Communication Tools

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This collection of communication tools is a companion document to *Establishing a Teacher Leadership Initiative Working Committee* and offers Ohio district-level staff tools and templates to shape a comprehensive plan for stakeholder engagement and communication related to Ohio teacher leadership initiatives. They also complement the resources developed by the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC) (https://ohioleadership.org/) (see below for links). Stakeholder involvement is necessary to achieve the widespread buy-in for effective and sustainable formal teacher leadership initiatives; insufficient engagement of and communication with stakeholders can quickly derail the most thoughtful initiatives. This suite of communication tools and resources includes:

1. **Stakeholder Identification and Analysis Matrix.** The first step to effective communication is to identify individuals who have an interest in or are affected by the teacher leadership initiative. Stakeholders may include individuals, groups or organizations. Districts may find that it is neither practical nor necessary to engage with all stakeholder groups in the same way. Instead, districts should identify the level of interest and influence that stakeholders have in the initiative and prioritize efforts with those with the highest interest and influence. This matrix provides a list of common stakeholders and provides guiding questions to analyze their communication needs. Districts should complete this matrix before developing a communications and stakeholder engagement strategy.

2. **Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy – Guided Checklist.** Districts should use this guided checklist to discuss and decide how to engage stakeholders and communicate throughout planning for and implementing teacher leadership initiatives. The guided checklist reflects various stages of the initiative: planning for the new initiative, launching the initiative, ongoing communication and for the beginning and end of each school year. Districts should complete this guided checklist after completing their Stakeholder Matrix.

3. **Comprehensive Communication Plan Template.** After identifying stakeholders and addressing the questions in the guided checklist, districts are ready to develop a comprehensive communication plan (CCP). Districts can use a CCP as an action plan to ensure that all team members are communicating a consistent and time-appropriate message and that they are effectively engaging with stakeholders. The CCP can also specify who the lead should be for each communication. Districts should revisit this plan a few times per year to ensure planned communications are being executed.

4. **Suggested Communication Products and Processes.** Districts can use this list for ideas about the different communication formats and methods that may be used with different stakeholder groups.

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5. **Sample Newsletter Layout and Sample Newsletter.** A newsletter can be a great way to share ongoing information about the initiative with a variety of stakeholders, and can help grow stakeholders' understanding of the initiative, share changes or updates, celebrate milestones and provide contact information. Districts can use this sample layout and sample newsletter for ideas.

6. **Media Planning Tool.** Districts can use this tool to develop a strategy for communicating with media.

Resources created by OLAC that support the topics of communication, stakeholder engagement, and leadership are noted below.

For **OLAC video resources** on these and related topics, please visit: https://ohioleadership.org/video_library.php.

For **OLAC modules** on these and related topics, please visit: https://ohioleadership.org/search.php?type=modules.

For **OLAC webinars** on these and related topics, please visit: https://ohioleadership.org/search.php?type=webinars.

For **OLAC podcasts** on these and related topics, please visit: https://ohioleadership.org/search.php?type=podcasts.

For **OLAC Cornerstone Connection** articles on these and related topics, please visit: https://ohioleadership.org/search.php?type=cornerstone.

Below are the six tools and resources developed to complement OLAC resources and support teacher leadership in Ohio schools and districts.

1. Stakeholder Identification and Analysis Matrix

Stakeholder	What are their interests and concerns?	What are their information needs?	What is the best way to communicate with them?	How often would they like to be updated?	Should they receive public or private materials?
Internal					
Superintendent					
Teachers' union/ association representatives					
Representative group of teachers					
Representative group of principals					
Other central office personnel (assessment, human resources, research, student services)					
School board members					
Other (if applicable)					

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	1. Stakeholder Identification and Analysis Matrix (continued)				
Stakeholder	**What are their interests and concerns?**	**What are their information needs?**	**What is the best way to communicate with them?**	**How often would they like to be updated?**	**Should they receive public or private materials?**
External					
Other community representatives					
State or municipal officials					
Parents/community					
Media					
Partners					
Other (if applicable)					

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2. Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy – Guided Checklist

Question/item	Answer	Suggested products	Relevant stakeholder(s)
A. Planning and launching the new initiative			
Establishing a working committee 1. How have you ensured that the committee is representative of stakeholders? 2. What is the scope of the working committee's authority? For example, is the working committee strictly an advisory group? Can it make decisions? What kinds of decisions? Or is it solely an advisory committee? 3. How often will the working committee meet? When? 4. By what date will the committee accomplish initial tasks and project milestones? 5. How many members should the working committee have? 6. What are members' roles and expectations? Will there be a committee chair? 7. How will decisions be made in the case of disagreements? 8. Is there a set of collectively determined norms for the committee? 9. How have you ensured that the committee's decisions and activities build upon existing decision-making structures within the district?		Stakeholder list Nomination/identification process Announcement Goal of committee; expected outcomes and/or products Roles and responsibilities documents Group norms document Schedule of meetings Milestones Invitation packet Outreach schedule Decision-making criteria	

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2. Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy – Guided Checklist

Question/item	Answer	Suggested products	Relevant stakeholder(s)
Launching the initiative 10. Will you have a formal launch event? If not, how will you kick off the initiative? 11. How are you communicating with district-level leadership across a range of departments likely to be involved? 12. How will you set benchmarks to assess progress over the near, middle, and longer term and share at the launch so that people understand what success looks like? 13. How will you communicate information about each component of the initiative to internal and external stakeholders, including their role in the initiative and the initiative's overall objectives? 14. What communications are you using to explain how your initiative will operate and why the school or district is implementing it? 15. How will you communicate how you expect the initiative to contribute to district goals, including student performance?		Event kickoff notice Announcements List of key messages List of key district players Implementation benchmarks Progress monitoring schedule	

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Question/item	Answer	Suggested products	Relevant stakeholder(s)
B. Ongoing communications (updates and feedback loops)			
Updates on implementation progress 1. How are you communicating with school and district staff about progress? 2. How are you communicating with the public about progress? 3. How and with whom are you reviewing near-, middle-, and longer-term benchmarks? 4. How are you providing regular updates and progress reports to stakeholders?		Quarterly implementation updates Meeting schedule Progress summaries Electronic updates Quarterly press releases	

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Question/item	Answer	Suggested products	Relevant stakeholder(s)
B. Ongoing communications **(updates and feedback loops)**			
Addressing concerns/feedback loops 5. Have you identified aspects of your work plan that may cause concerns, and created messages to address those concerns? 6. How will you ensure you respond in a timely manner to questions and concerns raised about the initiative? 7. What internal strategy will you use to document and address common concerns and questions about the initiative? 8. How will you resolve disagreements regarding the need for changes to the initiative? 9. What means do you have to gather information, quickly and easily, from stakeholders (e.g., hotline, after school drop-in sessions, trained individuals at each school site who can answer questions)? 10. Have you established a process for teachers, principals and other stakeholders to ask questions, raise concerns and receive a response?		Updated FAQ documents Website updates	

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Question/item	Answer	Suggested products	Relevant stakeholder(s)
B. Ongoing communications (updates and feedback loops)			
Other 11. How are you maintaining continuity when leadership changes? How are you communicating with and engaging new staff who come into the schools or district? How will you catch them up on the initiative and their role? 12. How will you differentiate your communication to accommodate potential information requests from a variety of sources (i.e., community activists, media, parents, interested citizens)? 13. How will you engage the media? (*For more information about communicating with the media, refer to* Establishing a Teacher Leadership Initiative Working Committee. 14. How will you review and update your communication and stakeholder engagement plan?		Informational packet for onboarding Quarterly professional development/technical assistance sessions to review the initiative Stakeholder surveys Media plan template	

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Question/item	Answer	Suggested products	Relevant stakeholder(s)
C. At the beginning and end of each school year			
1. How are you closing out and kicking off each year with school and district staff?		Back-to-school kickoff meeting protocol Year-end implementation updates	
2. How are you closing out and kicking off each year with other stakeholders?		Year-end stakeholder meetings Year-end implementation updates	

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3. Comprehensive Communication Plan Template

The CCP should attempt to include six components:

1. Methods that inform district-level leadership across the range of departments likely to be involved in some aspect of implementation;

2. Widespread information distribution to educators and the public that provide evidence of transparency;

3. A means by which educators can gather information quickly and easily (e.g., confidential hotline, convenient after-school drop-in sessions, trained individuals at each school site who can answer questions);

4. A process for stakeholders to ask questions, raise concerns and receive a response;

5. Targeted communications related to key events throughout implementation (e.g., launching the initiative, summary end-of-year/changes for next year and sharing progress updates); and

6. Attention to the need to generate support that will make it possible to sustain the initiative.

Comprehensive Communication Plan				
Audience	**Key information/ content**	**Method**	**Owner/lead**	**Frequency/ issue date(s)**
• Superintendent • Teachers' union/ association representatives • Representative group of teachers • Representative group of principals • Other central office personnel (assessment, human resources, research, student services) • School board members • Other community representatives • State or municipal officials • Parents/community • Media • Partners	Initiative goals Key dates Points of contact	(e.g., email)		(e.g., Last week of August)

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Comprehensive Communication Plan				
Audience	Key information/content	Method	Owner/lead	Frequency/issue date(s)

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4. Suggested Communication Products and Processes

Districts may consider using a variety of communication products as part of their communications and stakeholder engagement strategy. Interactive communication processes could include in-person meetings and telephone conversations, as well as online meetings, texts and some forms of social media. The diversity of communication processes contributes to the overall success of the initiative. These lists, although not exhaustive, provide districts with some ideas about the different communication formats and methods that they can use.

Communication Products (listed alphabetically):

- *Electronic updates:* Emails sent to individuals subscribed to listservs that provide the latest information on progress and include interesting information to maintain excitement and engagement in the initiative. Email templates that provide a formatted structure for organizing information sent via email make it easy for stakeholders to locate information of interest because it is always in the same place.

- *FAQs:* A document or page on the district website that provides answers to the most frequently asked questions; districts should update FAQs regularly as the initiative progresses and new questions arise. FAQs also help ensure there is a definitive source for information on the initiative.

- *Flyers:* One-page documents that present information about the initiative and can be given to many people or customized to meet the information needs of specific subgroups of stakeholders.

- *Identification process:* A product that describes procedures to identify and recommend a specific group or individual for recognition or designation in a teacher leader role. The identification process should be formal, structured and transparent.

- *Implementation benchmarks:* A list of target dates that ensures all parties are aware of what activities need to be completed by a specific date; benchmarks help maintain accountability and facilitate evaluation of progress and performance.

- *Kickoff notice:* An announcement disseminated in print or electronically that informs all stakeholders of the initiative start date. The announcement design should generate interest and excitement in the initiative.

- *List of key messages:* A breakdown of the most important takeaways that the team feels it should communicate to stakeholders.

- *Meeting schedule (external):* Identifies the dates that meetings will address specific topics in order to ensure diligence and increase transparency; it establishes when the team will engage different stakeholder groups.

- ***Meeting schedule (internal):*** A list of dates and topics that specify what issues the meeting will address and when; it sets the dates when the team should provide progress updates, express concerns and ensure coordination of activities.

- ***Newsletters:*** A brief publication or formatted document containing recent updates that are of interest to stakeholder groups; it allows for customizing messages to specific groups such as policymakers, teachers or members of the community.

- ***Ongoing announcements:*** Ongoing updates regarding the initiative; they may include summaries of completed activities or information about upcoming events, meetings or decisions.

- ***Overall summary of the initiative:*** A brief description of the initiative that makes it easy for stakeholders to learn about it.

- ***Press releases:*** Documents created for broad dissemination to the public that provide information on the status of the initiative's goals and achievements; they can also be used to inform stakeholders about potential changes and help provide transparency and increase public awareness.

- ***Progress monitoring schedule:*** A list of target dates that establishes when the district will collect and address evidence of completion of activities and progress toward goals.

- ***Progress summaries:*** Brief overviews of what the team has accomplished in maintaining the schedule; they should include the major implementation accomplishments for each aspect of the initiative at specific points in time.

- ***Quarterly implementation updates:*** Internal documents created once every 3 months to summarize completed tasks and assess the overall status of implementation; updates allow all stakeholders to understand progress, identify issues/challenges and maintain focus on accomplishing the schedule.

- ***Review criteria (internal):*** A set of principles, standards or metrics the team will use to evaluate performance and progress; the review criteria should address all elements of the initiative as well as the effectiveness of communications and the efficiency and effectiveness of the team's management and operations.

- ***Roles and responsibilities documents:*** Documents that provide guidance on the assignments and span of authority for individuals involved in managing the initiative and its activities*.*

- ***Stakeholder list:*** A list of potential and actual individuals involved in or affected by the initiative; the list should consider individuals' contributions, potential impact and the dynamic relationships they have with each other.

- ***Stakeholder surveys:*** Online data collection tool for gathering stakeholder input on a defined set of items related to the initiative; it can also be administered on paper. Districts

should customize survey items to the interest of specific stakeholder groups. Districts should collect data regularly and analyze them at the end of the year, if not more often, to inform programmatic changes and improvements.

- *Website:* An easily accessible, online source that provides information on the initiative's goals and activities; it should address the needs of a broad cross-section of stakeholders. Districts should update their website regularly, possibly quarterly, with additions, edits and changes to reflect progress and demonstrate active implementation.

- *Year-end implementation update:* A summary of quarterly implementation updates created at the end of the year that includes completed tasks and reports on the annual progress of implementation; this allows all stakeholders to understand progress, identify issues and challenges and identify issues that need to be resolved to improve implementation in the next year. The year-end implementation update should also include a summary of the performance on the internal review criteria.

- *Year-end stakeholder meetings:* A series of public meetings scheduled over a period of 2 to 5 weeks that bring together various groups of stakeholders and provide formal opportunities to collect feedback and suggestions and identify opportunities for improvement. These meetings should be open to the general public and widely advertised to ensure the broadest representation of feedback is gathered. Districts could also use these meetings to recognize contributions, assess satisfaction and seek commitment for ongoing participation.

Communication Processes (listed alphabetically):

- *Design sessions:* In-person meetings that include all team members and provide an opportunity to brainstorm and promote collective ownership of implementation activities and commitments.

- *Feedback loop for principals:* Dialogue with principals implementing initiatives to provide guidance, support and feedback in nearly real time; feedback loops create opportunities for individuals to modify implementation strategies and achieve more positive outcomes.

- *Feedback loop for stakeholders:* Dialogue with community members to harness their opinions and generate consensus around moving forward.

- *Focus groups:* Groups of people who participate in a guided discussion about a particular issue to highlight challenges, ask questions and provide feedback. Focus groups can help create a clear understanding of how different stakeholders view specific issues.

- *Online method to submit questions/concerns:* A technology-driven process that enables stakeholders or the public to engage with the initiative; it is important to ensure that responses are provided in a timely fashion.

- *Planning sessions:* A traditional meeting that brings together all team members, and sometimes senior executives, to identify key decisions and define activities necessary to

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accomplish initiative goals. It is sometimes helpful to include a facilitator to maintain focus and ask difficult questions.

- *Presentations:* Presentations share information, objectives and timelines and other key information about the initiative with stakeholders; visuals should be engaging and focus on one or two main ideas or goals.

- *Public recognition:* Formal or informal acknowledgment that could include taking time at a meeting to thank someone for his/her efforts or providing a certificate or award at a district event.

- *Task forces:* A defined group of individuals who come together to address specific problems or work on a defined activity or issue.

- *Work groups:* Small teams created to leverage collaborative contributions related to important aspects of the initiative; they often focus on specific tasks or issues.

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5. Sample Newsletter Layout and Sample Newsletter

Newsletter Date(s)

Newsletter Title

Introduction

Start the newsletter off with a few sentences about what is included.

Latest News

Consider focusing the first main section of the newsletter on the latest relevant news or information you want to share with newsletter recipients.

In-Depth Discussion

Each edition of the newsletter should include one in-depth section that is longer than the other sections and is focused on a specific issue related to the initiative. Consider concentrating the in-depth section on an aspect of the initiative that is new or modified or an aspect of the initiative that has generated a lot of recent questions.

> Include colorful and eye-catching text boxes throughout the newsletter to share important information that does not need to be in a narrative format, such as important dates to remember, contact information or links to websites.

Participant Profile or Q & A

Programs can "come to life" if stakeholders are able to learn about how the work is being implemented in the field by actual people. Consider including a section in every newsletter that profiles the work of one of the teacher leaders.

Resources

Include links to relevant and helpful tools and resources.

Conclusion

Conclude each newsletter with an announcement or highlight of work that will take place between this newsletter and the next one and what might be covered in the next edition of the newsletter.

Contact Information: Always include somewhere prominently on the newsletter an email and/or phone number that readers can use to reliably contact the district with questions about the initiative

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6. Media Planning Tool

Developing a working relationship with the local media is critical. The media can either help or hinder the success of your initiative, particularly in or near large media markets. This template provides a variety of prompts you can use to develop a media plan around your initiative.

Step 1. **State the vision and mission for the initiative and three to five complementary sound bites to the vision and mission.**

Vision
Example: An education system that is supported by effective teachers and leaders for all students.

Mission
Example: To promote and advance teacher leadership.

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Sound Bites

Example: *"The [initiative] gives our district the opportunity to become leaders in the effort to increase educator effectiveness through job-embedded professional development, as well as reform our educator evaluation system. By involving educators in every step of the development process, we can build a system that is unique to the needs of our schools and student populations and garner great support from teachers and principals. We are excited to be part of this important endeavor that will ensure that all children in [the district] have access to a high-quality education."*

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Step 2. **List newspaper, radio, television and social media outlets (and contact if known) that may generate, or be used to generate, stories about the initiative.**

Print or online newspaper	Radio	Television	Social media
e.g., The Columbus Dispatch	*e.g., Ohio News Network*	*e.g., News 5 Cleveland*	*Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram*

Step 3. **Decide how you will communicate with the media outlets described in Step 2.**

Media outlet	Program person or key contact responsible for communicating with this media outlet (including initial communication/launch, feedback loops and monitoring reactions)	How will you use this media outlet to drive communication about the initiative?	What type(s) of communication (phone call or group conference call, email, share news release, in-person meeting, op-ed, other) are appropriate for this media outlet?
e.g., The Columbus Dispatch		• *Share press release for launch* • *Invite to conference call for press* • *Coordinate op-eds and letters to the editor*	• *Press release, op-eds, conference calls, letters to editor, email*

Step 4. **Develop a timeline for when to interact with the media outlet described in Steps 2 and 3.**

Media outlet	Points in the initiative to communicate with media outlet (i.e., launch, key milestones, end of each year)	Specific dates/months/quarters to communicate with media outlet
e.g., The Columbus Dispatch	*Initiative launch, major milestones*	*Ongoing*

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This document was adapted from "Project Communication and Stakeholder Engagement" by J. Koppich, C. Rowland, D. Fireside, J. Keleher and D. Wogan (2016).