision points
- Background links
- What you need from them
- How much time to spend reviewing

“Please spend 10 minutes reviewing this summary before the meeting. It will help you contribute to the discussion.”

A cheat sheet can equip people to participate without making them dig through a massive packet. Tell people how to be successful.

STORY CUE

Talk about improving a board packet by adding a cheat sheet with high-level facts, numbers, comments, and decision points.

Turn noise into clarity

longer does not always mean clearer

- What is the point?
- What does the reader need to know?
- What do they need to do?
- What can be linked instead of repeated?
- What can be cut?
- What belongs in the subject line?

**A big document is not the same
as a useful document.**

TAKEAWAY

Generative AI can make it easy to produce a lot of words. But if the content repeats itself 50 times, it is not clarity. It is noise.



ACTIVITY #3

Turn Noise into Clarity

The Info

- Campaign is focused on **first-year and lapsed members**
- Need to avoid overlap with **Events Committee fall outreach**
- Board must approve **new spending**
- Rough budget is **\$2,500**
- Miguel may review the **lapsed member list**
- Alicia may draft the **first-year member message**
- Existing materials may already exist
- Feedback is needed by **May 24**
- Recommendation goes to the **June board meeting**

What Do People Need To Know

- 1.What is happening?
- 2.What needs attention?
- 3.Who owns what?
- 4.What feedback is needed?
- 5.By when?

t
Info

ACTIVITY #3

Turn Noise into Clarity

Hi committee chairs,

The Membership Committee is developing a campaign to better connect with **first-year and lapsed members** before the fall event. We are preparing a recommendation for the **June board meeting** and need your feedback by **May 24**.

What we need your input on:

- How do we avoid overlap with the Events Committee's fall outreach?
- Do you know of existing materials from the member survey or onboarding workgroup?
- Are there concerns with the rough **\$2,500** budget estimate?

Current next steps:

- Miguel will review the lapsed member list.
- Alicia may draft a welcome message for first-year members.
- We still need someone to confirm what existing materials are available.

Please send feedback by **May 24** so we can prepare a clear board recommendation.

Thank you!

Subject lines are strategy

tell people what to do before they open the email

Weak: “Board Packet”

Better: “Please review: 10-minute summary before Friday’s board meeting”

Weak: “Follow up”

Better: “Decision needed by Tuesday: approve member survey questions”

Weak: “See below”

Better: “Please review sponsor comments and send edits by 2 PM”

KINDNESS CUE

If you forward an email with no context, or just write “please see below,” ...come on. **Tell people what they are looking at and what you need them to do.**

Define success before you communicate

do not create noise. create understanding.

- What does success look like?
- What is the end goal?
- What do people need to know?
- What do people need to do?
- What decision is needed?
- What feeling or confidence are we trying to create?
- How will we know the communication worked?

**Sending the message is not
the success indicator.**

**The success indicator is what the
message made easier.**

"Painting Done" The practice of walking through exactly what a completed task or successful project looks like.

CONNECT

This is where the “paint done” idea comes in: define what done looks like before you ask people to communicate, decide, or act.

Internal wins become external stories

the best stories are noticed before they are written

- Committee improves the first-time attendee experience → communication effort (story) about helping new members feel connected.
- Volunteers streamline scholarship review → communication effort about expanding access to the profession.
- Board clarifies priorities → comms effort about where the association is headed and how members can get involved.

External storytelling gets easier when internal wins are visible.



Recognition reinforces what works

recognition is not fluff. it is direction.

- This mattered.
- This helped.
- This is worth repeating.
- This connects to our mission.
- This is how we move forward together.

**If people only hear from leadership
when something goes wrong, that
becomes the culture.**

Volunteers can feel taken for granted.

Staff can feel visible only when there is a problem.

Recognition turns isolated wins into repeatable culture.

AUDIENCE PROMPT

Ask: What is one thing working in your organization right now that you have not formally acknowledged?

Reference context: Gallup research connects recognition with engagement, productivity, loyalty and retention.

Create a home for information

make information easier to find and easier to use

- Volunteer resource center
- Password-protected leadership page
- Board and committee portal
- Shared Google Drive or Dropbox
- Basecamp or project hub
- Internal newsletter or monthly digest
- Committee dashboard
- FAQ or decision archive

The tool matters less than the behavior.

People should know where to go.

People should know what belongs there.

People should know how often it is updated.

TAKEAWAY

Turn the resource page from a file cabinet into a communication hub: updates, decisions, reminders, links, and questions.

Close the loop

the final five minutes matter

- Decisions made
- Decisions still open
- Tasks assigned
- Owners
- Deadlines
- What needs to be communicated
- Who needs to know
- When progress will be checked

Alignment does not happen because people attended the same meeting.

Alignment happens because people leave with the same understanding.

If decisions only live in minutes, they are easy to lose. A simple decision tracker makes them visible, searchable, and reusable.

Decision	Date	Owner	Next Step	Status
Move forward with member engagement campaign concept	May 12	Membership Committee	Bring budget recommendation to board	In progress

Final Activity: the meeting close-out

turn a positive conversation into action

A positive meeting without a clear close-out can still create confusion.

Scenario

*Your Membership Committee discussed a member engagement campaign for **first-year and lapsed members**. The group agreed the campaign should launch before the fall event and include a welcome email, lapsed member outreach, and possibly a sponsor-supported networking component.*

*A few items are still unresolved: the board must approve any new spending, the rough budget is **\$2,500**, staff needs to check for overlap with the Events Committee's fall outreach, and someone needs to confirm whether existing onboarding materials can be reused.*

Miguel agreed to review the lapsed member list by next Friday. A volunteer offered to draft the welcome email. Everyone leaves feeling positive, but no one has summarized the decisions, open questions, owners, or timeline.

Create the close-out.

- What was decided?
- What is still undecided?
- Who owns the next step?
- What is the deadline?
- Who needs to be informed?
- What should be captured for later?

INSTRUCTIONS

Groups of 2 create a close-out in 3 minutes. We'll share afterward.

Simple habits that change the system

small, repeated practices create culture

- Ask people how they want to receive information.
- Use action-based subject lines.
- Create one-page summaries.
- Send progress updates before people ask.
- Separate awareness items from decision items.
- Recognize progress regularly.
- Capture decisions in a searchable place.
- Close meetings with owners and next steps.
- Turn internal wins into external stories.

None of this requires a massive communications department.

These are communication habits. Repeated consistently, they create a stronger culture.

What I hope You Heard Today

effective internal communication builds trust and alignment

- People trust more when they do not have to guess.
- People engage more when they know what is expected.
- People collaborate better when they understand the goal.
- People contribute more when meetings invite actual discussion.
- People stay connected when progress is visible.
- People repeat good behavior when wins are recognized.

“We need to communicate more.”

To this:

“We need to communicate more intentionally, so people are aligned, informed, recognized, and able to act.”

The Inside Out Model is a communication approach that starts by building clarity, alignment, trust, and recognition inside the organization, so external communication becomes more strategic, authentic, and effective.



What will you try next?

choose one practice to bring back

Clarify

1. Define what success looks like before sending the message.
2. Separate awareness items from decision items.
3. Tell people what you need from them in the subject line.

Align

4. Ask your board, committee, or volunteers how they prefer to receive updates.
5. Add a five-minute close-out to every meeting.
6. Create a simple decision tracker.

Simplify

7. Rewrite one recurring report into a one-page summary.
8. Create a “silver platter” summary before your next board or committee meeting.
9. Turn one messy update into a clearer action-oriented message.

Recognize

10. Name one internal win each week.
11. Recognize one behavior you want repeated.
12. Turn one internal progress item into an external story.

**Try one.
Use it next week.**

Inside Out

Strong communication is not just what we send.

It is what we make easier for others to understand, trust, and act on.

When people are informed, included, and connected, they are better able to lead, volunteer, collaborate, and tell the organization's story.

Thank you

