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# ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

## How strategic plan campaigns launch organizational change

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Standing ovation. Hands reaching for Kleenex.

Not an unusual response for a back-to-school event. But unexpectedly, this was a sincere response to the launch of our strategic plan. Seriously.

Our process to develop a strategic vision and plan lasted almost a year, included a diverse team and a variety of input, and resulted in a boost to morale and a roadmap for achieving both short- and long-term goals.

### How did we do it?

Partly, this was circumstantial. The district had just gone through some turbulent times. People needed a way to reconstruct the image and narrative of the agency. The strategic planning process created the opportunity to do so. It was a useful exercise for defining the organizational vision, plotting the next steps and boosting morale.

A process like this requires a group effort. We built a team of creatives: graphic designer, web designer, multimedia expert, copywriter, videographer. We identified the heart elements of the planning process and the plan. We sought out and found thoughtful moments and people that were passionate about the plan. We asked the people that everyone knows and the people who were lesser known. We asked them to tell us — and everyone — why this mattered to them and why it mattered to kids. In their words. In their way. In their time. We built our materials in and of their collective voice. And it resonated. It wasn't a plan off the shelf. It was of them and for them and it resonated with them.

### Informational materials

We developed a variety of materials for the process and for the plan as a result of the process. Table 1 lists the materials prepared for each phase. Here is the link to all of the 2017-19 and 2019-21 campaign materials: [multnomahesd.org/mission.html](http://multnomahesd.org/mission.html).

For subscription information, contact WSSDA at (800) 562-8927 or (360) 493-9231.

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**Table 1. Strategic Plan Campaign Materials**

Creating	Launch	Ongoing Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress videos (4)</li> <li>• Talking points</li> <li>• Online forum “Ask Laura” (Q&amp;A with the communications director)</li> <li>• Timeline posters</li> <li>• Roadshows to sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Video</li> <li>• Common area posters</li> <li>• Workstation posters</li> <li>• Buttons</li> <li>• Back-2-School</li> <li>• Video</li> <li>• Pens</li> <li>• Lanyards</li> <li>• Supt. Address</li> <li>• E-news features</li> <li>• Website and social media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mid-year and annual update materials to the Board</li> <li>• Monthly presentation to Board by goal teams</li> <li>• Monthly Stock-Takes to Cabinet</li> <li>• E-News updates to the agency</li> <li>• Annual review with Advisory Committee</li> </ul>

**Tips for your strategic planning process**

**Do use a team. Don’t do it alone.**

A lengthy planning process requires stamina. A team of creatives helps keep a campaign approachable and combats topic fatigue. After a six- to nine-month process, even the most stalwart among us will jump at an invitation to watch paint dry rather than continue to create content on the same topic — certainly paint drying is more approachable to most readers than strategic planning. After all, who doesn’t have a story of a paint job gone horribly wrong?

**Make it approachable.**

Making the process manageable means not including everything. A strategic plan doesn’t include every program, school, department and service that a district provides. It does name strategic aims.

A good campaign will help individuals across the agency understand and track the progress in a clear and approachable way even if they aren’t directly involved with the work. Getting this right can be a bit of a challenge in the world of edu-speak. Creating campaign materials with a team can go a long way to making the campaign materials approachable.

**Prepare for topic fatigue.**

After working through a six- to nine-month planning process, topic fatigue takes hold right when energy is needed most for the campaign launch that will result in inspiring headlines like, “Board adopts strategic plan” that may be met with an overwhelming absence of hearts, thumbs-ups and shares.

Even after the launch, it is so easy and tempting to hit the snooze button and delay, sometimes forever, reporting on implementation efforts and results. To combat this, seek out non-typical teammates to help build and maintain energy through the final stage. Consider inviting your best in-house event planner to plan and host a launch event complete with cake, ribbons, t-shirts, pens, wristbands and the high school jazz ensemble. Ask a neighboring district colleague to plan out digital and social media posts with you. Work with a contractor to create

something fresh and edgy. Create co-responsibility for sharing out by scheduling cabinet and board update presentations two or three times a year — and be okay with it not always being perfect.

**Drumroll please...Prepare for the finale.**

The ad hoc team of creatives we assembled coincided with an agency culture shift away from silos and toward multi-disciplinary teams. We deliberately experimented with the discomfort of asking and inviting others to contribute who weren't formally trained or experienced in communications and creating campaigns. Working in this way wasn't always fast or smooth — but on balance, it resulted in a better campaign, a greater sense of community across the agency and a broader and deeper support for the plan.

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*Contributed by Laura Conroy, communications director, Multnomah Education Service District*