

#23NTCCommsDevTeams
#23NTC



Communications and Development Teams Working Better Together



Your Friendly Panelists



**Alice
Hendricks**
(She/Her)

**Cause Craft
Consulting**



**Karla
Capers**
(She/Her)

Oxfam America



**Julia
Toepfer**
(She/Her)

**National
Immigrant
Justice Center**



**Misty
McLaughlin**
(She/Her)

**Cause Craft
Consulting**

Research

We asked nonprofit staff to weigh in on:

- What works and what doesn't
- How process & governance helps them (or doesn't)
- Creative solutions to effective collaboration

84 Responses



Friction Between Nonprofit Development and Communications Teams

Why Can't We All Just Get Along?

An often-overlooked challenge in many nonprofit organizations is the working dynamic between Communications and Development teams. Staff frequently report difficulty reconciling conflicting goals, understanding each other's audiences and needs, and figuring out effective ways of working together — among other issues. Some organizations have pioneered creative solutions for working together, while others have created separate spheres in order to just “get by.”

As [capacity-building consultants](#) for both Development and Communications teams, we are frequently called upon to assist organizations with this dynamic. This survey further explores how inter-departmental friction plays out across the nonprofit/NGO/social sector, what's fundamentally at stake, and how organizations can pursue high-functioning, sustainable ways of working between their Development and Communications teams. We anticipate publishing the findings of this research through various written pieces, conference presentations, and on our website.

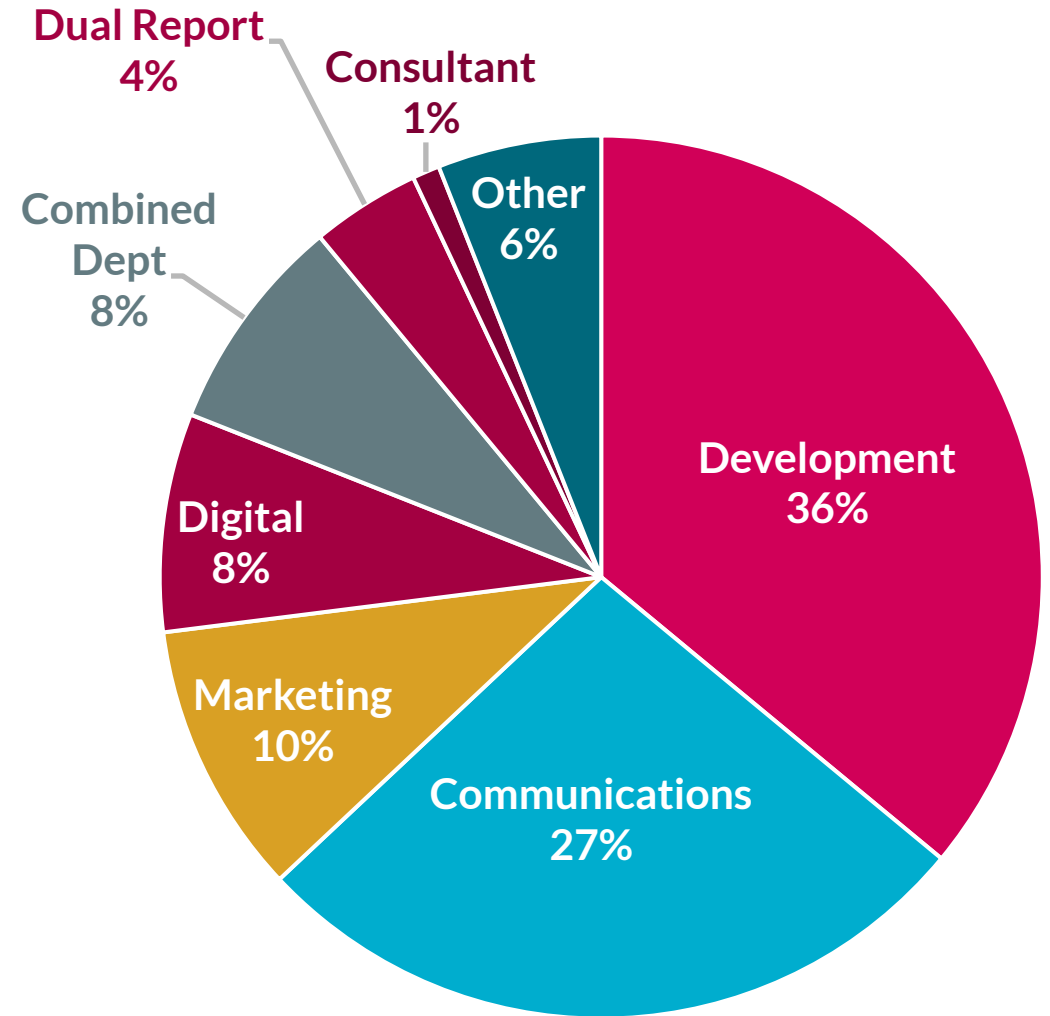
...approximately **10-15 minutes** to complete. It is **fully** opportunity to provide your email research on this

Survey Participants

Mix of Org Types

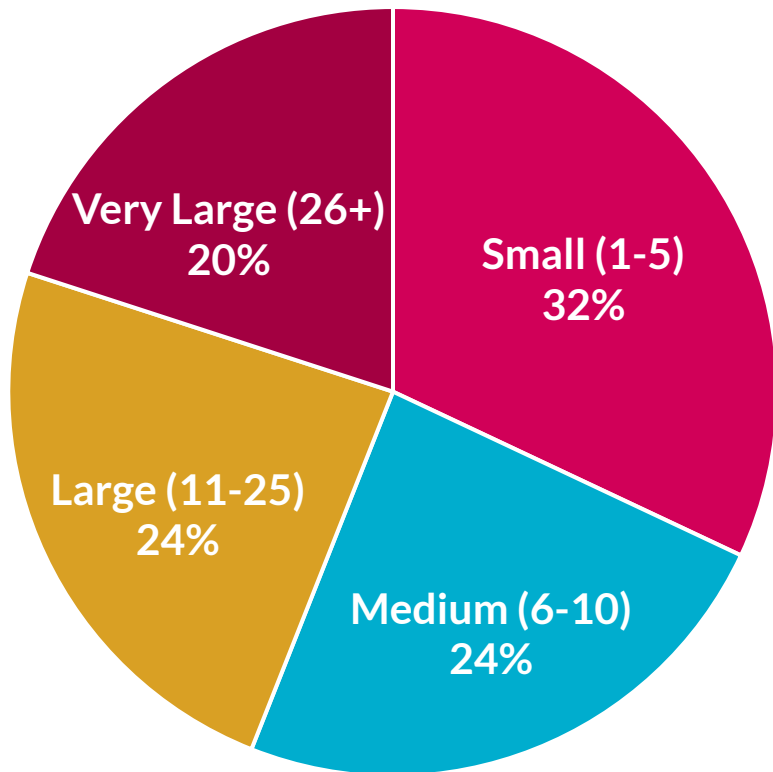
- Arts & Culture
- Disaster/Int'l Relief
- Environmental
- Health
- Education, Hunger/Poverty
- Public Media Organizing
- Religious
- Rights
- Social Services Wildlife/Animal
- Welfare
- Consultants

COMMS & DEV STRUCTURES

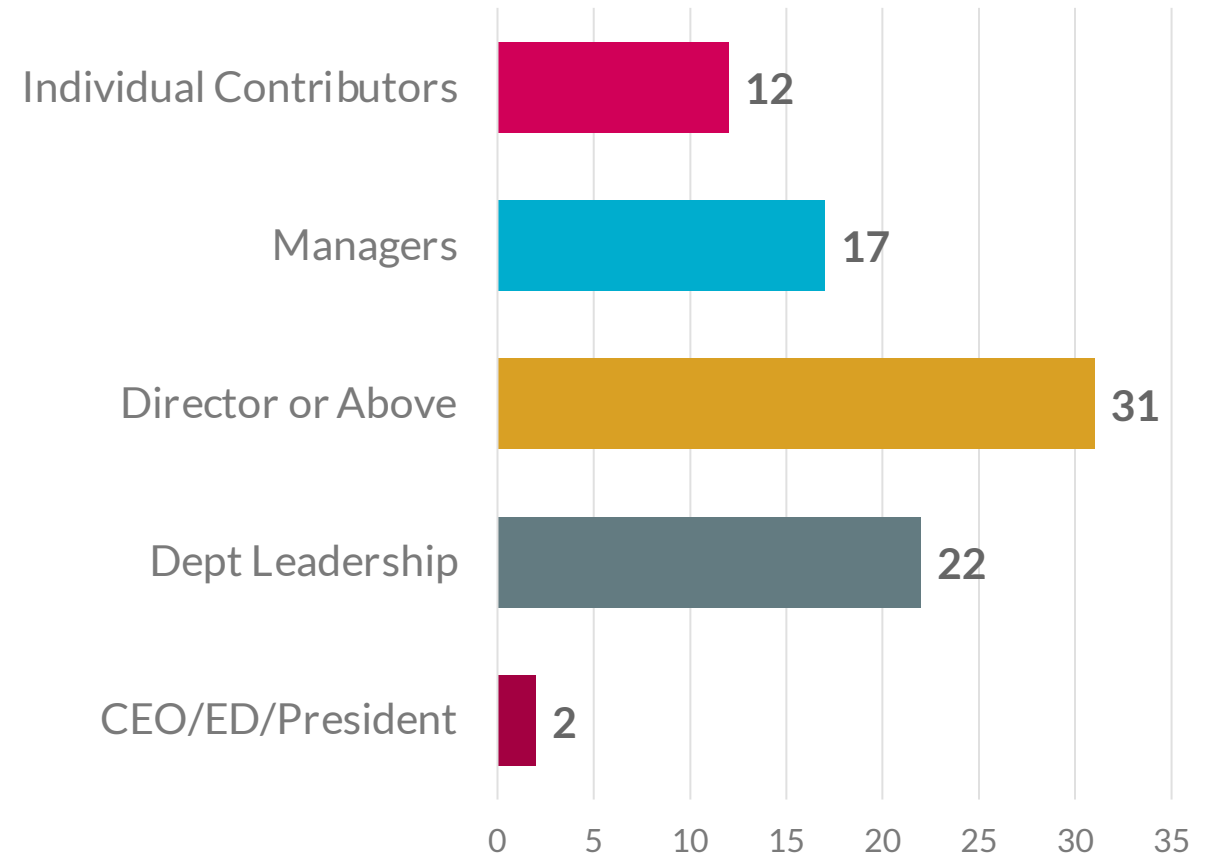


Survey Participants

TEAM SIZE

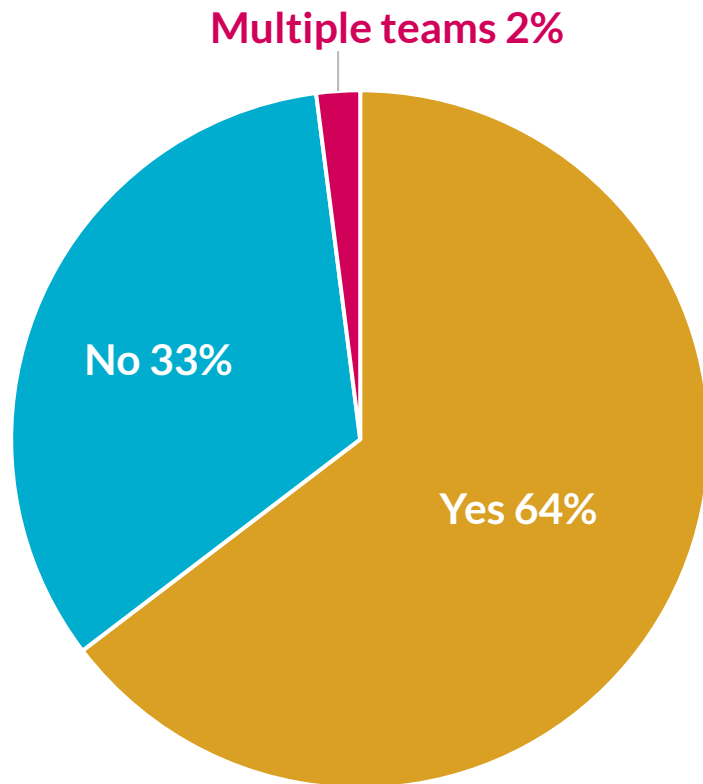


ROLES

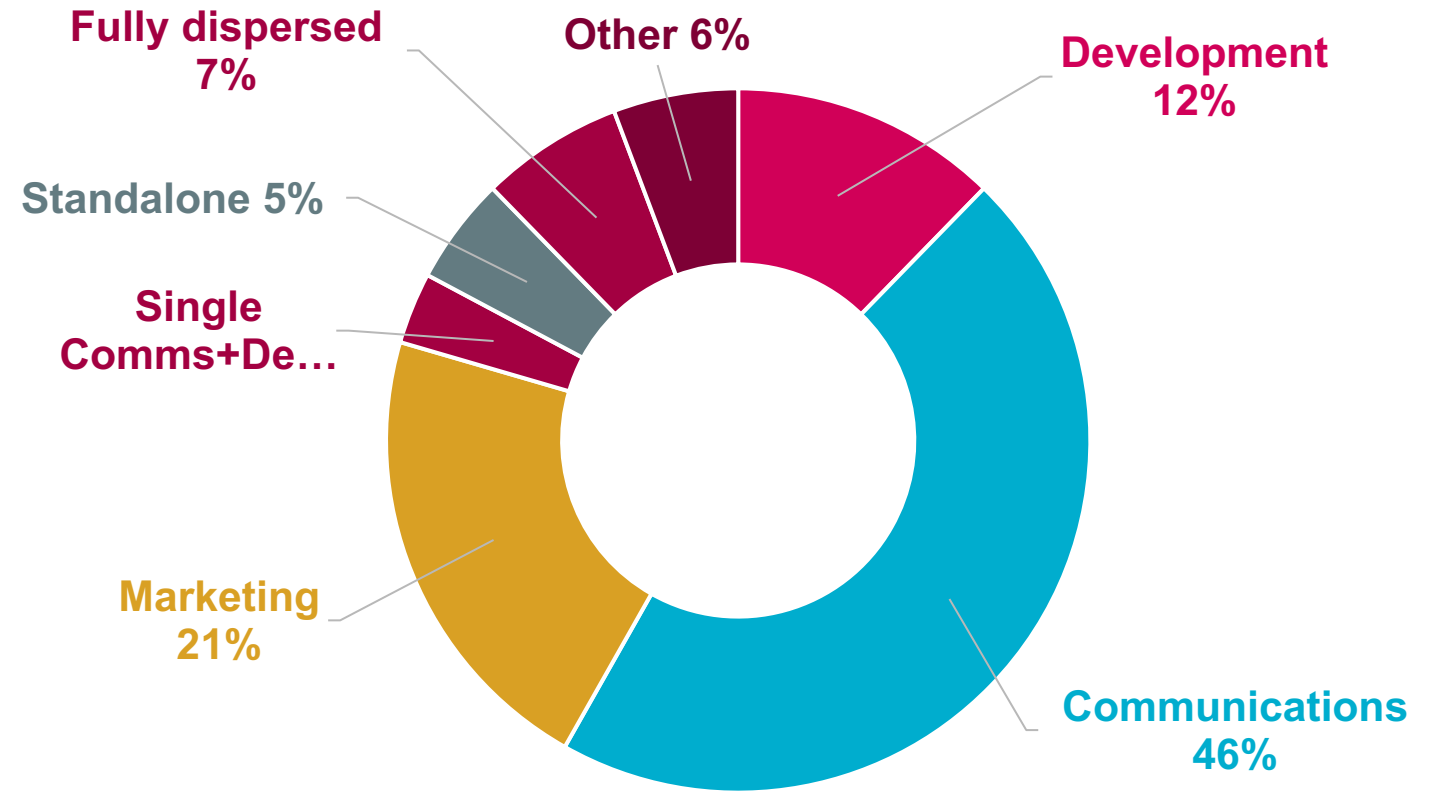


Survey Participants

DISTINCT MARKETING
OR ENGAGEMENT TEAM?



WHERE DOES DIGITAL SIT?



What Do These Teams Have in Common?

1. Commitment to **engaging external audiences**
2. Responsibility for **messaging** and **message delivery**
3. Oriented towards **results and outcomes**: donations, likes, shares, mentions, placements, sign ups
4. Mix of **one-to-one** (e.g. high touch) and **one-to-many** (e.g. mass market) approaches

Key Differences Between Org Types

Organizations differ the most based on:

- **Org Size:** Smaller orgs tend to have less conflict.
- **Mission & Orientation:** Fundamental differences between think tanks (where content is queen) vs movement orgs (where fundraising and advocacy reign) vs foundations vs service providers vs higher ed
- **Structure:** There tends to be less friction when Comms+Dev are one team vs distinct teams.
- **Digital Model:** When digital is both centralized and distributed (hybrid structure), it can act as an ambassador between functions.



”

Success of marketing/comms and fundraising are not mutually exclusive. When true collaboration and alignment between these efforts takes place, the results are scalable, significant and a win-win for all.

Key Takeaways: Effectiveness

Ineffective

Somewhat Ineffective

Neutral

Somewhat Effective

Effective

- Inter-team collaboration
- Messaging, brand & voice guidelines
- Shared strategies & goals
- Processes & decision rights
- Role & responsibility clarity
- Giving & receiving feedback
- Articulating priorities & planning approaches
- Clarity of audience ownership

★ Overall effectiveness of working dynamic

Q

What are the core tensions you've seen and experienced in your organizations?



Where Do the Tensions Often Lie?

- Deadlines: speed to market
- **Voice/tone/messaging approach: urgency vs nuance**
- **Decision rights: the final say**
- Data: more metrics- vs gut-driven
- Programs knowledge: who has stronger ties to that knowledge?
- **Channel control: who is the gatekeeper?**
- Content access: first rights to stories, images, videos
- **Audience ownership: who owns the list?**
- Attribution: who gets credit?
- Tech: whose business practices take precedent?
- **Rapid response: who drives it?**

Inter-Team Divisions: The Eternal Story

- Differences in **team-specific cultures**
- Lack of **shared strategy**/mandate
- Misunderstanding each other's **expertise**
- **Unrealistic** audience-engagement **goals**
- Missing **technology/tools**
- Territoriality
- Lack of **trust**
- Too many giving **input**
- Too many **deciders**
- **Conflict** becomes highly **personalized**
- Navigating **distributed**/remote/hybrid **environments**

”

Communications often approaches things from ‘what we need to say’ and Development approaches things from ‘what our supporters want to hear.’

”

Which department is allowed to grow and under what conditions seems to be a perpetual tension.

”

There’s a culture of competition rather than collaboration between the two teams.

Communications to Development

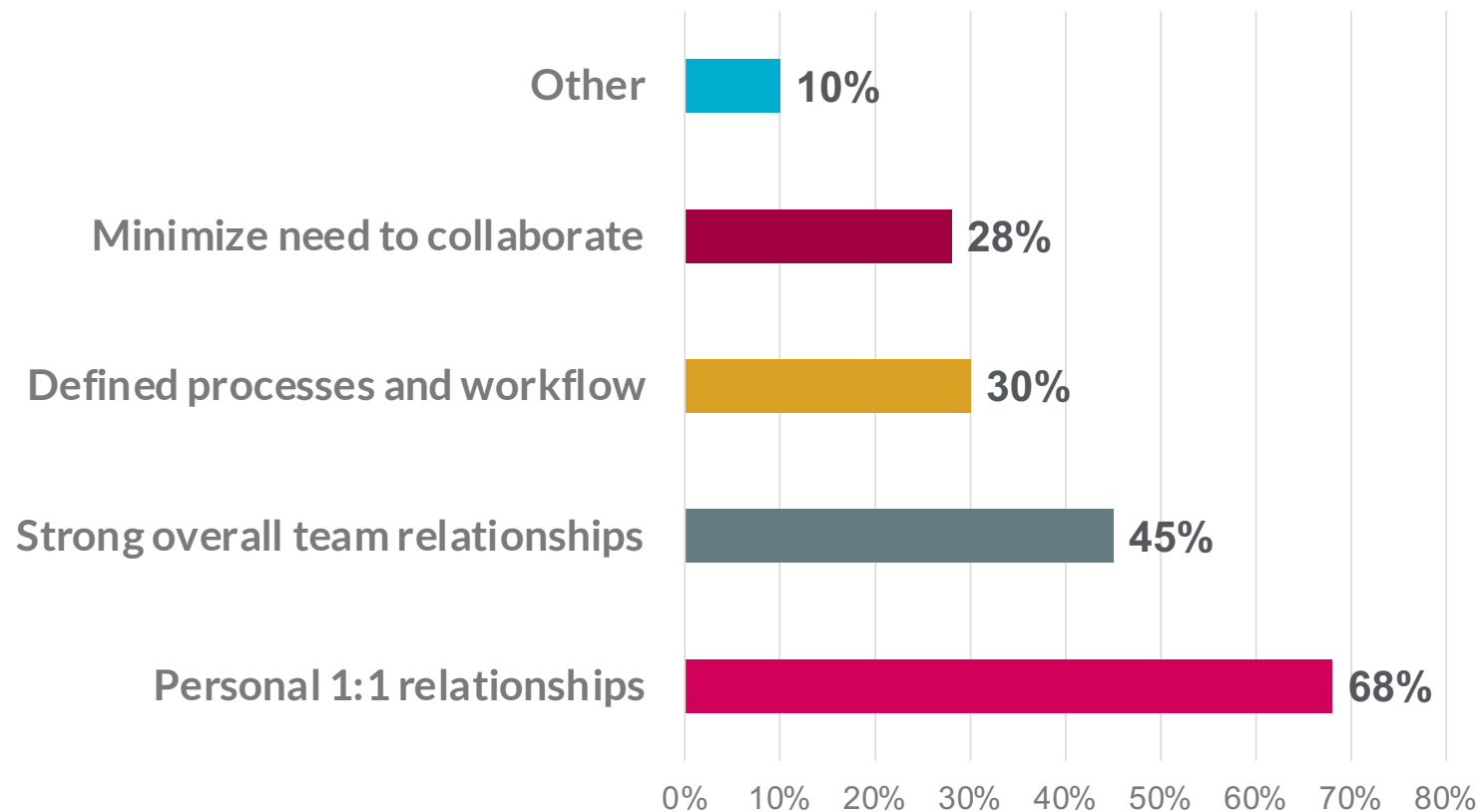
“All you care about is money
money money.”

Development to Communications

“The only audience you care
about is media and press hits.”

Key Takeaway | How best to get work done together?

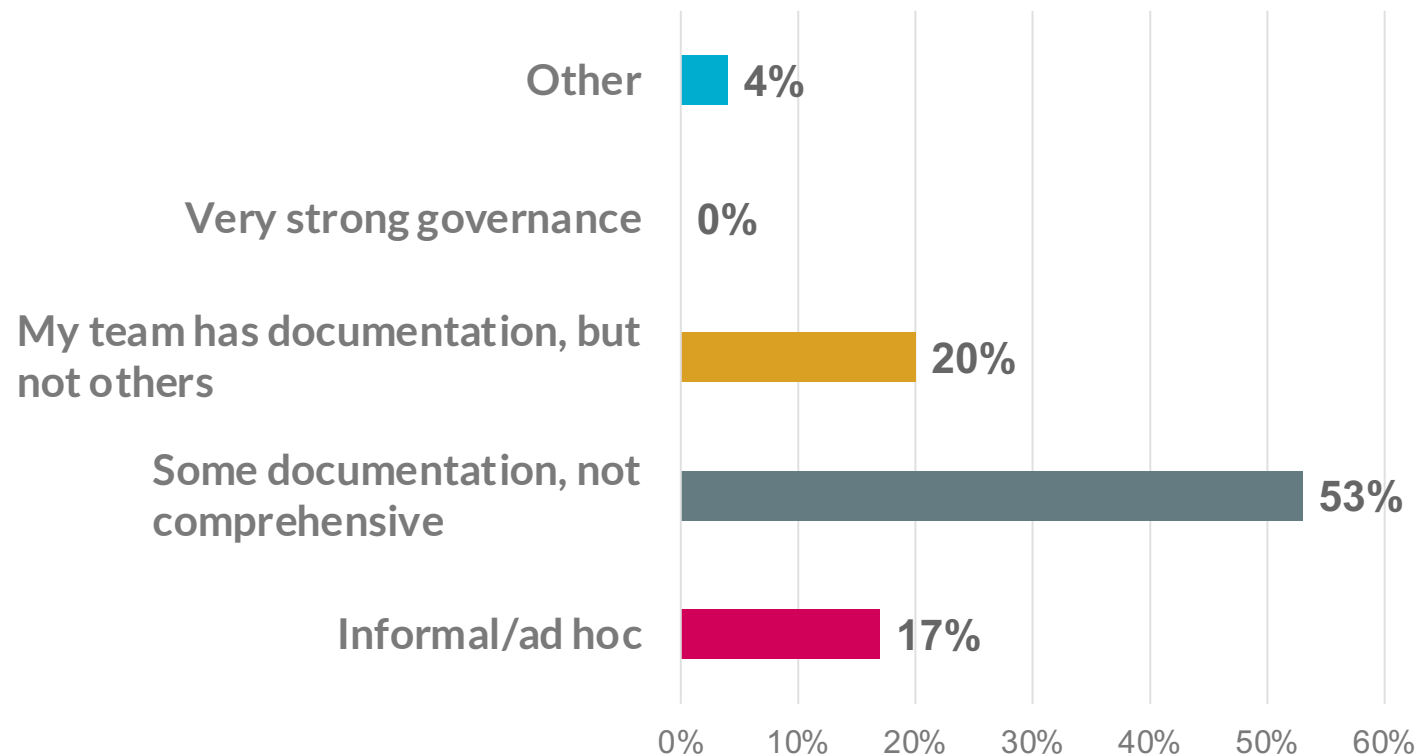
How best do you get work done?



“The 1:1 thing is a bandaid. I’m desperately dumping my personal political capital like a bucket onto a house fire. It’s not a long term solution.”

Key Takeaway | Workflows & Governance

Existing Processes



“My teams have relatively strong documented processes that account for team expectations, but execution and qualitative collaboration is still lacking.

You can have the best processes and documentation, but things like teamwork and psychological trust/safety amount cross team members can be a separate issue.”

Q

What creative solutions have you found for building trust and improving the working dynamic between departments?



”

The best improvements have come more so in the **qualitative trust building** among team members.

”

This is where leadership must set the priority to **support a culture of trust and collaboration**, not just among their teams, but among leadership as well.

Solutions: The Laundry List

Hard Tools

- Collaboration **Roadmap**, joint Comms-Dev **Charter**
- Shared **planning process** & KPIs
- Comprehensive **calendar**
- **Message** hierarchies
- Clear policies between departments, including **processes with decision rights**
- Centralized **documentation**
- Shared **content assets**
- A shared **integration and project management team**
- Working with outside strategy & planning firms as neutral, **expert 3rd parties**

Soft Tools

- Take it off of email, to **phone or web conference**
- Mutual **visibility into audiences**
- Daily **huddles**
- Recognize that Comms and Dev are 2 **distinct skillsets**, need 2 diff profiles
- No one in a straight “**service provider**” role
- **Senior alignment** (in addition to ICs)
- **Sharing results**, especially using data to demonstrate what works
- Dev-Comms “**mini retreats**” 2x/year
- Sense of **joint ownership** and collaboration

Project Charter
DRAFT / Final Project Charter for
[Project Name] [date]

PURPOSE	<i>How does this project support your organizational goals or strategic plan? What is motivating the work?</i>
OUTCOMES	<i>What is the change you want to see happen as a result of this project? What will the impact of the project be?</i>
WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?	<i>What does success for this project look like? What specific measures or indicators will help you assess how successful this project is when it is complete?</i>
SCOPE	<i>Explicitly name what is—and isn't—included within the bounds of this project.</i>
TIMELINE	<i>List key milestones and target dates for completion</i>
EQUITY	<i>What are the equity (racial, accessibility, etc) issues or dimensions to this project? How will you track and measure equity-related dimensions?</i>
PROCESS	<i>How will you keep the sponsor, stakeholders, and team members involved and up to date on the project (including outside partner organizations)? What mechanism will you use (Teams channel, meetings, email updates, etc.) to involve and update folks? How will you document lessons learned, metrics, and follow-up items needed when the project is complete? How will you ensure the process is clear, and how will you incorporate input from all stakeholders?</i>
RISK ASSESSMENT & SOLUTIONS	<i>Identify potential risks and ways you will mitigate them/respond to them.</i>
SPONSOR (ONE PERSON)	<i>Who is your sponsor? (The sponsor will have overall accountability for the project, should champion the project organizationally, and help remove obstacles that might harm its overall success.)</i>
TEAM MEMBERS & ROLES	<i>Responsible/Accountable: Supportive: Consulted: Informed:</i>
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	<i>Who are the stakeholders? What is their role in the project?</i>
RESOURCES	<i>What resources are necessary (money, staffing, tech needs)?</i>

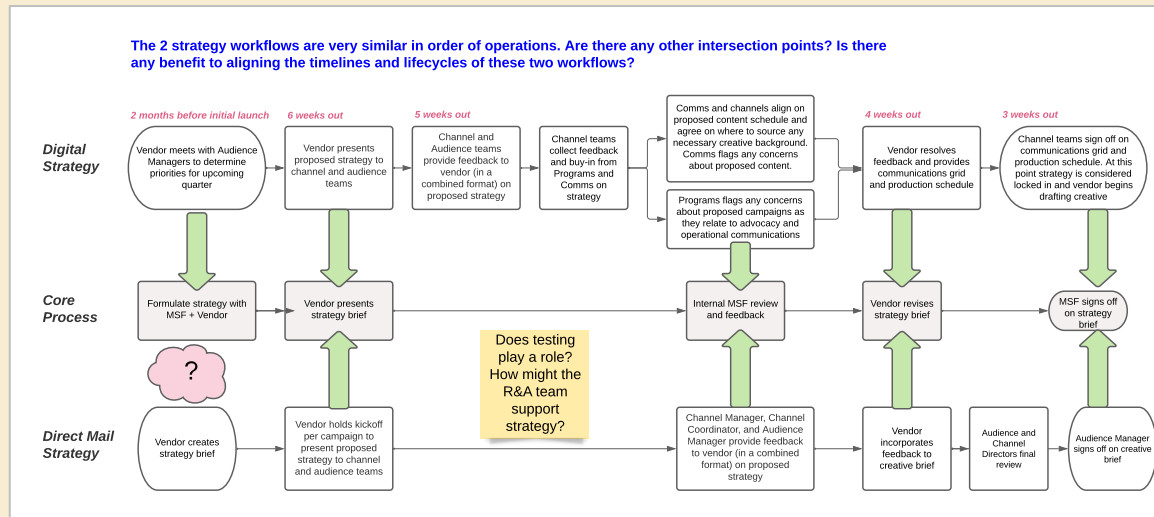
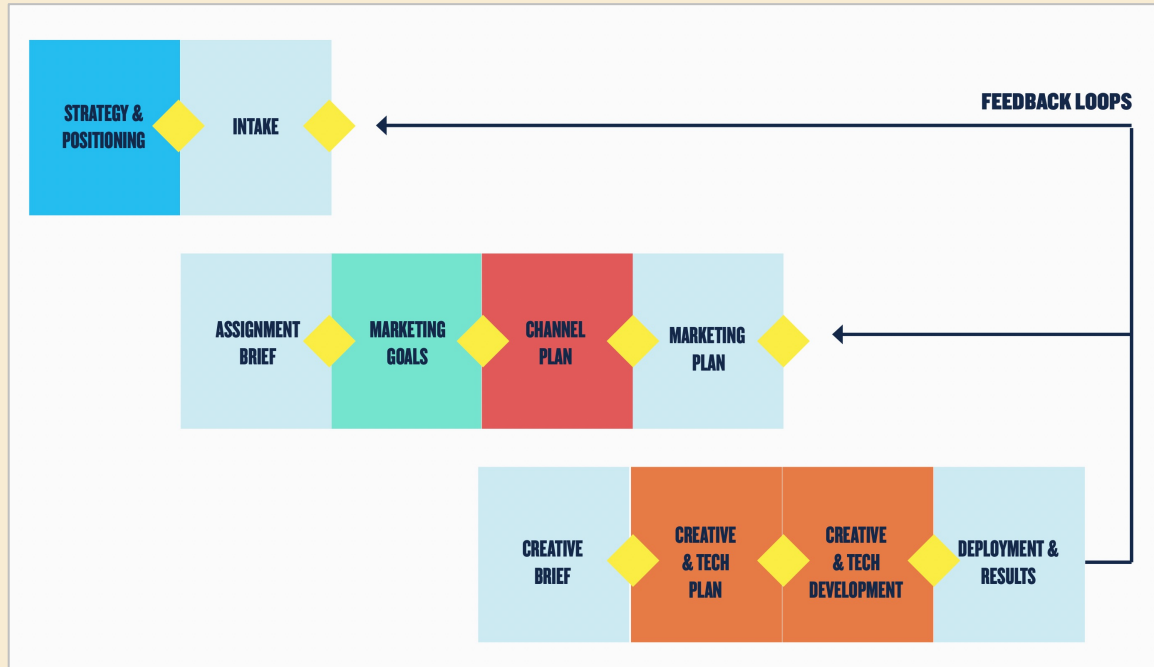
Solution:

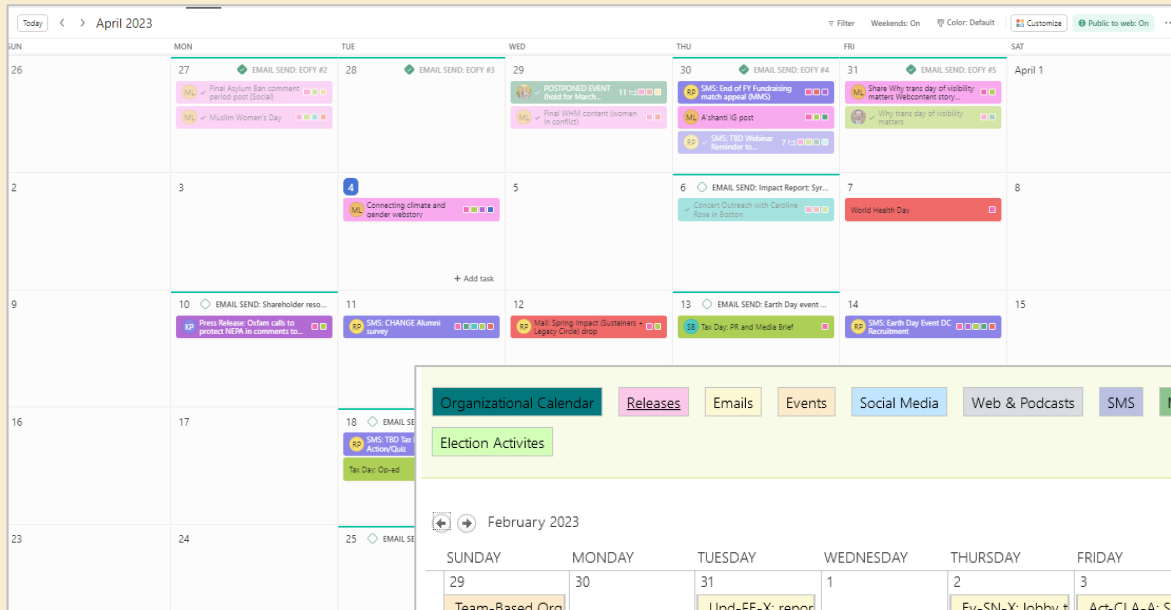
Project Charters / Terms of Reference

[Download the Project Charter / Terms of Reference template](#)

Solution:

Clear,
Documented
Process &
Intersection





Organizational Calendar | Releases | Emails | Events | Social Media | Web & Podcasts | SMS | Mailings

Election Activities

February 2023

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
29 Team-Based Org	30	31 Upd-FE-X: repor Act-CE-AX: MN s Podcast: Jess Ph	1	2 Ev-SN-X: lobby t Act-CT-A: MA ac	3 Act-CLA-A: Sena	4 Email priorities
5	6 Upd-DEV-D: An TBD: Moving For Big Oil SMS	7 CSD: Ethylene O Act-CT-AX: petiti Report: Commu ▼ 1 more item	8 Ev-SN-X: day of Upd-DEV-D: KGS Upd-CE-AX: MN	9 Monthly e-news	10 Upd-DEV-AX: Gi Upd-DEV-D: HK	11 Email priorities
12	13 Act-CLA-X: Signc Development SM	14 Upd-CSD-AX: 2r Podcast: TBD	15 Upd-DEV-D: PFE	16 Feb Membersh Feb Membersh	17 Act-FE-AX: Cosp Ev-FE-X: Rally fo	18 Email priorities
19	20 Ev-SN-X: AAAS c President's Day	21 Feb Membersh	22 CSD federal scier Act-CT-X: NY sig Ukraine War - O ▼ 2 more items	23 Feb Membersh	24 Feb Membersh	25 Email priorities
26	27 Feb Membersh	28 Feb Membersh Feb Membersh Feb Fundraising ▼ 1 more item	1 Upd-SN-X: repor Act-CT-A: MD ele Act-CT-A: NY cle ▼ 1 more item	2 AAAS Conference (Washington, D.C.) Act-GS-AX: Mars	3 12:00 pm AAAS TB 3:00 pm UCS Clear	4 Email priorities

Solution:

Shared Calendars

Q

What does a more constructive working dynamic look like?

(hint: recognizing expertise, partnering/supporting versus servicing or policing)



”

We need organization-wide recognition that Development and MarComms are equally strategic and important in the continued success of the organization.

”

We must help the fundraising folks at this org understand that they cannot bring in the money without the support of communications, and communications aren't support staff for departments so much as a fundamental component of driving member/donor engagement to achieve broader organizational goals.

And Your Questions?

Take the Comms Dev Survey

www.causecraftconsulting.com/comms-dev-survey



Follow us on LinkedIn for more research results

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/cause-craft-consulting/>



NATIONAL
IMMIGRANT
JUSTICE CENTER
A HEARTLAND ALLIANCE PROGRAM



Thank You!

Please take our session survey.



**Karla
Capers**
(She/Her)



**Julia
Toepfer**
(She/Her)



**Misty
McLaughlin**
(She/Her)



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