• Culture of Communications
• Communication Channel Priorities (tracking)
• Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) (tracking)
• Generative AI in the Social Sector
A culture of communications and the supports and resources required for a strong communications function are less prevalent at nonprofit organizations. This presents an opportunity to continue building a stronger field.

- Communicators at private foundations are more likely than their nonprofit counterparts to strongly agree their organizations have a strong culture of communications.
- Foundation communicators are also more likely to report being satisfied with the supports to execute their work successfully compared to nonprofit communicators.
Communicators across the social good sector have identified tactical and strategic applications of Gen AI. They also express concerns about its use.

- Communicators lean optimistic on Gen AI, but quite a few express concerns about its challenges. Those who are most optimistic about Gen AI tend to be more likely to use it.
- A vanguard group of regular Gen AI users seems to be emerging, with one third of respondents saying they use Gen AI tools at least weekly.
- Tactical uses prove more common right now, but there is clearly experimentation underway with other ways this technology can support the sector.
- Still, few organizations have policies or guidelines in place for Gen AI, and a sizeable number of respondents express concerns about Gen AI including: accuracy and authenticity, ethical considerations, protecting proprietary information and data, and lack of training.
Culture of Communications
A strong culture of communications is reported across the foundation and nonprofit sector, but challenges persist, especially for nonprofit communicators.

My organization has a strong culture of communications.

- Strongly disagree: 3.8%
- Somewhat disagree: 17.8%
- Somewhat agree: 47.3%
- Strongly agree: 31.2%

Those at private foundations are significantly more likely to than their nonprofit counterparts to strongly agree that their organizations have a strong culture of communications (42% and 24%, respectively).
Despite this culture shift, only a minority are very satisfied with the supports to do their jobs effectively.

Most are just fairly satisfied, with two-thirds selecting this response, and another 15% saying they are dissatisfied with the tools, resources, and support available to them.

Dissatisfaction is highest among those working in nonprofits, with over 1 in 5 saying they are dissatisfied (22%).
Communication Channel Priorities
Email proves particularly valuable for nonprofit organizations while LinkedIn continues to dominate social channels.

With the release of each new social media platform over the last decade and a half, email seemed to be on its way out. Yet, right now over half of nonprofits say they are investing the most time and effort in email right now (52% compared to 28% of private foundations).

Q: What communications channels and platforms is your organization investing the most time and effort in right now? Please select up to three answers.
The Communications Network

The decline of X/Twitter continues, with about one in 10 investing time into it right now.

Websites continue to be among the most common “other” responses, with print-options (print magazine, direct mail) also surfacing in this round.

Q: What communications channels and platforms is your organization investing the most time and effort in right now? Please select up to three answers.
tracking select communications trends

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)
Reported use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools is trending upwards since The Network’s 1st pulse poll.

Definition included in survey:
AI refers to technology that can perform tasks and do work that traditionally would have required 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.

Q: Are you or other communicators at your organization currently using AI to perform any tasks at work?
The Rise of Generative AI in Social Sector Comms
Gen AI refers to tools that can generate text, images, speech, music, and video in response to prompts from a user.

Here's how Generative AI (Gen AI) is perceived and being used by communicators across the social good sector right now.
34% report using Generative AI at least once a week. 37% say they rarely or never use this new technology.
While many communicators have adopted Gen AI technology, few work at orgs with standards around the use of this new tech.

Q: Does your organization have standards, policies, or guidelines about the use of Gen AI?

Private foundations are 2x as likely as nonprofits to have standards, policies, or guidelines about using Gen AI (43% and 22%, respectively).
Communicators report other barriers to Gen AI adoption, including concerns about quality/accuracy, ethics, and maintaining authenticity.

Half cite lack of adequate training as a concern.

Other responses span environmental impact, furthering the economic divide, and potentially recycling messages.
Perceptions from The Field:
Communicators lean optimistic on Gen AI, but quite a few express concerns about its challenges.
Those *most optimistic* about Gen AI are also *most likely* to be frequent users this technology.
After grammar and rewording tools, content creation is the most common way Gen AI is being used (56%).

How Communicators are Using Gen AI (Top Uses)

- Grammar check or rewording tools: 73%
- Content creation (e.g., email messages, newsletters, social media kits, and video scripts): 56%
- Transcription and/or note taking: 49%
- Summaries of longer documents or research: 48%

(n=253/those saying they use Gen AI)
Some communicators are also experimenting with other ways to use Gen AI.

Five percent or fewer say they are using Gen AI for video creation or editing, performance reviews, and recruitment and hiring.

Other responses include idea generation, generating email subject lines, translation, and developing alternative image captions.
I use it to get started on public communication content, and then I rewrite almost all of it. I also use it to get ideas for persuasion e.g. “what are three arguments to convince an audience of entrepreneurs that they should support single payer healthcare?”

Survey respondent on using Gen AI at work
Idea generation: I occasionally use Claude to generate name, headline, and tagline ideas. It's pretty good at giving me raw material I can massage into something useful.

*Survey respondent on using Gen AI at work*
Since Gen AI has become available, communicators see its benefits in their work.

Q: What do you see as the primary benefits of using Gen AI at work? Please select all that apply.

- Increased efficiency and productivity: 71%
- Creativity and idea generation: 58%
- Cost and time savings: 58%
- Continual optimization of messages and messaging strategies: 29%
- Consistency and error reduction: 27%
- Data-driven insights: 15%
- Real-time data analysis: 10%
- Increased personalization: 9%
- Other (please specify): 5%
Communicators struggle to directly connect use of Gen AI to their organization's mission.

**HOW GEN AI HAS OR CAN HELP ADVANCE AN ORGANIZATION’S MISSION**
*(top coded responses, shown in descending order)*

- **Efficiency and time-saving**
  About a third mention that Gen AI helps to save time by automating routine tasks, improving productivity, and reducing the time spent on mundane tasks. This includes responses about doing more with less, saving time on rote tasks, and enhancing workflow efficiency.

- **Content creation and enhancement**
  Approximately 30% highlight how Gen AI aids in generating content for blogs, social media, and other communications. These responses also mention increased creativity, idea generation, and tailoring messages to the audience.

- **Improved communication and engagement**
  One in five communicators mention that Gen AI helps to improve communication with stakeholders by making it more responsive, reducing jargon, ensuring clearer messaging, and creating engaging content.

Q: In what ways, if any, has Gen AI helped or can Gen AI help advance your organization’s mission? 
(n=73)
As communicators increasingly experiment with Gen AI, more strategic applications are emerging, too.

HOW GEN AI HAS OR CAN HELP ADVANCE AN ORGANIZATION’S MISSION
(lower tier coded responses, shown in descending order)

- **Strategic and proactive insight**
  About 1 in 10 indicate that Gen AI provides valuable insights and helps with strategic planning. This includes aiding in understanding data better, optimizing engagement, and helping with strategic decision-making.

- **Language and accessibility**
  A few responses highlight the role of Gen AI in making communication more accessible, such as helping with bilingual communications, reducing jargon, and ensuring messages are understandable at different reading levels.

Q: In what ways, if any, has Gen AI helped or can Gen AI help advance your organization’s mission?
(n=73)
“[Gen AI] is just making us more efficient so we can do more.

Survey respondent on using Gen AI at work
I'm not sure [Gen AI] has achieved this level yet of impacting the mission.

Survey respondent on using Gen AI at work
Our mission? I am not sure about that yet, but [Gen AI] has saved me time in creating templated materials (Outlines, form emails).

*Survey respondent on using Gen AI at work*
Data in Practice: Strategic & Planning Considerations
Data In Practice: Strategic & Planning Considerations

● *What factors are most important in creating a culture of communications at foundations and nonprofit organizations?*
  ○ What role do communicators play in advancing this mindset?
  ○ How do other colleagues help, as well as how do other colleagues potentially inadvertently create obstacles to doing so?

● *What specific tools, resources, and support do communicators need to feel more adequately equipped to do their jobs effectively?*
  ○ What would be especially important for those at nonprofit organizations? How can the larger community play a role here?
Data In Practice: Strategic & Planning Considerations

- How do communicators expect both their use of Gen AI and the tools available to them to evolve in the coming 1-2 years?
  - Given the speed at which the technology is moving, how should the field think about addressing some of the existing challenges and concerns with Gen AI?
  - What might lead to having more regular users of the technology?
  - What can help communicators adopt more strategic applications of it – both within their own work and as part of advancing their organization’s mission more generally?
About the Research
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 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.

Fielded during the second half of June, this report covers results from the second pulse survey, which explores perceptions and use of generative AI in more depth.

As with the first pulse survey, the results from this wave reflect the perspectives of communicators with a range of experience – the majority work for foundations and nonprofits and the average years of experience is 15.

For more information and to see results from the first pulse poll, go to: https://www.comnetwork.org/research.
Pulse Poll #2: 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.** June 17-26, 2024

- **Sample size.** n=292
  (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 15 years.)
### About Survey Respondents

#### Organization Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family foundation</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community foundation</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private foundation</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonprofit organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consulting/agency</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
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#### Size of Communications Team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<td>5-9</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+</td>
<td>20%</td>
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</table>

**Median:** 3 people  
**Average:** 7 people

#### Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another race</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
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#### Years in Communications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>16-25 years</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26+ years</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Median:** 15 years  
**Average:** 15 years