• 2024 Presidential Election
• Mis/disinformation and False or Incorrect Causal Narratives
• Communication Channel Priorities
• Use of Artificial Intelligence
Insights: At a Glance

THE ECOSYSTEM

- The information environment is crowded, loud, and is being disrupted by new technologies.
- Foundation and nonprofit communicators are worried about morale across their organization and among partners as the presidential cycle heats up. They expect the election outcome will affect how communicators work, too.
- On average, seven in 10 express concern about misinformation, disinformation, and false or incorrect causal narratives.

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES AND TOOLS

- AI has been adopted by nearly two thirds of the field.
- Discourse on social media is impacting how and where communicators focus their time.
- By a wide margin, LinkedIn emerges as the primary communications channel in the field/sector right now.
- Limiting use of specific social media channels or opting out of others is a common strategy.
- Instagram, Facebook, and X/Twitter are now lower priorities across the field.
- Fewer than 10 percent are using X/Twitter.
About the Research
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Communications work is strategic. It's also fluid. Communicators are always among the most agile individuals within an organization.

Why?

Because disruption, change and ambiguity are hallmarks of the field. There are new tools to support communicators in their work. There are thorny and persistent challenges to creating and sustaining conversations with key audiences. And, this year, there's a presidential election, making the communications ecosystem noisier than ever before.

Recognizing that many internal and external factors impact communications across the social good sector, The Communications Network is experimenting with a new initiative: several times this year, The Network will be distributing a short pulse poll to its community.

The surveys will explore pressing communications challenges, emerging trends, and longer-term questions facing the field.

There are also a couple questions that will be included on all of the surveys, allowing The Network to specifically track how owned media/channel strategies shift and adoption of AI.

This report covers results from the first pulse survey, which was fielded in April.

_Nearly half of respondents for this first poll have been working in the field for over 15 years, bringing seasoned perspectives spanning thousands of hours of communications work to the forefront of our learnings._
Survey #1: Methodology

- **Distribution.** The survey was distributed via email by The Communications Network to both members and others who engage with the organization. Email recipients were encouraged to both complete the survey and share it with other communicators in their professional network.

- **Fieldwork.** April 10-19, 2024

- **Sample size.** n=390
  (Survey respondents represent a diversity of organizations and include a mix of newer, mid-level, and experienced communicators. On average, respondents have been working in communications for 17 years.)
# About Survey Respondents

## Organization Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family foundation</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community foundation</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private foundation</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofit organization</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting/agency</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10%</td>
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## Size of Communications Team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median:</td>
<td>3 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average:</td>
<td>8 people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another race</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Years in Communications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-25 years</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26+ years</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median:</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average:</td>
<td>17 years</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The presidential election is affecting most organizations in the social good sector.

Aspects of communications strategy and planning most likely to be impacted:
- Editorial decisions
- Tone of communications
- Strategic priorities for the year

Q: In what ways, if any, is this year’s presidential election affecting your organization? Please select all that apply.

About 1 in 5 communicators say the election is not impacting their work.
Looking ahead to November, nearly all expect the outcome of the election to also have an impact.

Expected Impact of Outcome of Presidential Election

- No impact at all: 6.9%
- Minor impact: 20.5%
- Major impact: 28.5%
- Moderate: 44.1%

73% of respondents expect a major or moderate impact.

Q: And, how much impact will the outcome of the presidential election have on your organization?

Expected impact proves similar among respondents from nonprofit organizations and private foundations.
The next administration’s priorities are likely to impact programmatic areas and funding.

OTHER POTENTIAL IMPACT OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION (TOP RESPONSES shown in descending order):

- **Policy changes**
  New policies from a different administration could significantly impact work, from areas like climate/environment, education, healthcare, immigration, and racial equity efforts

- **Specific programmatic impacts**
  Very direct impacts the election could have on their specific programs, services, and advocacy areas based on new federal priorities

- **Funding and financial implications**
  Concerns about potential changes or cuts to funding sources (government grants, foundation grants, individual donors) depending on the election outcome and new administration’s priorities

- **Morale and emotional well-being**
  Emotional toll the election outcome could have on staff, partners, and communities served, impacting morale, motivation and ability to effectively do their work

Q: What other concerns do you have about the impact of this year’s presidential election on your work or your organization?
There are also concerns about cutting through the noise of it all during an election cycle.

OTHER POTENTIAL IMPACT OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION (SECOND-TIER RESPONSES shown in descending order):

- **Threats to democracy and social division**
  Concerns about the overall state of democracy, rise of hate/extremism, and increased social/cultural polarization

- **Communicating effectively**
  Challenges in cutting through election/political noise to get their messages across and concerns over misinformation/disinformation

- **Fundraising challenges**
  Election cycle and donor attention/funds being diverted to political causes is seen as a potential hindrance to organizations' own fundraising efforts

- **Perceived legitimacy and ability to operate**
  Particularly for DEI-focused groups, there are worries their work could be undermined, de-legitimized or face operational challenges under a different administration

Q: What other concerns do you have about the impact of this year’s presidential election on your work or your organization?
Election season puts politics front and center in a way that makes communicating about ISSUES really hard. How do you keep talking and moving issues in a discourse that is overwhelmingly focused on politics and politicians.

Survey respondent
[There are] implications for how audiences are able to hear/receive information and messages.

Survey respondent
I have general concerns about how presidential election years make people want to "tune out" from media coverage, social media, and email campaigns which lessens the ability of organizations to reach people with their specific, mission driven work.

Survey respondent
deep-dive module

Mis/disinformation and False or Incorrect Causal Narratives
Definitions

**Misinformation**
Misinformation is defined as the sharing of inaccurate and misleading information in an unintentional way.

**Disinformation**
Disinformation is defined as the deliberate dissemination of false or inaccurate information in order to discredit a person or organization.

**False or incorrect causal narratives**
False or incorrect causal narratives are defined as narratives that incorrectly or erroneously describe a causal relationship between variables.
Snapshot: Mis/disinformation and false narratives

- Approximately 7 in 10 are concerned about inaccurate or false information, including:
  - 74% of communicators concerned about false or incorrect causal narratives
  - 73% concerned about misinformation
  - 66% concerned about disinformation
- 50% a little or not at all prepared to address disinformation
- 72% public perceptions related to their organization’s programmatic work negatively affected by disinformation
- 83% have taken or are taking steps to address disinformation
Misinformation, disinformation, and false narratives are influencing the work of most communicators.

Q: How concerned are you about [misinformation/disinformation/false or incorrect causal narratives] related to your work?
Tactically, most identify at least one way their work is negatively affected by disinformation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Negatively Affected by Disinformation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public attitudes or perceptions related to programmatic priorities</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse on social media channels</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility or reputation of the organization</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media presence/what channels or platforms you invest in</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience engagement</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned media coverage related to programmatic priorities</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility or reputation of specific individuals at the organization</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned media coverage of your organization</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those from private foundations are more likely than nonprofit communicators to say public perceptions related to their programmatic work are affected (84% and 68%, respectively).

Q: What aspects of your work, if any, are most negatively affected by disinformation? Please select all that apply.
Attention to the real issues [is] being taken away/distracted by the noise.

Survey respondent
Half report feeling a little or not at all prepared to address disinformation in their work.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, those saying they feel somewhat prepared to address disinformation are consistently the most likely to say they are very concerned about all three of the challenges (misinformation, disinformation, and false narratives).

Q: How prepared do you feel to address disinformation as it pertains to your work?
Sharing content and channel strategy are among the top ways to address disinformation.

Q: What steps, if any, have you taken or are you taking to address disinformation? Please select all that apply.

- Sharing content to debunk misinformation, disinformation, and/or false narratives: 39%
- Limiting use of specific channels or platforms: 31%
- Opting out of specific channels or platforms: 31%
- Coordinating communications with other organizations or institutions: 30%
- Increased monitoring via internal resources: 29%
- Sharing content about official guidance or risks: 17%
- Increased monitoring through 3rd party tools or vendors: 16%
- Conducting trainings for team members: 14%
- Other (please specify): 4%
- None of the above: 17%

Third party monitoring is more common for communicators at private foundations than for their nonprofit counterparts (33% and 9%, respectively).

Those feeling unprepared to address this problem are more likely to be doing nothing to about it.
tracking select communications trends

Communication Channel Priorities
LinkedIn emerges as the top communications channel right now, with fewer focused on Instagram or FB.

Q: What communications channels and platforms is your organization investing the most time and effort in right now? Please select up to three answers.
Other platforms, including X/Twitter and YouTube, are less likely to be priorities.

The most common “other” responses include website and in-person events.

Q: What communications channels and platforms is your organization investing the most time and effort in right now? Please select up to three answers.
Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)
Almost two-thirds say they or their communications colleagues are currently using AI.

Q: Are you or other communicators at your organization currently using AI to perform any tasks at work?

**Definition included in survey:**
AI refers to computers and robots doing things that traditionally require human intelligence. Types or applications of AI include machine learning, natural language processing, virtual agents, predictive analytics, machine vision, voice recognition, decision making systems, data analytics, image processing, etc.
Data in Practice:
Strategic & Planning Considerations

2024 pulse surveys | survey #1
Data In Practice: Strategic & Planning Considerations

- What’s in your disinformation toolkit?
  - What’s been working well?
  - What requires more resources?
  - What requires more experimentation?

- The aperture to have a conversation unrelated to the election is closing quickly, if it hasn’t already. How, if at all, has your organization been managing the noisiness of an election year?
  - How are you planning for after Election Day?
Data In Practice: Strategic & Planning Considerations

- Given the challenges within the media ecosystem and potential limits to certain social media channels, how well are you able to create community and spread your message?

- What conversations have you been having about AI?
  - How formally or informally have you been approaching use of this tool in your work?
  - What do you want to know about how others are using it?