



# **Gerald R. Ford Foundation**

## **Communications Audit & Communications Plan**

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## **Executive Summary**

The Ford Foundation currently has a strong communication and key message foundation for its publics. However, there are several areas for improvement in terms of communicative approaches, clarity and navigation ease of the website, and cultivation of new relationships. There are tactics that can be improved that consist of style and design, and presentation of information.

Below is a summary of communication strategies. These will be mentioned throughout the suggestions which will be detailed throughout the audit and plan:

- Consolidate all effective communications from the last 40 years
- Create a better production for YouTube videos in order to stimulate conversation
- Build new relationships and be responsive to those new publics
- Update website for a fresher appeal
- Share news and updates with current members and community members to increase awareness in West Michigan

Key messages within the audit:

- Ford Foundation increases awareness of the life and legacy of America's 38<sup>th</sup> President, Gerald R. Ford
- Promotes historical literacy, conferences, and educational outreach
- Sponsors collegiate buildings, events, exhibits, and programs

## Communications Audit

### *Introduction*

The communications audit is a review of an organization's total communications to understand what the organization is currently doing and accomplishing what is intended, keeping in mind the goals and objectives. The audit for the Ford Foundation is based on ~~depth interviews and~~ materials reviews.

### *Goals for Communication*

- **Deeper awareness.** While the Ford Foundation has been a longstanding staple in the Grand Rapids community, there is not a clear understanding of what it provides. People need to understand the programs and opportunities available through the Foundation as well as how they can give back. The National Archives and Records Administration of the U.S. Government funds the operations and maintenance of the Gerald R. Ford Library and Museum; however, public activities are purely funded through support of the Foundation. Specific awareness should relate to the Ford Foundation as a whole, not just the Museum or Library.
- **Current and potential relationships.** Sustaining relationships, both current and potential, should be emphasized. This essentially means that individuals or organizations give not once, but keep the Ford Foundation in mind when thinking of contributions in the future. This also means encouraging donors to join the Friends of Ford membership program to have early notification to special events, free admission to the Museum, and other benefits.
- **Digital archives.** The ease of accessibility and navigation of the digital archive newsletters should be more readily organized for viewers. Although members can receive a printed or digital copy of the newsletter, all are available on the Ford Foundation website. The website should structure these archives in a way that makes it easier for viewers to search for and select a particular newsletter. (this may be a tactic)
- **Website.** The Ford Foundation website currently has a multitude of pages; however, the style and design of the website may make it hard to view and read for those hard of sight. (this may be a tactic too)
- **Mutual understanding.** Organization and corporate donors need to have a better understanding of the needs of the Ford Foundation, and partners need to have a better understanding of what is available to them.
- **Referrals.** Word-of-mouth referrals to the Ford Foundation is one way to create new relationships with donors and partners.

### *Publics*

The following are key publics identified:

- Financial donors. This public can be broken down into current and potential givers as well as an individual-based or corporation/foundation-based donors
- Underserved populations
- People interested in presidential history or museums
- Community members. This may include college students and local residents
- Board members
- People who don't know about the Ford Foundation
- Employees and potential employees
- Partners

### *Messages*

Given the identified publics and goals for communications, the following are key messages identified upon review of the materials that should be expressed:

- We increase awareness of America's 38<sup>th</sup> President, Gerald R. Ford
- We promote historical literacy, conferences, and educational outreach
- We sponsor collegiate buildings, events, exhibits, and programs
- We provide exhibits, public activities, and community events at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum
- We offer a Friends of Ford membership that allows early notification to special events, free admission to the Museum, and other benefits
- We rely solely on donations from donors and members
- We provide Smithsonian-quality feature exhibits and noted speakers
- We support excellence in journalism through awards and scholarships
- We provide and support academic facilities at many Michigan collegiate campuses

### *Tactics*

Below are communications tactics used by the Ford Foundation. An analysis of each tactic will be included within the Materials Review section:

- Publicity
- Website
- Printed and Digital newsletter
- Postcards
- Banners
- Social Media

### *Evaluation*

The Ford Foundation has several hundred members that contribute and holds many partnerships as a way to divide costs. However, many people in West Michigan do not know about the Ford

Foundation, its membership program, or facilities that it has funded. (These are perceptions that I found based on the initial client meeting).

- I didn't know that you could be a member of the Ford Foundation
- Unaware that the Ford Foundation existed

## Materials Review

After reviewing current communication tactics of the Ford Foundation, a summary for each is below. This includes target audiences, objectives, and key messages. All were considered as the basis for evaluation. **Suggestions are made in bold.**

### *Publicity*

Upon searching “Ford Foundation” in Google, there is another Ford Foundation listed first. This one is based in New York. In fact, the Ford Foundation (Grand Rapids) does not even come up on the first page of results. This means that any news related to the Ford Foundation will likely be pushed towards other search result pages, causing a decrease in potential viewers or a case of mistaken identity. Along with this, viewers are less likely to search through each page of Google search results to find the Ford Foundation.

News releases, as mentioned above, will be pushed back on Google’s search results, unless key words like “Grand Rapids,” “Gerald R. Ford,” “Library,” “Museum,” or other similar words are used. They are accessible through the website but do not show up within the first two pages of search results, which is typically the only amount of pages viewers will look through.

#### **Suggestions:**

- **Short news releases about ongoing work, new partnerships, or press releases should be sent to West Michigan media (MLIVE, WOOD TV 8, WOOD Radio, etc.), as well as local media of partners**
- **Ask these partners to post the news release on their websites or media platforms and do the same on the Ford Foundation website**
- **Both organizations would receive more awareness, perhaps from publics of the opposite organization, and highlights the efforts of each**

### *Website*

The website should be easily accessible for all publics. This includes navigation of the website. The design and color scheme of the website may make it hard for viewers to read, specifically if there is a vision impairment. The Ford Foundation provides many facilities to collegiate campuses throughout Michigan as well as educational opportunities and community events. Information about these facilities on the website may garner more awareness about the Ford Foundation and what it does.

The website provides good and detailed information, along with constant updates from news releases. As mentioned above, search results from Google list a different Ford Foundation which means these news releases listed on the Ford Foundation website will likely not be seen within the first few search results pages.

There are several pages and subpages within the website, but the website is outdated. A more simplistic approach to the design of the website will allow for a more refreshed site for viewers. While the navigation is clear, there are a couple of labels on the navigation bar that link

to other websites. When viewers click on different labels, they should not be redirected to the same website, especially if the page titles on the navigation bar are different.

Unlike many other websites, the Ford Foundation website does not provide a search bar. This may make it even easier for viewers to navigate the website and search for a specific news release or person.

**Suggestions:**

- **Move social media links to its own page, instead of listing at the bottom**
- **Condense pages to provide better descriptions and direct links (if applicable) to other websites**
- **Update design, including font and potentially the color scheme; it may be hard for viewers with vision impairments to read**
- **Provide more information on the educational facilities that have been built at different collegiate campuses**
- **Provide a search bar for even easier accessibility for viewers**

*Printed and Digital Newsletter*

The newsletter has a consistent format and is easy to read. It lists the full board and provides images, as well as captions for the images. It is fully accessible from the website and through the mail as a printed copy. It provides detailed information for each section and includes information on how to join the Friends of Ford membership program, schedule of upcoming events, and individual facility news and updates.

The digital newsletter is accessible from the Ford Foundation website; however, it is difficult to search for a particular newsletter. All archives are listed on one page, meaning that viewers will have to scroll to find. The archives date back to 1982, making the search somewhat difficult. Providing a navigation bar label under “News,” with sublabels for the year, will make it even easier for viewers to find a specific newsletter.

**Suggestions:**

- **If changes to the color scheme are made on the website, the same changes to the color scheme in the newsletter should be made to create consistency**
- **Create a navigation bar label for viewers to find a specific newsletter in the digital archives**

*Postcards*

Postcards provide a unique communicative way to spread information about updates and events to the community. There is a picture and brief description or biography of the news or person. It has a clear and concise layout.

**Suggestion:** N/A for now

*Banners*

Banners provide an eye-catching source of information to pedestrians. They are large in size and have a picture with a title.

**Suggestion:**

- **When able to, have a representative from the Ford Foundation table in Kirkhof Center to give information to students, professors, and faculty** (Lauren mentioned they did this)

*Social Media*

At the bottom of the Ford Foundation website, there are four main links to social media accounts, including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Vimeo, and YouTube. All appear to be active but do not have much engagement.

Facebook has over 8,000 page likes and follows. They post a consistent amount of posts, photos, and videos but engagement is low. Posts rarely get over 50 likes and less than 10 shares or comments. Their “About” section provides information such as a website link, phone number, email, Facebook Messenger link and a very short description about the Foundation. They regularly update their events.

Flickr is a photo sharing social media platform where users can interact with various photos. The Gerald R. Ford account has less than 66 followers and has an average of 10 views per photo album but has 1.4 million views overall. This is a somewhat outdated platform. Many social media users tend to prefer Instagram as a photo sharing platform; however, the information that Gerald R. Ford provides may not translate well to this platform.

Vimeo is a video sharing app that has a consistency in posting. There is some consistency with Facebook videos posted; however, there are some videos that show up on one platform but not the other.

Twitter is a popular social media platform, much like Facebook, although each caters to different publics. Many businesses have both, but Twitter is an easy way to talk to other individuals. The Ford Foundation does not appear to be as active on Twitter as compared to their other forms of social media. Their last tweet was in October of 2020 while their last like is from December of 2017.

YouTube is another popular way for creators and viewers to interact with one another. This channel has almost 1,700 subscribers. The videos posted on the YouTube account, which is GRFordLibraryMuseum, posts longer videos, some that are over an hour in length. Each video varies in views, likes, and comments. In order to have better production and conversation within this site, it would help to include the Ford Foundation within the name. This will tie the Foundation, the Library, and the Museum together.

**Suggestions:**

- **Consistency within photo albums on platforms – albums on Flickr should be the same albums on Facebook**
- **Consistency with videos on platforms – videos on Vimeo should be the same videos on Facebook**



- **Consistency with Tweets and Facebook posts to increase views, both with the post and the link (if applicable) to a news release or website**
- **Include the Ford Foundation within the YouTube name and provide a link on the Ford Foundation website**

### *Conclusion*

The audit of the Ford Foundation shows a strong foundation of communications tactics; however, it also revealed recommendations for improvement in the execution of future communications. These will be detailed in the communications plan below.

## Communications Plan

### *Introduction*

The communication plan is an integral part of the audit process. Publics are detailed below, with objectives, key messages, tactics, and evaluations for each. This is based on information in the communications audit.

Publics: financial donors, underserved populations, people interested in presidential history or museums, community members, board members, people who don't know about the Ford Foundation, employees and potential employees

### Financial Donors

- *Objectives* – Continuous financial contributions; larger gifts over time
- *Key Messages* – The Ford Foundation's public activities are fully funded through support of the Foundation
- *Tactics* – All tactics can serve this public but primarily newsletters, social media, and the website, personal visits, calls, and emails, annual report
- *Evaluation* – Track number, frequency, and dollar sum of gifts; donor surveys and feedback

### Underserved Populations

- *Objectives* – Increase awareness for those of low socioeconomic status, specifically about scholarships and educational opportunities available
- *Key Messages* – We provide educational opportunities, programs, and scholarships
- *Tactics* – Website and newsletters may serve this public the best, representative visit to schools, presentation, tour of Museum for schools
- *Evaluation* – Record number of participants at presentation and tour; feedback from students and teachers

### People Interested in Presidential History or Museums

- *Objectives* – Increase visitor numbers to Museum and Library; analytics on website views
- *Key Messages* – We foster increased awareness of the life, career, values, and legacy of America's 38<sup>th</sup> President, Gerald R. Ford
- *Tactics* – All tactics can serve this public, virtual and in-person (when able to do so) events, promote Friends of Ford membership program, tours of Museum and Library
- *Evaluation* – Track number of new members of Friends of Ford, visits to Museum and Library, and new attendees of events

### Community Members

- *Objectives* – Increase awareness of Ford Foundation; volunteer opportunities; become a donor and member of Friends of Ford
- *Key Messages* – Local foundation and Museum (for West Michigan) and Library (for East Michigan), hometown President
- *Tactics* – All tactics can serve this public, virtual and in-person (when able to do so) events, promote Friends of Ford membership program
- *Evaluation* – Track number of new members of Friends of Ford, track analytics of visitors to website and social media, number of volunteers or volunteer hours

#### Board Members

- *Objectives* – Positive attitude; advocate for Foundation, buy in to organization
- *Key Messages* – Staple of the Grand Rapids community, see the impact, every job matters
- *Tactics* – All tactics can serve this public, board meetings, internal newsletter, anonymous survey or feedback
- *Evaluation* – Employee retention, employee surveys

#### People Who Don't Know About the Ford Foundation

- *Objectives* – Increase initial awareness and build onto the brand; can also apply to donors, partners, employees, and community members
- *Key Messages* – Provides facilities for collegiate campuses, hosts public activities, local
- *Tactics* – All tactics can serve this public but primarily social media and website
- *Evaluation* – Ask how this public learned about the Ford Foundation through survey or feedback

#### Employees and Potential Employees

- *Objectives* – Positive attitude; advocate for Foundation
- *Key Messages* – Staple of the Grand Rapids community, see the impact, every job matters
- *Tactics* – All tactics can serve this public; board meetings; internal newsletter; anonymous survey or feedback, employee of the month
- *Evaluation* – Employee retention, employee surveys

#### Partners

- *Objectives* – Build on existing relationships, create new relationships, share feedback, understanding of mission and values
- *Key Messages* – Support for other foundations and businesses, partner and not a vendor, education opportunities
- *Tactics* – All tactics can serve this public, cold calls, business meetings
- *Evaluation* – Partner survey and feedback, number of new, returning, or discontinuing partners