



# Communication Plan

Information Technology Services  
University of Tennessee, Chattanooga

June 2017

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# **Executive Summary**

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Effective communication is vital to every organization. Creating and conveying strong, well-defined messages is essential for successful interaction. Consistency across messaging, regardless of the communication channel utilized, is necessary to provide a resilient and cohesive organizational face. This Communication Plan presents a framework for managing and coordinating communication in the division for Information Technology (IT) at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga (UTC).

Successful communication will require individuals from each department within the IT Division to adopt these guidelines. This plan must be accepted and executed by every member in IT leadership. The resulting unified approach will provide appropriate and consistent information to the IT service community: students, faculty, staff, vendors, and partners (internal and external). This is a dynamic plan subject to change and will be modified accordingly to reflect the University's and IT Division's mission, vision, and values.

Primary areas of communication addressed in this plan:

- Audiences
- Responsibility
- Analysis
- Standards and guidelines
- Messaging criteria
- Projects
- Methods and frequency

## **Acronyms**

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- AVCIO: Associate Vice Chancellor of Information Technology
- CIO: Chief Information Technology Officer
- CISO: Chief Information Security Officer
- D-CIO: Deputy Chief Information Technology Officer
- ELT: Executive Leadership Team
- ITDR: Information Technology Direct Report Group
- IT: Information Technology
- OU Campus: OmniUpdate
- PSP: Projects and Strategic Planning
- RSS: Really Simple Syndication
- SLT: Senior Leadership Team
- UTC: University of Tennessee, Chattanooga

# **Purpose**

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The IT Strategic Planning developed this Communication Plan was created for Information Technology Services at UTC in 2016. It is a dynamic document which will undergo periodic updates as the IT environment changes. Its purpose is to provide a global foundation for governing and organizing communication within IT.

This plan identifies target audiences, methods of communication, frequency of communication, message criteria, feedback, and guidelines. This structure ensures that IT conveys meaningful, reliable, and applicable information while increasing the understanding of Information Technology at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga.

Communication is a shared responsibility in IT. Therefore, it is imperative that IT leadership, including divisional liaisons, and the departments within the IT Division work together to develop a communication paradigm. In addition, the effectiveness of this plan will be tracked and relevant adjustments will be made accordingly.

## **Mission**

*Helping Students Achieve Excellence Through Technology*

## **Vision**

Information Technology touches every aspect of teaching, learning, and living. We will create an organization that delivers solutions based services within a culture of customers first.

- Leverage current technology to create synergies between IT employees and users
- Establish a 5-year plan with IT leadership to maintain focus on equipment, goals, and project management
- Cultivate an environment that fosters employee growth and development with relevant training and timely feedback
- Act as **one** team united through **one** vision

## **Values**

- Attitude
- Customer Service
- Effectiveness
- Stewardship

# **Goals and Objectives**

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The goal of this plan is to present a framework for creating standardized, customer-centered messaging in all IT communications with populations both internal and external to the campus. It promotes the dissemination of accurate information in a manner that is professional, informative, and user-friendly; while at the same time, contributing to the dynamic culture of IT. Frequent updates to this plan will be implemented based on feedback and changes in the University's and IT department's mission, vision, and values.

The following objectives support this goal:

- Ensuring comprehension and use of communication framework
- Ensuring clear and consistent communication to recipients
- Educating constituents on information technology
- Providing multiple points of entry to information and services

- Soliciting feedback

These goals and objectives are accomplished by:

- Announcing new services
- Collaborating with peer UTC staff to provide relevant information that impacts the campus proper
- Designing, writing, and distributing up-to-date information in support of IT
- Developing more customer-centric language in IT messages
- Documenting, revising, and revisiting all communications
- Maintaining a standard IT identity for all written materials
- Maintaining relevant information in all methods of communication
- Maintaining procedures for executing short-term, mid-term and ad hoc communication tasks
- Offering qualified IT staff the opportunity to present at conferences and events
- Participating in special events to promote IT

## **Assumptions**

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The success of this plan is based on the following suppositions:

- IT leadership, divisional liaisons, and IT participants assist in the success of this communication plan by utilizing the presented guidelines and methods of communication
- IT communicates consistent, informative messages
- IT is committed to open and honest communication
- IT communication balances the needs of the campus community with the goals of the organization

## **Audiences**

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IT communicates with two primary audiences: the first is internal to the campus and the second is clients and other external associations.

These audiences include, but are not limited to:

- IT staff
- Senior leadership (faculty and staff)
- Campus community (faculty, staff, and students)
- External associations (partners, higher education peers, service groups, and vendors) and the general populace

See [Appendix A](#) for the Communication by Audience Matrix.

## **Communication Responsibility**

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The Associate Vice Chancellor of Information Technology (AVCIO) assigns responsibility for message management within each IT unit to the Executive Leadership Team (ELT), Senior Leadership Team (SLT), and division liaisons. The team regularly reviews IT activities and provides communication guidance using this framework. They write, review, and edit all IT campus messages for accuracy and in a professional manner that is informative and user-friendly.

The IT leadership team is responsible for the following IT communication methods:

- Creating and utilizing IT branding

- Creating and distributing IT monthly, quarterly, and annual reports
- Evaluating and maintaining social media accounts
- Maintaining the IT website
- Writing, reviewing, and distributing mass emails

All IT staff are responsible for the following requirements in IT communications:

- Utilizing IT communication standards and templates
- Consulting with members of the leadership team in message creation
- Providing clear, concise subject matter content to messages
- Reviewing messages before sending to customers

## **Communication Analysis**

The success of this IT Communication Plan depends upon regular analysis and implementing changes based on the reported outcomes.

Analysis includes:

- Measuring success of the communication plan
- Obtaining customer feedback and utilizing it to enhance IT services
- Examining the rates and types of calls to the IT Client Solutions Center
- Tracking traffic volume and other analytic measures for UTC and IT websites and social media

## **Communication Standards**

Official campus and IT Division messages distributed from the IT Office contain vetted content and are not to be altered without consulting a member of the leadership team. Official IT messages will be forwarded to other campus groups when necessary.

Effective messages in all types of media are short, clearly written, and presented in a consistent manner. IT maintains communication and editorial standards that exemplify these traits when the included guidelines and templates are employed. The communication standards outlined in this plan include IT templates for reports, memos, and presentations.

Answering the following questions clarifies what to include in a message and the most effective process to use:

- What is the purpose of the message?
- Who is the targeted audience?
- When does the message need to go out?
- What is the simplest and most direct way to state the issue?
- What action is required by the recipient?

## **Graphic Identity**

Graphic identity involves the use of logos, fonts, and colors to create a clearly recognizable image. Establishing a successful IT graphic identity for all IT associated materials enhances audience recognition and associations.

This Communication Plan supports and recommends using the UTC [Graphic Guidelines](#). A consistent IT graphic identity promotes a strong, unified, professional image to all audiences. IT templates must include the IT logo and conform to UTC's established standards and guidelines.

## Style

Style is the approach used to present an organizations image through text. Guidelines standardize the use of terminology and grammar to make messages and materials the most relevant to the targeted audience. This plan supports and recommends using the communication standards outlined in the UTC [Editorial Guidelines](#). These guidelines address common questions about grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and language. Utilizing a consistent style across all communications presents a more unified professional IT image to the campus and the general public.

## Templates

IT templates conform to UTC's Guide to Editorial Style and Identity Guidelines, as well as the IT Style Guide. This plan recommends using approved IT templates for IT communications. By using the standard IT templates a recognizable IT identity is instantly achieved and further enhances the professional cohesiveness of the department.

[IT Templates](#) are available for the following items at the Strategic Planning website:

- Agendas
- Documents
- Letterhead
- Minutes
- Power Point presentations
- Reports

## Communication Guidelines

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Every communication should fit the technical level of the intended audience by avoiding acronyms, technical jargon, and unclear definitions. Communication focuses on conveying a positive message and identifying a knowledgeable resource for follow up or questions.

The following are examples of IT messages:

- Accomplishments and project updates
- Emergency service notices
- Organization changes
- Service announcements
- System outage notices
- System upgrade messages

Successful communication is consistent, reliable, and as necessitated to ensure that all audiences are informed of critical and significant information in a timely manner. For example, the IT website and IT ticket request system are updated regularly to communicate the most recent service information, and IT staff are emailed relevant information and announcements as needed. Regular IT Town Hall meetings are scheduled to update employees, share the current status of departmental projects, and define future considerations. Divisional meetings also provide an additional method for Q & A sessions and feedback.

See [Appendix A](#) for the Communication by Audience Matrix.

The following methods are available for IT communications:

- Email
- Events
- Feedback
- IT News & RSS Feeds
- Knowledge Base
- Meetings
- Social Media
- Texting
- Ticket Request System
- Website

General guidelines for communicating are as follows:

- Provide a clear, consistent, and easily recognizable message
- Begin each message by stating any necessary actions that need to be implemented
- Present a straightforward message to the audience
- Include unit name, contact information, closing statement, and provide a link to the IT Web site
- Educate about IT services when appropriate
- Use all appropriate and accessible communication means
- Ensure timely and meaningful communication
- Listen and act on feedback

## **Communication Messaging**

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### **Planned Outage/Upgrade Messages**

Planned Outage/Upgrade messages utilize the following format:

- Simple subject
- One sentence telling what is happening
- Impact to users
- What is Application X?
- How do I get help or start using Application X?
- Incident/Emergency Messages

Planned Outage/Upgrade messages utilize the following process:

- SLT crafts the message
- CIO and D-CIO review and authorize the message for broadcast
- Approved final message is copied to the IT Leadership Team and IT Service Desk
- Final message is sent to users who have access to the application

### **Incident/Emergency Messages**

Before the message is crafted, determine who needs to be informed. Everyone affected by an event receives a message. The message must be clear, relevant, timely, and frequently monitored.

Incident/Emergency messages utilize the following format and answer the following questions:

- What happened?
- What do we know about the cause of the incident? If known
- What are we doing about the incident?
- When will service resume?

Incident/Emergency messages utilize the following process:

- Post the incident/emergency to the status page on the IT website
- Compose a message to be sent to the affected users
- Send a draft of the message to executive leadership for review and approval
- Copy the approved message to Client Services for distribution to the targeted audience
- If the outage is more than 90 minutes update the system status page and continue with regular updates
- Send an approved follow-up message to the affected community when service is restored

See [Appendix C](#) for the Critical Systems Communication Matrix.

## Web Guidelines

Web page policies and guidelines are available online through UTC's Department of [University Relations](#). For assistance creating IT webpages, contact the UTC Web Team at [UTCWEB@raven.utc.edu](mailto:UTCWEB@raven.utc.edu). All web content is managed utilizing OU Campus. The IT Lead Web/Portal Administrator is Weston Gentry, email: [weston-gentry@utc.edu](mailto:weston-gentry@utc.edu).

## Project Communication

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Effective communication saves time, money, and effort. Successful communication requires everyone involved in a project to consistently interact on a regular basis. Employing numerous communication methods increases accountability and productivity. Detailed tracking keeps the team on the same page and the project moving forward. Always document every communication and revise as needed.

See [Appendix B](#) for the Project Communication Matrix.

## Basic Guidelines

The following basic guidelines are for all project communications:

- Subjects are easily identifiable for searching, categorizing, etc.
- Content is clear and concise, easy to understand quickly, and consistent across all forms of communication
- All methods of communication, notes, and database entries are well-defined and complete
- Include specifics and the steps taken in order of execution
- Avoid incomplete, one sentence blurbs
- Utilize only the resources needed to successfully complete each task

## Targeted Outcomes

The following targeted outcomes are for all project communications:

- Sustainability is achieved by establishing a doable pace for the project and maintaining it as the project progresses
- Accountability is achieved when team leaders and task owners continually document the progression of each step as it is developed, revised, employed, and completed
- Engagement is achieved when project members with varying responsibilities and others engaged at different levels embrace the project, thus creating buy-in
- Respect is achieved when everyone involved in the project considers their time and efforts are appreciated and effectively utilized, thus taking pride and ownership in the success for the project

## Email

The following email guidelines are for all project communications:

- Email is most often the primary means of project communication, both internally and externally
- The subject line is noticed first and should clearly and briefly identify the project and subject matter
- The subject line tells the recipient if they need to respond, so avoid changing the topic during a thread
- For new topics change the subject line completely or send a new email
- Nicknames and acronyms should be agreed upon by everyone working on the project so that emails can be easily organized, grouped, and searched
- The email "To" field indicates who should read, respond directly, and take action
- The email "Cc" field indicates who should be informed; neither action nor a response is required

## Tracking

The following tracking procedures are for all project communications:

- Utilize an issue-tracking system so all participants know who is responsible for what and when it is due
- Project management software also tracks progression and provides a full history timeline
- Utilize clearly understandable, descriptive titles for each individual issue
- Utilize defined categories (assignees, responsible departments, dates and times, priority levels, status, etc.) for each issue
- Detailed attributes enable quick and easy grouping, reviewing, searching, and tracking throughout the project
- Limit each issue to one item to make it easier to assign different issues to various people
- Add a new issue for each item change and assign it accordingly
- Document everything (conversations, correspondences, changes, etc.) with specific details in the comments, actions, and detail sections for each issue
- Be explanatory and always write all communication completely

## Meetings

The following meeting guidelines are for all project communications:

- Avoid status meetings that include everyone, especially when only a few minutes are needed to update a specific part in the project
- Otherwise, participants get bored, do not pay attention, and feel as though their time is being wasted
- Communicate daily and utilize one-on-one contact by talking to each other in person
- Setup short (5-15 minutes) meetings to update the team on the current status and keep everyone involved in the project on the same page
- For required meetings with specific people make an agenda and stick to it, moderate the dialogue
- Assign alternate team members to record and post minutes for all meetings

- Save decision making for the teams handling the specific tasks
- Everything does not have to be answered or solved immediately
- Delegate to smaller groups and individual teams
- Utilize email and other forms of communication

## Vocabulary

The following vocabulary basics are for all project communications:

- Agree upon a common vocabulary to avoid miscommunication
- Utilize wiki's and other collaboration boards
- Maintain consistent terminology
- Define acronyms

## Documentation

The following documentation basics are for all project communications:

- Log and update everything
- Obtain agreement for every new and edited version of documentation
- Write comprehensively by including specifics and complete details
- Always record all project communications

## Tasks

The following task basics are for all project communications:

- Be creative, utilize color coding to visually identify team members
- Be inventive, utilize sticky notes to update and track on a whiteboard
- Take pictures of the whiteboard and giant sticky notes and add them to the project documentation
- Develop an electronic workflow for each team and add it to the overall project workflow

## Implementation

The following implementation basics are for all project communications:

- It is often difficult to get everyone to accept the new rules
- Show and explain how time spent up-front communicating and documenting detailed information will only take a small amount of work
  - Example: Searching for an important but unidentifiable email
- This saves everyone involved time and effort in the long-run
- Utilize verification methods in the tracking software
- Reject communications that do not follow the agreed upon criteria

## Summary

The following summary is for all project communications:

- Implement standards to support clear and concise communication

- Put the most important information at the start of every message in the subject line, title, and first sentence
- KISS – Keep it simple and succinct
- Limit all communication to the people directly involved on each task so as not to waste other people’s time
- Always document everything in writing and make it easy to find
- Verify all documentation is clearly understandable
- Utilize smaller tasks to make problems easier to resolve and keep the project moving forward
- Revise and revisit often

## **Communication Matrix by Audience**

[Appendix A](#) is a summary of audiences that IT communicates with on a regular basis. This matrix displays targeted audiences, means and frequency of communication, and the purpose of communication for each audience.

## **Communication Matrix by Project**

[Appendix B](#) is a table for communicating project ownership, team assignments, and member responsibilities. This matrix displays means for communicating project progression, purposes, and distribution.

## **Communication Matrix by Critical Systems**

[Appendix C](#) identifies owners, administrators, and contacts for critical systems. This matrix list the point of contact in IT when an event occurs and provides a timeframe for announcements and the means of communication.

## **Conclusion**

The Communication Plan serves as an overall framework for communication within IT. Successful communication results from a committed effort by each IT staff member in using the channels and guidelines presented in this plan. Such a commitment ensures that IT provides relevant, accurate, and consistent information to the IT service community. Effective communication saves time, money, and effort.

The IT Strategic Planning Manager, Barbara A. Webb, assists in developing tactical communication plans for each IT unit and project as needed using the framework outlined in this plan. For requests and assistance relating to this Communication Plan please contact Barbara Webb at [barbara-webb@utc.edu](mailto:barbara-webb@utc.edu) or Susan Lazenby at [susan-lazenby@utc.edu](mailto:susan-lazenby@utc.edu).

\* *Much appreciation and sincere thanks to the Administrative Information Technology Services (AITS) at the University of Illinois (UI) for granting us permission to adapt and utilize their AITS Communication Plan: [https://www.aitis.uillinois.edu/UserFiles/Servers/Server\\_474/File/AITS%20Communication%20Plan/AITS%20Communication%20Plan\\_final.pdf](https://www.aitis.uillinois.edu/UserFiles/Servers/Server_474/File/AITS%20Communication%20Plan/AITS%20Communication%20Plan_final.pdf). Contact Susan Flanagan at [sflanagi@uillinois.edu](mailto:sflanagi@uillinois.edu) for more information.*

# Appendix

## Appendix A—Communication by Audience

Communication Matrix—By Audience			
Audience	Communication Method	Frequency	Communication Purpose
All IT Staff	Email	Daily and as needed	Consistent and timely messages help all IT employees answer the same questions with the same message. Communications about internal and external opportunities are also provided to staff.
	Emergency service notices	Immediate and as needed	
	Events	As needed	
	Feedback	As needed	
	IT Newsletter	Monthly and as needed	
	IT Town Halls	Quarterly and as needed	
	IT Website	Daily and as needed	
	Knowledge Base	Weekly and as needed	
	Listservs	Monthly and as needed	
	Meetings	Weekly, quarterly, and as needed	
	Reports	Monthly, quarterly, annually, and as needed	
	Social Media	Daily and as needed	
	System Status Updates	As needed	
	Ticket request system	Daily and as needed	
Chief Information Officer Deputy CIO IT Leadership	Email	As needed	Consistent and timely communications inform the campus, system, and divisional liaisons of IT's mission, vision, and values.
	Emergency service notices	Immediate and as needed	
	Feedback	As needed	
	Meetings	Weekly, monthly, quarterly, and as needed	
	Reports	Monthly, quarterly, annually, and as needed	

## Communication Matrix—By Audience

Audience	Communication Method	Frequency	Communication Purpose
University Executives	Email	As needed	Communications to Executive Leadership are to show worth, inform executives about IT endeavors, heighten credibility, provide budget information, garner support, and push for decisions concerning IT.
	Feedback	As needed	
	Meetings	Weekly, monthly, quarterly, and as needed	
	Reports	Monthly, quarterly, annually, and as needed	
IT Advisory Groups	Email	As needed	Communications to IT advisory groups inform and engage committee members, while investing in the governance process and reducing redundancy of IT systems.
	Feedback	As needed	
	Meetings	Quarterly, annually, and as needed	
	Reports	Quarterly, annually, and as needed	
Students	Email	As needed	Communications to students are created to provide assistance with enterprise applications, inform students of IT services, solicit feedback, and encourage students to monitor email and social media for information concerning technology services and support, and broadcast activities, outages, updates, and upgrades.
	Emergency service notices	As needed	
	Events	As needed	
	IT Website	As needed	
	Knowledge Base	As needed	
	Meetings	As needed	
	Social Media	As needed	
	Ticket Request System	As needed	
Faculty and Staff	Email	As needed	Communications to faculty and staff are structured to convey the significance of IT, solicit feedback, deliver procedural and operational messages, provide information concerning technology services and support, and broadcast activities, outages, updates, and upgrades.
	Emergency service notices	As needed	
	Events	As needed	
	IT Website	As needed	
	Knowledge Base	As needed	
	Meetings	As needed	
	Social media	As needed	
	Ticket request system	As needed	

## Appendix B—Communication by Project

Communication Matrix—By Project					
Project Name	Project Lead	Team Members	Start Date	Due Date	End Date
Tasks	Communication Method	Distribution	Owner	Access/Update	Purpose
Documentation	Database Email IT website Shared storage				
Meetings	Face to face Online				
Minutes	Database Email IT website Shared storage				
Annual Report	Database Email IT website Shared storage				
Monthly Report	Database Email IT website Shared storage				
Quarterly Report	Database Email IT website Shared storage				
Weekly Report	Database Email IT website Shared storage				

## Appendix C—Communication by Critical Systems

Communication Matrix—By Critical Systems								
CRITICAL SYSTEMS				Communications Plan				
System	Subsystem	Owner Administrator	Contact	POC Contact	Incident Announcement	Assessment Announcement	Incident in Progress	Incident Resolution
Banner	Banner Services Systems Applications	Banner Systems Support Services	Director, Banner Systems Support Services	CIO/D-CIO	<1 Hour Email Scrappy & Raven	<2 Hour Email Scrappy & Raven	4-8 Business Hours Until Resolution Email Scrappy & Raven Contact UR to generate Pop-up Box	Immediately after Resolution UR Remove Pop-up from Website Email Scrappy & Raven
Banner	Banner Services Systems Database	Enterprise Applications & Data Center	Banner Systems DBA	CIO/D-CIO	<1 Hour Email Scrappy & Raven	<2 Hour Email Scrappy & Raven	4-8 Business Hours Until Resolution Email Scrappy & Raven Contact UR to generate Pop-up Box	Immediately after Resolution UR Remove Pop-up from Website Email Scrappy & Raven
Banner	Banner Services Systems Servers	Enterprise Applications & Data Center	Executive Director, Enterprise Applications & Data Center	CIO/D-CIO	<1 Hour Email Scrappy & Raven	<2 Hour Email Scrappy & Raven	4-8 Business Hours Until Resolution Email Scrappy & Raven Contact UR to generate Pop-up Box	Immediately after Resolution UR Remove Pop-up from Website Email Scrappy & Raven
Enterprise Services System (Non-Banner)	Data Center	Enterprise Applications & Data Center	Executive Director, Enterprise Applications & Data Center	CIO/D-CIO	<1 Hour Email Scrappy (if applicable) & Raven	<2 Hour Email Scrappy (if applicable) & Raven	4-8 Business Hours Until Resolution Email Scrappy (if applicable) & Raven Contact UR to generate Pop-up Box	Immediately after Resolution UR Remove Pop-up from Website Email Scrappy (if applicable) & Raven
Infrastructure	Network	Infrastructure	Director, Infrastructure	CIO/D-CIO	<1 Hour Email Scrappy (if applicable) & Raven	<2 Hour Email Scrappy (if applicable) & Raven	4-8 Business Hours Until Resolution Email Scrappy (if applicable) & Raven Contact UR to generate Pop-up Box	Immediately after Resolution UR Remove Pop-up from Website Email Scrappy (if applicable) & Raven
Infrastructure	Telecomm	Infrastructure	Director, Infrastructure	CIO/D-CIO	<1 Hour Email Scrappy (if applicable) & Raven	<2 Hour Email Scrappy (if applicable) & Raven	4-8 Business Hours Until Resolution Email Scrappy (if applicable) & Raven Contact UR to generate Pop-up Box	Immediately after Resolution UR Remove Pop-up from Website Email Scrappy (if applicable) & Raven

- Pop-up Box – UTC website
- Scrappy – student listserv
- Raven – faculty and staff listserv
- UR – University Relations