

# STOP PUBLISHING PLANS.

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## START COMMUNICATING THEM.

# REGIONAL PLANS ARE WRITTEN TO CHECK BOXES. NOT FOR CLARITY.

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Written for one audience. Expected to land with many.

BOARD MEMBERS

ELECTED OFFICIALS

COMMUNITY LEADERS

CITIZENS

**IF NO ONE  
UNDERSTANDS IT,  
NO ONE OWNS IT.**

# DON'T LET YOUR PLAN GATHER DUST

## 1 CONFUSION

People don't understand what your agency does or why it matters.

## 2 MISINFORMATION

If you don't explain the work, someone else will — and not always accurately.

## 3 LOST SUPPORT

Projects lose momentum when people never understand the purpose.

## 4 RESISTANCE

Silence is often read as secrecy.  
Silence is often read as deceit.

# THE STANDARD HAS SHIFTED.

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*Publishing a plan is no longer the finish line.*

## BEFORE

Publish the plan.  
Job done.

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## NOW

Show it.

Explain it.

Prove it worked.

# WHAT THE NEW STANDARD LOOKS LIKE.

## INFORM

People expect transparent information about how decisions are made and why.

## ENGAGE

Create ways for people to respond, ask questions, and see their input reflected.

## REACH

Put the message in front of the people who actually need it — not just those already in the room.

## PROVE

Show what happened, what changed, and how the work is moving forward.

**SMALL AGENCY.  
LEAN STAFF.  
BIG EXPECTATIONS.**

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**50%**

**OF ALL REGIONAL  
ORGANIZATIONS HAVE  
NO COMMUNICATIONS  
STAFF**

# 50% OF ALL REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS HAVE NO DEDICATED COMMS STAFF.

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## EDs

often serve as the default spokesperson — on top of everything else.

## PLANNERS

fill the communications gap with no training and no time.

## AD HOC

is not a strategy. It's how plans stop landing.

# THE PLANNERS NEED A PLAYBOOK.

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*Ad hoc isn't a strategy.  
A playbook is.*

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*If no one understands it,  
no one owns it.*

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*Communication can't be  
an afterthought.*

# THE PLAYBOOK.

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SIX STEPS. ONE SYSTEM. REPEATABLE BY ANY TEAM.

01 KNOW YOUR AUDIENCES

02 PLAIN LANGUAGE

03 CHANNEL STRATEGY

04 VISUAL COMMS

05 COMMS CALENDAR

06 MEASURE IT

# KNOW YOUR AUDIENCES.

Every plan has at least four audiences. Each one needs a different message.

## ELECTED OFFICIALS

"What does this mean for my district and constituents?"

## BOARD MEMBERS

"What are we approving and why does it matter?"

## PARTNER AGENCIES

"How does this affect our shared priorities and funding?"

## THE PUBLIC

"Will this help my community? What changes for me? How much will this cost?"

# PLAIN LANGUAGE PRINCIPLES.

01

## LEAD WITH THE OUTCOME

Tell people what will change for them before explaining how or why.

02

## CUT THE JARGON

If a 7th grader can't follow it, rewrite it. Use 'plan' not 'framework.' Use 'roads' not 'multimodal corridors.'

03

## ONE IDEA PER PARAGRAPH

Long paragraphs bury the point. If you can say it in two sentences, do it.

TIPS

### GENERAL PUBLIC / MIXED AUDIENCES:

6th–8th grade level. This is where you capture the widest range of readers without talking down to anyone.

### ELECTED OFFICIALS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS:

8th–10th grade is fine — they're engaged stakeholders but not necessarily technical.

### TECHNICAL AGENCY PARTNERS:

You can write at a higher level, use field-specific terms of art, and skip basic definitions.

**Microsoft Word** has a built-in readability tool that makes it easy to check your level before publishing.

# WE ARE TRANSLATORS.

## BEFORE

### Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

*The CEDS establishes a regional economic framework to enhance competitiveness, build capacity, and guide investment priorities across the district.*

*Jargon-first. Meaning buried.*



## AFTER

### How this region will grow jobs, strengthen communities, and compete for funding.

Same plan. Outcome-first. The public doesn't need the official title. They need the meaning.

EXERCISE

# PRESSURE TEST YOUR PLAN.

*Pick a plan your agency has produced in the last 2 years. Answer honestly. Pair with the person next to you — 2 minutes.*

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- Can you explain this plan to a neighbor in 30 seconds — without jargon?
- Does your agency's website have a plain-language summary of it right now?
- Has anyone outside your agency read it and told you they understood it?

# CHANNEL STRATEGY.

Not every message needs every channel. Match the message to the medium.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Awareness & reach. Short, visual, shareable. Best for announcing milestones and engaging the public.

## WEB / LANDING PAGE

The permanent record. Plain-language summary, FAQ, and timeline.

## BOARD & MEETINGS

Decision-makers need three things: how it will affect their residents, why it matters, and how can they support the message?

## PRESS & PARTNERS

Trusted messengers multiply reach. Brief fact sheets and talking points get the story right.

# VISUAL COMMUNICATION.

65%

OF PEOPLE ARE  
VISUAL LEARNERS

## ONE CHART, ONE POINT

Title it with the takeaway, not the data label. Don't make people figure out what your chart means.

## SHOW THE GEOGRAPHY

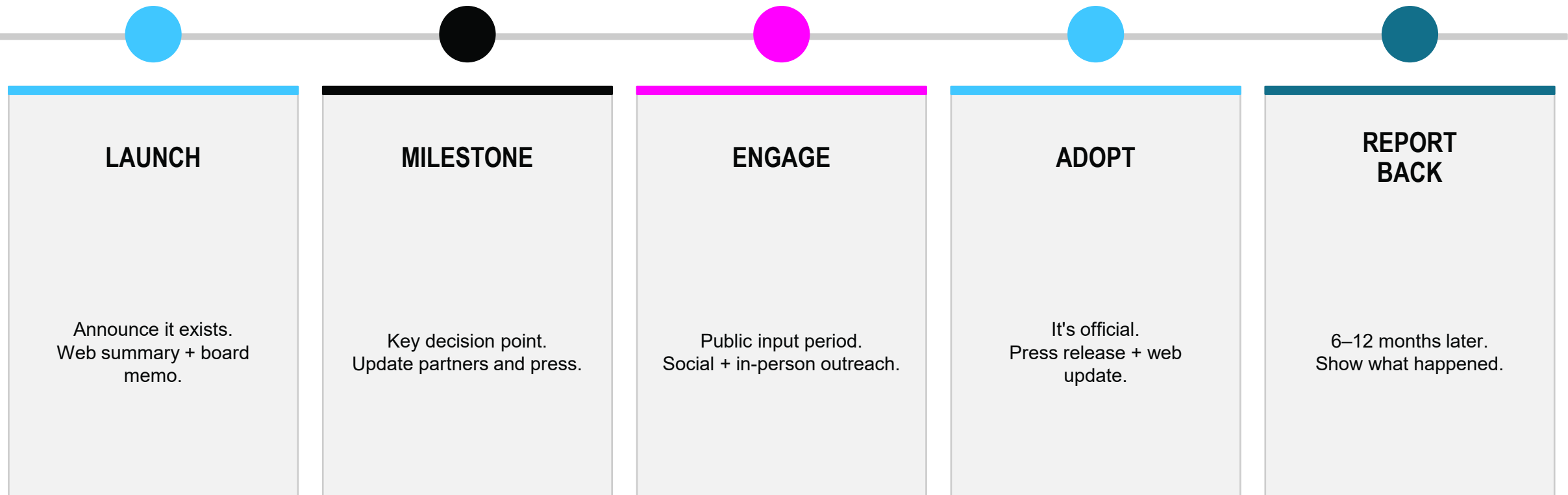
Maps make regional plans real. If your plan affects a place, show that place.

## USE YOUR BRAND CONSISTENTLY

Same colors, fonts, and logo on every public output. Consistency builds recognition and trust.

# BUILD A COMMS CALENDAR.

For every plan, map these five moments. Nothing falls through the cracks.



# MEASURING SUCCESS.

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## WHAT TO TRACK:

- Website visits to plan summary page
- Email open rates for partner updates
- Social media reach and shares
- # of public comments received
- Board comprehension — did they vote informed?
- Post-adoption milestones

# EVERY PLAN SHOULD ANSWER THREE QUESTIONS.

Connect the plan to real community outcomes, not compliance language.

## 1 WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

Answer the question residents, board members, and partners are all asking. How will this affect their travel time, pocketbook etc., is what they want to know first.

## 2 WHAT CHANGES?

Be specific. Vague plans earn vague support. Name what will look different in 2 or 5 years because of this work.

## 3 WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Connect to a real community outcome. "This plan funds safer roads in your neighborhood." Not: "This TIP allocates federal formula funding to eligible projects."

*If you can answer these three questions clearly, you can communicate any plan.*

# WHERE AI SAVES TIME.

Use AI where it removes the time barrier for small teams. AI does not replace judgment — it removes the time barrier.

## 1 SUMMARIZE REPORTS

Turn a 200-page plan into a board or web summary in minutes.

## 2 TRANSLATE PLANNING LANGUAGE

Rewrite jargon into plain English for public use.

## 3 ANALYZE COMMENTS

Identify themes and concerns without reading every submission manually.

## 4 IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY

Create captions, summaries, and translated content faster.

Draft → Review → Edit → Publish

# YOU DON'T NEED A DEPARTMENT.

# YOU NEED A SYSTEM.

## 1 MESSAGE FRAMEWORKS

Define standard messages for each program area.

## 2 CONTENT WORKFLOW

Summary → website → board update  
→ press release → social media.

## 3 SHARED TEMPLATES

Reuse visual summaries, language,  
and graphics.

## 4 REPORT BACK

Show what changed, not just how  
many attended.

*A COG with two staff and a clear system will outperform a COG with five staff and no system.*

# YOUR FREE TOOLKIT.



SCAN FOR FULL TOOLKIT

## CANVA

DESIGN

Free visual summaries, one-pagers, and social media graphics. No design skills required.

## GOOGLE SITES

WEB

Free plan landing page. No IT department needed — just a Google account.

## CLAUDE / CHATGPT

AI

Summarize 200-page plans, rewrite jargon, draft press releases in minutes.

## LOOKER STUDIO

DASHBOARD

Free dashboard. Connects to Google Sheets. Embed in your website.

## WORDCLOUD GENERATOR

DESIGN

Free. Turn long, complex regional plans into simple visuals that help people quickly understand the main ideas and priorities.

## MENTIMETER

ENGAGE

Free live polling. Check comprehension in real time. Audience uses their phone.

# THREE THINGS. DO THEM MONDAY.

*Keep the list short enough that a small team can actually do it.*

**1**

## DIGITAL-FIRST SUMMARIES

Start with a web summary, then build the PDF from it — not the other way around.

**2**

## AI-ASSISTED WORKFLOW

Use AI for summarizing and drafting so staff time goes to review and decisions.

**3**

## CONSISTENT REPORTING

Regularly share updates, progress, and what changed with boards and partners.

**QUESTIONS.  
LET'S TALK.**



# THANK YOU.

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