Making the case for comms – Barking Owl (26/03/25)

The Barking Owl is the NAVCA network for communications workers across the NAVCA membership. We meet every month to discuss a different comms topic.

In this meeting, we talked about how important communications is to organisational strategy, and shared our ideas, experiences and challenges around advocating for comms. We talked about five different categories of 'making the case for comms'. This document shares the experiences of comms workers at local infrastructure organisations, and will give you some ideas to bring back to your colleagues.

Representation of communications at senior management level

- It can be helpful to have communications representation at senior level, as comms people have a good understanding of reputation and PR. This also allows for a proactive approach to managing reputational risks, leveraging media opportunities, and driving campaigns that amplify our voice, ultimately increasing reach, influence, and funding potential.
- We found that there is a mix in the group as to whether people are part of the senior management team or not. Some people are communications managers but not in the senior management team.
- We agreed it can save time to have representation for comms at a senior level as there is already an understanding of the importance of comms when they have strategic conversations. We also spoke about having a dedicated comms trustee who can advise on comms, if there isn't a comms staff member in the senior management team.

Staffing for comms

- Staffing for comms is very mixed across NAVCA members – at Barking Owl, we usually find that people are the only comms worker at their organisation, but a few members do have comms teams.
- One comms manager felt that having an officer role would increase their capacity to create video content, graphics, explore new technologies and social media options and more, allowing the manager to focus on the strategic elements of comms more effectively.
- Some members found that having a communications assistant made a huge difference.
- Some members were concerned about sharing the responsibility for comms with someone else, and the risk that they aren't on the same page as you in terms of

branding and messaging. One member job shares at the same level, which they feel does not work. They think it would be better to have someone who picks up the strategic/manager role, and one person to do the officer role.
- We talked about the need to manage external expectations in terms of what additional staff can do.

Budget

- Many members either do not have a budget at all or find it difficult to ask for a higher budget for equipment etc. Some members have been asked to bring in equipment from home to use, such as film and photography tools. This might be due to colleagues not seeing the value of having that equipment.
- Budgeting for comms-specific hours helped one member to achieve goals that might otherwise have been shelved.
- Some members don't have a specific comms budget, but do have funding from projects.
- We talked about how it could be worth pointing out that some/more budget = better output, which = greater reach, which = more support, greater visibility, supports funding bids etc.

Website

- We agreed that website development should be a priority for all our organisations.
- One member found that social media channels were prioritised over the website, and one member shared that they once had a manager who suggested getting rid of the website completely and just putting everything on Facebook!
- Some members would like to a website review, but find it difficult to have the time and headspace to do this.
- A monthly amount for website development and subscriptions would also allow organisations to continuously improve their key sector-facing platforms.

Internal comms

- Internal communication is a continuous process within an organisation that keeps employees informed and connected to the organisation's work and values.
- We know that good internal comms supports a positive organisational culture, encourages collaboration across departments, and reduces misunderstandings or silos. When supported by senior management, it reinforces transparency and trust, boosts morale, and enhances overall productivity, ensuring that everyone works together effectively.

- Some members of the group found that they were being asked to be responsible for internal as well as external communications, but they felt that this was the responsibility of senior management.
- We agreed that having a proper internal comms structure would be helpful.
- Some members use Teams for internal comms.