

# ASI Communications Priorities

## 1 Position ASI as an expert for the media

- o Stronger relationships with specific media.
- o Faster reaction time.
- o Protect and elevate brand.
- o Promote ASI experts as thought leaders.
- o Be creative and versatile to promote ASI.

## 2 Boost our visibility among Sacramento policymakers

- o Conduct a regular survey of key policymakers.
- o Develop simple briefing documents for policymakers.
- o Develop close ties with ANR.
- o Hold lunch briefings with policymakers on key issues.
- o Organize events with notable policy-maker(s).
- o Build strong bonds with Sacramento media outlets.

## 3 Cultivate existing networks

- o Build strong relationships with NGOs, commodity and farm groups.
- o Use those networks to help promote ASI's work.
- o Participate in events hosted by groups in our network.
- o Increase visibility in the materials those groups produce (Web, newsletters, etc).
- o Promote internships for these groups.
- o Promote network leaders in our briefings to policymakers.

## 4 Harness the power of CE farm advisors

- o Add someone from CE to our advisory board.
- o Build CE projects into our proposals.
- o Survey of farm advisors.
- o Annual meeting with advisors in Davis.
- o Use SAREP grants.
- o Spotlight leadership among farm advisors.
- o Annual award.

## 5 Improve online communications

- o Make site indispensable.
- o Make education the primary goal of our site.
- o Functionality and user-friendliness.
- o Update the site frequently.
- o Use offline and online communication to direct people to our site.
- o Ensure affiliated program sites share a common DNA with the main ASI site.

## 6 Increase Advertising

- o Advertise in trade publications.
- o Become an underwriter of Capitol Public Radio.
- o Market ourselves online. (search marketing, Google ads).

## 7 Build staff and capacity to implement this communications plan

- o Hire communications coordinator.
- o Build on existing networks within UCD and ANR.
- o Consider consultants as necessary.

## 8 Leverage our facilities: Student Farm and Russell Ranch

- o Bring reporters, NGOs, and CE farm advisors to Russell Ranch.
- o Highlight research from Russell Ranch.
- o Enhance Web sites for RR and SF.
- o Use SF to debunk myths about the preparedness of UCD students.
- o Use communications to boost impact of Children's Garden.

## 9 Establish strong ASI brand identity

- o Present ourselves as the Agricultural Sustainability Institute at UC Davis.
- o Position our role as a navigator.
- o Frame our work around food and farm solutions that are good for our economy, environment and communities.
- o Use our tagline to clarify.
- o Use words and phrases that evoke images and speak plainly and directly to our audiences.
- o Cultivate a group of scientists and allies to serve as messengers on key issues.
- o Refresh our brochure.

## 10 Promote signature initiatives

- o Signature initiatives.
- o Signature products (polls, indices, etc).

**AGRICULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE  
FENTON COMMUNICATIONS REPORT – SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

RECOMMENDATION	RESOURCES			PRIORITY		
	DOLLAR	BEHAVIOR	TIME	CORE	KEY	OPTIONAL
<b>BRANDING</b>						
1) Present yourself as <i>Agricultural Sustainability Institute at UC Davis</i>		◇		◇		
2) Position your role as a navigator		◇		◇		
3) Frame your work around food and farm solutions that are good for our economy, environment, and communities		◇		◇		
4) Use your tagline to clarify	◇(maybe)		◇	◇		
5) Use words and phrases that evoke images and speak plainly and directly to your audiences		◇		◇		
6) Cultivate a group of scientists and allies to serve as messengers on key issues	◇(maybe)		◇		◇	
7) Refresh your brochure	◇		◇		◇	
<b>SIGNATURE INITIATIVES &amp; PRODUCTS</b>						
1) Create 2-3 signature initiatives		◇	◇	◇		
2) Create signature products for each initiative	◇		◇	◇		
<b>MEDIA RELATIONS</b>						
1) Increase proactive media outreach using strategies aimed at developing relationships with target reporters at key outlets						
• Create and prioritize a list of journalists and outlets across the state with which you want a strong relationship			◇		◇	
• Organize telephone briefings for reporters to announce the launch of your Signature Initiatives and Signature Products			◇		◇	
• Use one-on-one meetings with top priority reporters and editors to deepen relationships and flag future stories.			◇		◇	
• Organize media tours to highlight Signature Initiatives.	◇		◇			◇
2) Develop culture of media responsiveness and protocols to react quickly to communications opportunities			◇	◇		
3) Protect and elevate ASI's brand		◇		◇		

RECOMMENDATION	RESOURCES			PRIORITY		
	DOLLAR	BEHAVIOR	TIME	CORE	KEY	OPTIONAL
4) Position ASI experts/spokespeople as “thought leaders”			◇			◇
5) Be creative and use a diversity of tactics for gaining media awareness and developing relationships	◇		◇			◇
<b>SACRAMENTO AND POLICYMAKERS</b>						
1) Conduct a regular survey of key policymakers to identify places where they need research assistance or scientific input			◇		◇	
2) Develop simple briefing documents tailored to policymakers			◇	◇		
3) Develop a close relationship with UC’s Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources, Daniel Dooley, in order to leverage his influence and access in Sacramento		◇	◇	◇		
4) Hold biannual lunch briefings with policymakers on key issues	◇		◇		◇	
5) Organize at least one showcase event with a notable policy-maker annually to highlight a solution that can be replicated in other parts of the state	◇		◇		◇	
6) Build strong relationships with reporters, editors and producers at important mainstream media outlets in Sacramento, especially the Sacramento Bee, Capital Public Radio, and Capitol Weekly		◇	◇	◇		
<b>EXISTING NETWORKS</b>						
1) General Best Practices for Networks			◇		◇	
<b>CE FARM ADVISORS</b>						
1) Add someone from the CE community to your advisory board			◇		◇	
2) Build CE projects and partnerships into your own fundraising and policy proposals			◇		◇	
3) Do a regular survey of farm advisors to identify their needs and the needs of the communities they are serving			◇	◇		
4) Follow up the survey with an annual meeting or training with CE farm advisors at UC Davis	◇		◇		◇	
5) Use SAREP grants process to strengthen relationships with farm advisors						
• Create a landing page for SAREP grants that makes clear through the design that SAREP is housed within ASI	◇		◇		◇	
• Send out an email from Tom to farm advisors encouraging them to apply, and include a link back to the landing page			◇	◇		

RECOMMENDATION	RESOURCES			PRIORITY		
	DOLLAR	BEHAVIOR	TIME	CORE	KEY	OPTIONAL
• Profile any success from the grants in your newsletter or on your Web site			◇	◇		
• Include a question about the grants in any survey to farm advisors		◇		◇		
• Promote and review the grants process during any workshop or training for farm advisors at UC Davis		◇			◇	
• Urge UC's Agriculture and National Resources leadership to send an email about the grants to farm advisors and to post something on their Web site			◇		◇	
• Secure space to advertise the grants in any publications widely read by farm advisors, like California Agriculture	◇(maybe)		◇			◇
6) Look for regular opportunities to applaud or spotlight leadership and best practices among farm advisors						
• Profile a farm advisor's success in your newsletter or on your Web site		◇		◇		
• Invite them to come speak to students and faculty on campus			◇		◇	
• Invite them to participate in a press briefing		◇			◇	
• Write a letter to CE leadership acknowledging the good work of one of their farm advisors			◇			◇
• Organize a local media or policy briefing to showcase the local success	◇		◇			◇
• Pitch a local reporter to do a story highlighting a local success, and position ASI as a validator in that story			◇		◇	
7) Create an annual award for sustainable innovations among farm advisors	◇		◇			◇
<b>ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS</b>						
1) Develop ASI's Web site to be a useful, if not indispensable, resource for your target audiences – initial redesign	◇		◇	◇		
Develop ASI's Web site to be a useful, if not indispensable, resource for your target audiences – ongoing updates		◇		◇		
2) Make education the primary goal of your site		◇		◇		
3) Optimize the site for functionality and user-friendliness – initial redesign	◇		◇	◇		
Optimize the site for functionality and user-friendliness – ongoing updates		◇		◇		
4) Update the site frequently with compelling content representing various communities – initial changes	◇		◇		◇	

RECOMMENDATION	RESOURCES			PRIORITY		
	DOLLAR	BEHAVIOR	TIME	CORE	KEY	OPTIONAL
Update the site frequently with compelling content representing various communities – ongoing		◇	◇		◇	
5) Use offline and online communication to direct people back to your Web site		◇		◇		
6) Ensure that subsidiary sites share a common brand “DNA” and convey a relationship with ASI - SAREP	◇		◇	◇		
Ensure that subsidiary sites share a common brand “DNA” and convey a relationship with ASI – Other pages	◇		◇		◇	
<b>LEVERAGING YOUR FACILITIES</b>						
1) Bring reporters, NGOs and CE farm advisors to the Ranch for targeted meetings and special briefings.	◇		◇			◇
2) Clearly demonstrate how research at the Ranch fits into Signature Initiatives and include important research findings in your communications for those Initiatives.		◇	◇	◇		
3) Create an enhanced Russell Ranch landing page and micro-Web site	◇		◇			◇
4) Look for opportunities to promote research on common, everyday foods			◇		◇	
5) Use the Student Farm to debunk myths about the preparedness of UC Davis students		◇	◇			◇
6) Use communications to boost impact of Children’s Garden	◇		◇			◇
<b>ADVERTISING</b>						
1) Advertising in trade publications	◇		◇			◇
2) Underwriting Capitol Public Radio	◇		◇			◇
3) Marketing Yourself Online	◇		◇			◇

Agricultural Sustainability Institute  
at  
**UC DAVIS**  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA



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COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Our goal for this communications plan is to give you a document that is easy to use and implement. Our experience, after more than 25 years as the nation's leading communications firm for nonprofits, informs our belief that for a communications plan to be useful, it has to build off the work you are currently doing. Keeping your capacity and budget in mind, we offer efficient and effective ways to take all of the work you are doing now and better reach your goals through smart communications. We also offer strategies and tactics that help you reach multiple goals, so that all of your time and money investments are worthwhile.

## II. TERMINOLOGY

**Goals:** The broad outcomes you hope to achieve over the life of the plan.

**Strategies:** The means by which you seek to achieve those goals.

**Dollar Recommendations:** Recommendations that either require new dollar resources or redistribution of current resources.

**Behavior Recommendations:** Recommendations that are changes in how you approach a certain strategy or tactic, but generally do not take more time or money than you currently spend.

**Time Recommendations:** Recommendations that require new staff time to implement, as opposed to just changing what you are already doing.

**Core:** Recommendations that are top priority, and essential to the success of the organization.

**Key:** Recommendations that are important to implement, but are second tier in terms of priority.

**Optional:** Recommendations that are desirable activities, but are third tier in terms of importance.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The following is an overview of the methodology Fenton used in researching ASI to inform the communications plan. This process included the following activities:

**Perceptual Audit.** Fenton conducted phone interviews with 11 internal and external stakeholders, including External Advisory Board members, UC and UC Davis communications staff and ASI staff with unique insights into affiliated programs such as SAREP and Student Farm. Five other stakeholders, from similar categories to those interviewed by phone, completed a Web-based survey.

**Collateral & Media Review.** We reviewed ASI's existing collateral materials, including your Web site. We researched how your organization is positioned in the news media by reviewing clips from the last two years.

**Peer Review.** We also conducted research on a handful of organizations perceived as peers or competitors. We specifically looked at:

- Roots of Change
- Iowa State University's Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture
- Agricultural Issues Center
- Lodi-Woodbridge Winegrape Commission



**Half-Day Workshop.** We then presented the results of our research and our big-picture strategic recommendations at an External Advisory Board meeting in Davis. Feedback from this meeting has been incorporated into this report.

#### IV. GOALS

##### **ASI Communications Goals**

- Establish ASI as the place to which California government, business and NGO leaders turn first for information about sustainable food and agriculture.
- Promote links among farmers and between the farm community and other key constituencies to create common ground for creating new incentives and removing barriers to sustainable food production, distribution, and consumption.
- Ensure that all of the individual components of the ASI portfolio — from research to education and outreach — contribute to a broader movement toward more sustainable farming and food practices in California.

#### V. TARGET AUDIENCES

Your target audiences should be identified as specifically as possible, because this precision allows you to develop successful strategies to reach the people who matter most. An effective communications strategy invigorates your base of support and successfully broadens that base. Successful communications can also effectively differentiate you from your peers in the hearts and minds of your prospective donors.

##### **ASI Target External Audiences**

Through the online perceptual audit, during telephone interviews with stakeholders, and during our meeting with your External Advisory Board, four primary target audiences were identified:

1. Farmers and Ranchers
2. Policymakers
3. NGOs and Network Organizations
4. Agribusiness Leaders (including processors, distributors, food retailers and institutional food service companies)

Normally, we recommend an organization have no more than three primary audiences at any one time. Generally, it's hard to communicate effectively with anyone if you cast your net too wide. Success with more than three usually depends on whether or not the same brand and messages are equally compatible with each audience; whether you can effectively prioritize within each audience type; whether or not you can use the same communications strategies and tactics to reach multiple audiences; and whether you have sufficient communications resources. To the extent that you embrace our recommendations to create Signature Initiatives (*See Section VII*), we also strongly recommend that you go through the process of identifying priority audiences for each Initiative.

##### **Primary Audiences:**

##### ***1. Farmers and Ranchers***

Farmers are the ones who will transform farming systems in California by adopting sustainable practices. It is important to effectively communicate the environmental and social benefits of sustainable agriculture while continuing to understand this community's financial needs. It is also especially important with this group to focus on practical, applicable solutions to current problems

rather than what they might perceive as ivory tower, academic ideas that do not have real world application. We should note here that UC Cooperative Extension agents/ farm advisors and commodity groups, as well as their private sector and NGO counterparts, will be key liaisons to this audience.

We should distinguish between two kinds of farmers for the purposes of communications because their needs and communications pathways will be different:

- Small-and medium-size growers
- Large farm operators

## **2. Policymakers**

Policymakers are responsible for setting priorities, shaping and passing the legislation that encourages or requires sustainable agricultural practices from California's farmers. They will also provide incentives to help farmers continue using or transitioning to sustainable practices. Since we know that policymakers generally do not like to take risks, it will be especially important for ASI to demonstrate common ground across the farming and environmental communities. That will give policymakers the political cover they need to take action to advance sustainable farm and food policies.

We should distinguish between two kinds of state policymakers:

- Appointees and regulators in the administrative branch, including key state agricultural commissions and staff in relevant agencies
- Legislators and legislative staff, especially those on committees most relevant to environmental and agricultural issues. (Note that legislators must be approached in coordination with the UC Office of the President.)

It is also worth noting that while you will be reaching out to both state and federal policymakers, you will undoubtedly have more influence in California, especially because of your proximity to Sacramento.

## **3. NGOs & Network Organizations**

A number of NGOs interested in protecting open space, social justice, health, and the environment are gatekeepers to key constituencies that you need to ultimately reach. In general, NGOs will primarily look to you for scientific credibility and to play a role as a neutral broker. In many cases, NGOs have already done the work to bring different parties — including agricultural producers, environmentalists, labor leaders, policymakers and businesses — to the same table. These existing networks and relationships should be leveraged to gain credibility and position ASI as a thought leader.

We can break the NGO audiences you need to reach into three general categories:

- Conservation, land-based learning, and farm preservation groups, who are more likely to already have relationships in farm communities
- Environmental and social justice groups, who are more likely to represent urban and suburban constituencies
- Farm labor groups

## **4. Agribusiness Leaders**

Several members of your External Advisory Board advocated including distributors, processors, retailers and food service companies among your top audiences. We've grouped them together under the heading *agribusiness leaders*. These companies have a critical role in providing downward signals to farmers and ranchers to grow food sustainably and in giving consumers

more options to buy and eat sustainable foods. These companies are increasingly looking for guidance on what is or is not sustainable.

What is less clear is whether it would be possible to draw some conclusions about the person most likely to have both the interest and influence on sustainability matters within each company. Ideally, you would want to be building relationships directly with a Vice President for Sustainability or comparable position in any of these companies. In light of that, keep in mind that you would be dealing with people at an executive level with either a personal or professional interest in sustainability, corporate responsibility, environmental quality or consumer affairs.

Finally, because this audience category has the potential to be so broad, we strongly recommend that you prioritize your outreach to those companies that are most relevant to your Signature Initiatives.

## **Secondary Audiences**

In addition to the primary audiences identified above, we should note a few secondary audiences to keep in mind. Although these audiences will not be the focus of the communications plan, where possible you should promote strategies and tactics that have the additional benefit of bringing these audiences along.

### **1. University Faculty and Administration**

Faculty at UC Davis and other campuses drive the research that contributes to practical and effective methods of sustainable agriculture. Their buy-in and leadership will ultimately have a huge impact over the ability of ASI to achieve its mandate.

### **2. California Consumers**

Technically, any Californian who eats California-grown food is ultimately a stakeholder in ASI's work. Since that is too broad a category for a meaningful communications plan, given your existing resources and competing priorities, we would recommend focusing on key institutions that have influence over the behavior of consumers and other key audiences. Those would especially include the following institutions that are already the target of your outreach:

- Schools
- Hospitals
- Professional chefs

### **3. College Students**

Current and prospective students at UC Davis and other institutions are highly receptive to the twin needs of protecting the environment and creating safe and sustainable food systems. They will also drive future research and hold positions in state government. By communicating the value of sustainable agriculture early to today's students, they are more likely to support it in the future. Students will want ASI to provide them with opportunities to gain valuable experience and knowledge. They will also value ASI if it directly gives them the opportunity to be part of a larger movement for social and environmental change.

## **VI. BRAND WITH YOUR AUDIENCES IN MIND**

### **ASI and the UC Davis Brand**

It is important to treat ASI not as a brand unto itself but as having a symbiotic relationship to the parent brand of UC Davis, and, by extension, the UC System. UC Davis has a unique reputation as a leader in agricultural science dating back more than a century. At the same time, you also want the ASI brand to inherently address the limitations of your parent brand, including concerns that universities tend to move slowly and produce theoretical rather than practical ideas.

As we've mentioned previously, a brand is only effective if it allows you to make positive emotional connections to your audience. It has to anticipate and address your audiences' hopes, fears, aspirations and frustrations. In your case, that means your brand has to convey the fact that you offer *relevant, easy to access expertise*.

### **Recommendations**

1. **Present yourself as the Agricultural Sustainability Institute at UC Davis. (Behavior Recommendation; Core)** At your December External Advisory Board meeting, we raised the larger question of whether ASI should be a brand unto itself or whether it should primarily be an extension of UC Davis. The sentiment seemed to be that you should try to do both with one amendment. They felt that the ASI brand should ultimately reflect the broad expertise of the UC System, rather than just UC Davis. The solution that emerged was to talk about the "Agricultural Sustainability Institute at UC Davis" because that locates you at Davis without limiting you to a narrow affiliation with it. From our perspective, that still works well because it keeps UC Davis as part of your name and allows you to borrow from its well-established reputation as a pioneer and leader in the field of agricultural science.

*We recommend that you make the full name "Agricultural Sustainability Institute at UC Davis" standard for all communications and coach all of your staff and advisory board members to use it as well.*

2. **Position your role as a navigator. (Behavior Recommendation; Core)** The audiences you are trying to reach want to make smart decisions and value scientifically credible information to help them make those decisions. But they do not have the time or the expertise to know what information is most important and what emerging solutions will be most effective. Moreover, to an outsider UC Davis and the UC system is a bureaucratic maze, with many different institutions and departments with similar names doing overlapping work. ASI can be a bridge to the information that matters to them and make it easier to access the wealth of expertise within the university community. And because you have the unique ability to work with and understand a wide range of stakeholders, you can also help your audiences navigate the food and agriculture community itself, identifying opportunities for new linkages and partnerships.
3. **Frame your work around food and farm solutions that are good for our economy, environment and communities. (Behavior Recommendation; Core)** Your audiences are busy people. They will not have patience for theory. You should avoid situations where you are only highlighting problems or peddling what could be perceived as pie-in-the-sky ideas. If you want to have lasting relevance to them, your communications should always point toward practical solutions. That is not to say that university faculty and others won't be doing research on problems. But we recommend that you spend your limited resources and communications opportunities telling audiences what they *can* do. That doesn't mean you shouldn't be bold or cutting-edge. It does mean that when you are thinking big or pushing the envelope, you offer a clear and feasible path to success.

We also think that you will be most effective when you can show how single solutions will have multiple benefits. For example, strategies that help reduce nitrogen pollution can help farmers save money while at the same time keeping our water supply clean and safe. Or, linking communities with local farms gives communities better access to fresh produce, helps local farmers stay in business and saves energy. When you have practical solutions that deliver these multiple benefits to different audiences, that should be a signal to you to make it a communications priority.

4. **Use your tagline to clarify. (Time and Possibly Dollar Recommendation; Core)** Your placeholder tagline — Science for Stewardship and Well-being — may speak to your values but it doesn't clarify for external audiences your relevance to them as much as it could. We would recommend modifying your tagline to reflect your practical rather than theoretical orientation. The following are just some examples for how you might do that, in order of recommendation:
  - Solutions for a better food system
  - Science for a better food system
  - Science - Stewardship - Solutions
5. **Use words and phrases that evoke images and speak plainly and directly to your audiences. (Behavior Recommendation; Core)** Academia often speaks in a language of its own. In a university setting, you get extra points for using more syllables. But with the rest of the world, that can be a barrier to effective communication. Part of your job as navigator is to be a translator as well — to turn complex scientific concepts into language easy for lay people to digest. Try to steer clear of jargon and acronyms. Talk about *farms* and *ranches* and food rather than *agriculture* generally. People care more about *clean air* and *clean water* than they do the *environment*. There is more motivational power in *saving energy* than in *reducing carbon dioxide emissions*. Even though you might think that your audiences are familiar with eco and agri-jargon, that doesn't mean it's the most effective way to reach them. At the end of the day, they are more likely to respond emotionally to simple words like "food" and "safe" than any thing else you might say.

**A note about the word *sustainability*:** This is a word that has more cache among environmental NGOs than it does among the conventional food and farm business community, but that is indeed changing. We would be careful about relying too heavily on it to communicate with your audiences. There are some in the farming and ranching community who will definitely be turned off by the word, but for most others it will simply raise more questions than it answers. You are better off saying that a particular practice is *good for current and future generations of farmers or Californians* than to say that it is *sustainable*. You can also use language such as, *practices that will set farmers up to succeed now and well into the future* as another way of describing sustainable farming. Finally, we recommend that you use clear and compelling examples to ground your definition of sustainability for your audiences. So your elevator pitch might sound something like this:

*The Agricultural Sustainability Institute at UC Davis works with scientists across the UC system to find new ways of growing and delivering food that are better for our environment, economy and communities. For example, we are helping a coalition of farmers and environmental groups devise a set of water-friendly farming techniques that use less fertilizer and save money for farmers in the process.*

**A note about your mission and vision statements**

We generally do not recommend that organizations rely too heavily on mission and vision statements to communicate with external audiences. They tend to be most useful in outlining an organization's core values to serve as guidelines for internal decision-making by staff and board members. Instead we recommend developing an external message platform using the narrative approach suggested for your brochure below. The benefit of a message platform aimed at specific external audiences is that you define what you do and why you do it in terms that are directly relevant to your external audiences.

That said, there is a benefit to having your mission and vision statement be more consistent with your key brand attributes. In that sense, what is missing most from both of those products is an emphasis on *practical solutions that are good for the environment, economy and communities* and on the role that you play helping key audiences *navigate* complex issues. Whether or not these concepts belong in a mission statement or a vision statement is

a bit of a technicality. They are ultimately so core to who you are and what you do that they should be acknowledged up front, for internal audiences as well as external ones. We have included a sample message platform (See *Appendix X*) so you can see how to recast your mission and vision statements in a format suited for outside audiences.

6. **Cultivate a group of scientists and allies to serve as messengers on key issues. (Time and Possibly Dollar Recommendation; Key)** In many ways, the most effective way to deliver your best brand is to regularly associate yourself with a combination of scientists, farmers, environmentalists, and other key stakeholders as needed. (It's worth noting that scientists and farmers have especially strong credibility ratings compared to other professions. And if you really want to convince people that food grown well is good for you, get a nurse to say it. To get the opposite effect, have a lawyer do it.) When you can have two parties that don't always get along — like the leaders of a farm group and an environmental group — associating with ASI and agreeing on the same solution, you are not only demonstrating common ground, but also telling your audiences that you have a knack for bringing people together. With that in mind, you should make a point of capturing testimonials and stories from these key messengers and featuring them in places such as:

- Marketing materials or collateral, like your brochure, annual report, individual program brochures
- Web site
- Newsletter
- Workshops
- Press Releases

We also recommend that you invest in spokesperson training for those people who will be your primary messengers for any of your Signature Initiatives (See *Section VII*) or other major programs. That is especially true for scientists who will inevitably need help making their research relevant and easy to understand for a range of audiences.

7. **Refresh your brochure. (Time and Dollar Recommendation; Key)** Going through your collateral and strategic documents, it became clear that you lacked one short but compelling brochure or simple communications product that you can leave behind when you meet with key stakeholders. Your existing brochure provides an overview of ASI's mission and structure along with well-defined sub-headings for various programs and initiatives. And the copy is complemented by effective images, and has clear contact information to show that you are accessible.

However, the key to branding is connecting with people's hearts. You want your audiences to *feel* like you are an organization that they can trust and that understands them. And for that, your brochure should tell a story, rather than provide an organizational overview and a laundry list of programs.

We would recommend refreshing your brochure with the following elements included:

- a. Updated name and tagline
- b. Copy that defines the problem your audiences face. For example:

*How we grow food and how we eat is important. People who make decisions that impact food systems want to do the right thing, but often lack access to information about what works.*

- c. Copy that offers a solution. For example:



*ASI works with scientists across the UC system to find and promote new ways of growing and delivering food that are better for our environment, economy and communities.*

- d. Copy that illustrates what you are doing and ideally promotes your Signature Initiatives  
For example:
  - *We are teaching farmers and ranchers to use new water-friendly farming techniques that use less fertilizer and save money in the process.*
  - *We are working with food processors and distributors to develop practical ways to save energy and reduce their climate impact.*
  - *We are making it easier for California schools and hospitals to buy their food from local farms and ranches.*
- e. Photos that show you value farmers, environment and communities
- f. Quotes from a few key allies, ideally some combination of a respected farmer, business leader, NGO and policy-maker
- g. Contact information and Web site URL

Note that we think the Farm-to-School brochure is very effective. It has testimonials front and center. It doesn't tell a traditional narrative story, but it boils the program down to simple, easy to digest concepts; highlights successes; and clearly conveys the benefits to its key audiences.

#### **Thoughts About the Newsletter**

Overall, your newsletter does a pretty good job of packaging your work. But it comes off more like a newsletter about ASI than a newsletter about sustainable agriculture. That raises a question about the newsletter's primary purpose and audience. If the newsletter goes to people who already feel invested in ASI and want to specifically know what you are doing, then it is probably fine. If you are trying to use the newsletter to build and solidify new relationships, then we would recommend approaching it from the perspective of your audience. What are the issues that concern them most? Are there issues that are particularly timely? Are there people you want to hold up as a model? That doesn't require a complete overall of your newsletter. But it does mean that you should approach most of the content from the perspective of "why would our readers be interested?" and start there. So many of the articles are about process: meetings or conferences you organized, a change in your strategic plan, a grant you received. Your audiences care more about outcomes and solutions. So rather than give them an article about a biodiversity conference, write an article about farming with whole ecosystems in mind and then mention the conference in a side-bar.

The article on biologically integrated farming systems for table grapes, from the Winter-Spring 2008 issue is a good example. The article's headline and lead paragraphs focus on the fact that you got a grant. Only further down do you actually get into the real questions and challenges that are driving the research. But that's the stuff that will be most interesting to your average external audience member. You would be better off having an article about harvesting table grapes more sustainably and including a side-bar about the new grant extension and what that means.

The common thread to keep in mind for all of your communications, from your brochure to your newsletter to your Web site is a new orientation aimed at what your audience is most likely to take in rather than what you would simply report out. That simple change in behavior will go a long way toward making ASI relevant to the people it most wants to reach.

## VII. USE SIGNATURE INITIATIVES AND PRODUCTS TO BREAK THROUGH THE CLUTTER

When you consider the sheer number of issues and activities happening within and outside of the UC system that might be relevant to ASI's work, it's very easy to imagine ASI spreading its communications and other capabilities very thin. More importantly, unless there is some coordination and consolidation, you run the risk of doing many different things without making a larger impact.

It is also true that the people you are trying to reach are typically overwhelmed with information. They often need to hear the same message several times before it starts to sink in. That is why we recommend investing in a series of Signature Initiatives and Signature Products that can break through the clutter and give your communications efforts greater cohesion and impact with your audiences.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Signature Initiatives (Behavior and Time Recommendation; Core)**

Signature Initiatives give you ways to frame and package your work for your audiences. We recommend that you start with no more than 2-3 in order to do them successfully, and once selected, you should be prepared to commit to them for at least 3-5 years. The following are some criteria for choosing a Signature Initiative:

- It should address an important problem with economic, environmental and social implications
- It should have clear relevance to one or more of your priority audiences in California
- There should be a clear and practical solution or set of solutions, which would address the concerns of and offer benefits to different priority audiences
- It draws on your core competencies of scientific research and education and builds on expertise at ASI, UC Davis or the entire UC system
- You can set clear, measurable goals that could be met over a 3-5 year time horizon
- You can raise money around it
- It should allow you to make connections between agriculture and issues that are higher priorities among Californians, like the economy, energy, health and water

It is also worth noting that many of the strategic and tactical recommendations within this plan lend themselves to promoting Initiatives, including:

- Sacramento briefings and briefing papers for policymakers
- Telephone press briefings for reporters, opinion articles and public affairs radio programs
- Outreach to and partnerships with existing networks
- Web site and online strategy
- Signature Products
- Messenger recruitment and training
- Workshops at Russell Ranch or off site

With those criteria in mind, we suggest the following Signature Initiatives as examples worth considering:

#### ***Climate-Smart Food Systems (or Energy-Smart Food Systems)***

We already know that climate change is a priority for environmental NGOs and policymakers. A growing number of food producers, processors and distributors are realizing that they have to adapt to a climate-sensitive era as well. We can expect that new policies will only accelerate the urgency with which these audiences need practical guidance on how to effectively and economically address energy and climate concerns. Note that you could just as easily frame this



initiative around energy rather than climate, since energy has even broader appeal than climate change. But if you know that your audience already has a demand for help navigating climate change, that would be the better choice.

### **Water-Friendly Farming**

Your own stakeholder survey revealed that water is the number one issue of concern. When you combine concerns about water scarcity with water pollution, it's even greater. That makes a strong case for having at least one of your initiatives focus on water. We understand that through your latest Packard grant, you will already be focusing on a major program to reduce nitrogen pollution. While you may be primarily focused on the pollutant, in reality, the universal bottom line is safe and clean water. As such, you should frame your nitrogen work within a water-focused initiative. And because there are economic benefits to farmers who use less fertilizer, it meets the criteria of providing multiple benefits to different audiences.

### **Farm to Market Solutions**

You are already doing a lot of work, largely through Gail Feenstra's program, to link growers within a region to local schools, hospitals and other institutions. We recommend packaging them together as part of a broader initiative aimed at creating a market for sustainably and responsibly grown food to help farmers, communities and the environment.

*Note: Keep in mind that your Signature Initiatives may be mutually reinforcing. In fact, that is ideal. Helping communities source their food locally has clear climate benefits. Helping to protect our limited and fragile water supply is all the more important in an age of climate change. Using less fertilizer may not only impact our water but also help address climate change. Having lots of those kind of synergies allows you to get more communications bang for your buck.*

### **Signature Products (Time and Dollar Recommendation; Core)**

A signature product should create a platform for showcasing ASI as a leader to your audiences broadly. It should also help you stand out from the crowd and give your audiences something concrete with which to associate you. Ideally, your Signature Product should fill in the blank in the following question: "ASI, aren't they the ones that do \_\_\_\_\_?"

Here are some criteria to consider when choosing Signature Products.

- They frame issues in ways that are positive, relevant and memorable for your priority audiences
- They allow you to highlight problems and solutions and make connections between the environment, economy and communities
- They have the potential to garner strong media coverage
- They are feasible in light of your core competencies and capacity
- You can raise money around them
- They have a long shelf life or could be repeated regularly
- They complement your Signature Initiatives

As with the Signature Initiatives, many of the strategic and tactical recommendations within this plan lend themselves to promoting signature products, including:

- Sacramento briefings and briefing papers for policymakers
- Telephone press briefings for reporters, opinion articles, public affairs radio programs
- Outreach to existing networks
- Web site and online strategy
- Collateral and communications around signature initiatives

With those criteria in mind, we suggest the following Signature Products as examples worth considering:

**Annual Food/Farm Poll**

California is ripe for an annual food/farm public opinion survey and UC Davis has the credibility for such a poll to be taken seriously. Ideally, the poll should try to understand California consumers' attitudes and opinions about where their food comes from and try to understand what factors are likely to influence their decisions about what to buy and eat. It would be enormously valuable to policymakers, NGOs, and the institutions that grow, process, distribute or serve food. While at one time we entertained the idea of partnering with an organization like the Public Policy Institute of California, it would be even more valuable to ASI if the poll came from UC Davis, instead. Of course, you could partner with another institution on campus, like the Robert Mondavi Institute for Wine and Food Science.

**California Farm or Food Sustainability Index**

If you want to invest your audiences in achieving measurable changes in how we grow and consume food, you need to make the measurements clear and transparent. Ultimately, it will be important to track those changes over time. Ideally, you will want to measure a mix of environmental, economic and social trends to reinforce the interrelatedness of these issues. Some questions you could try to address in such an index are:

- How much fertilizer is used by California farms and ranches?
- How many waterways have unsafe levels of nitrogen-related pollution?
- How much energy does California's agriculture industry use?
- What percentage of public schools have gardens or cafeterias serving local food?
- How much farmland is permanently protected from development?
- How much farmland is currently certified organic?
- How much money did consumers spend on organic food in California last year?
- How much money would California farmers save if they used a particular water or energy saving technique?
- How much food is imported in California?
- How many students majored in agriculture or food related subjects last year?

**Climate Food Pyramid**

We know that you are already working on developing the formula for determining the climate impact of various farm and food-related activities. Ideally, you would be able to package and market that formula in a way that is memorable. For example, a professor at Princeton used Stabilization Wedges to communicate how different energy strategies could work together to combat global warming. It was so easy to understand and remember that even Vice President Al Gore used it in *An Inconvenient Truth*. Since people already associate nutritional information about food with a pyramid, we strongly recommend borrowing the same imagery to communicate climate impact as well. If you could get your most respected stakeholders, especially scientists and policymakers, to adopt or endorse the climate food pyramid, it could become the industry standard. You would also want to take steps to design and promote a micro-Web site with some interactive ways to use the pyramid model. (Note: It appears that [www.climatefoodpyramid.com/org/gov/edu](http://www.climatefoodpyramid.com/org/gov/edu) is available. Grab it while you can!)

**VIII. POSITION YOURSELF AS AN EXPERT FOR THE MEDIA**

Securing media coverage should never be an end in itself for any communications plan. It's always a means for reaching your priority audiences. In your case, the media has an important role to play in enhancing your brand recognition among your key audiences and framing the conversation that your audiences will have around sustainable agriculture challenges and solutions.

It is important to recognize that ASI staff are already doing a lot of great work to push stories out to the media and to respond to their inquiries. Our recommendations are intended to build upon that foundation. Although ASI has been mentioned in several articles, it has yet to become the place that reporters turn to first for information about sustainable agriculture. What's more, in the handful of articles where ASI has been mentioned or ASI spokespeople have been quoted, ASI's relationship with SAREP or UC Davis has been unclear and at times confusing.

Due to your relationship with UC Davis and the collective credentials of ASI's affiliates, you should be able to quickly develop the reputation as a credible, go-to source for media covering stories related to sustainable farming and food systems.

When we spoke to other communications staff at UC Davis and UC, it became clear that no one has clearly identified a particular group of reporters or editors covering food and agriculture with the goal of deepening relationships over time. These communications colleagues can certainly help in that role, but at the end of the day, if ASI wants to change the way your issues are covered by the media, it will have to take the lead in building key media relationships. The recommendations below are intended to help you do that.

## **Recommendations**

- 1. Increase proactive media outreach using strategies aimed at developing relationships with target reporters at key outlets.** See the step-by-step process outlined below for a general plan on how to make this happen quickly and efficiently.

***Create and prioritize a list of journalists and outlets across the state with which you want a strong relationship. (Time Recommendation; Key)***

- Consider beats (e.g. science, food and higher education reporters and editors), outlets (e.g. major California newspapers and second-tier newspapers in key markets) and geographic focus (e.g. Central Valley) when developing your list of target journalists.
- Build relationships with producers at influential public affairs programs like Forum (KQED-FM, San Francisco), Which Way LA? (KCRW-FM; Los Angeles) and Insight (KXJZ-FM, Sacramento) to pitch program topics and to ensure that they call you when they need sustainable farming and food (systems) experts.
- Ideally, it's best to manage these relationships in a subscription media database, like Cision (formerly Bacon's). The main benefit is that the system will automatically update your list when reporters change jobs or beats. And you can export your lists to regular Excel spreadsheets as needed. If you don't have access to a subscription database, you can track your most important relationships in Outlook or any contact management system. Or you can use a simple Excel spreadsheet. The main point is that you have them in a single place where more than one person can track contacts over time.
- Share your list of priority media targets with people like Pam Kan-Rice and Pat Bailey so that they can look for opportunities to engage those reporters as well.

***Organize telephone briefings for reporters to announce the launch of your Signature Initiatives and Signature Products. (Time Recommendation; Key)***

- Provide them with information and sources to contextualize the significance of how your Initiatives and Products relate to newsworthy issues (You always want to answer the question: "How does this Initiative/Product" tie back to what average viewers, listeners or readers are interested in right now?")
- Highlight interesting angles, potential legislative hooks, controversies, etc.

- Coordinate with UC Davis and UC communications colleagues early. In many cases, they will be able to help with the pitching and the logistics.

***Use one-on-one meetings with top priority reporters and editors to deepen relationships and flag future stories. (Time Recommendation; Key)***

***Organize media tours to highlight Signature Initiatives.*** You can combine this tactic with the VIP field events we recommend in Section IX. **(Time and Dollar Recommendation; Optional)**

- The focus of the tour should reinforce your core brand qualities. For example, to show that ASI's initiatives are solutions-oriented and practical, start the morning at a farm and have the reporter follow the spokesperson to a school that is using the locally-grown produce.

2. **Develop culture of media responsiveness and protocols to react quickly to communications opportunities. (Time Recommendation; Core)** Establishing a clear system for rapidly taking advantage of proactive and reactive media opportunities should ensure that ASI is able to fully utilize its network of experts and develop its reputation as a "journalist-friendly" source. And for better or worse, media coverage around food and agriculture issues tends to swell when there is an emergency or crisis. For food safety issues in particular, you should set your sights on influencing the day-two stories, when the media tends to step back and look backward and forward. By responding quickly but carefully, you can help to guide that conversation to be both scientifically-grounded and solutions-oriented.

The following are some tips for ensuring that you respond to media opportunities with speed and care:

- Create a simple media intake form for the communications department to use whenever a journalist calls ASI (See Appendix IX).
- In addition to gathering the relevant information, make sure there is a clear chain of command for responding to incoming media requests. This will ensure visibility for ASI's designated spokespeople, brand/message continuity and facilitate the development of relationships between ASI's experts and key reporters.
- Develop a system for responding quickly to breaking news related to ASI's focus. An obvious example would be last year's salmonella scare and tomato recall, but ASI should also appropriately respond to legislation, new reports, etc. when they are in the news. Responses could include:
  - E-mailing a simple media alert promoting key UC Davis faculty members as experts
  - A press teleconference call with key experts and allies
  - Individual phone calls to a key editorial writer, reporter or public affairs program producer
  - Submitting a topical op-ed

3. **Protect and elevate ASI's brand. (Behavior Recommendation; Core)** As past media coverage has shown, ASI is at great risk of misidentification and/or brand dilution due to your collaborative nature. In addition to correctly positioning ASI in relation to UC Davis, when working with partner organizations, decide how you want spokespeople to identify themselves and which affiliation is "taking credit" before getting on the phone with a reporter. Here are two important tips for establishing and protecting ASI's brand with the media and in media coverage:

- When an ASI spokesperson talks to the media — either to pitch a story or give an interview — they should clearly identify themselves primarily as a representative of ASI, so they are not described simply as being from UC Davis or any other institution.
- Especially during the next two years, encourage spokespeople to proactively give reporters background on ASI (e.g. the elevator pitch), so that reporters are not only familiar with the name, but also with what ASI actually does.

*Note: In many cases, the expert on a particular issue will be a UC Davis faculty member, rather than ASI staff per se. If possible, you should create ASI titles for faculty members who will regularly serve as spokespeople for your Initiatives. For example,*

*“Dr. John Smith is a Professor of Agricultural Ecology at UC Davis and a senior advisor to the Agricultural Sustainability Institute’s Water-Friendly Farming Initiative.”*

4. **Position ASI experts/spokespeople as “thought leaders.” (Time Recommendation; Optional)** Successfully positioning key ASI spokespeople, such as Tom, as leading, forward-thinking experts on California food systems (or other, more specific topics) will provide many benefits. Increased name recognition will inevitably lead to more success in setting up editorial meetings, publishing op-eds, appearing on high-profile public affairs programs and generally securing influential platforms to publicize ASI’s work. Here are a few suggestions on how to implement this recommendation:

- Organize editorial board meetings with key newspapers to highlight priority initiatives and opportunities for editorial or opinion coverage.
- Try to publish at least one op-ed per Signature Initiative per year in a major California newspaper ideally connecting your Initiative to a hot news topic or on a new or relevant trend.
- Syndicate ASI-branded content, like a column or blog from Tom, to trade publications.

In addition, the following recommendations, which appear elsewhere in this plan, can help you position your spokespeople as thought leaders:

- Actively promote ASI spokespeople as guests for radio public affairs programs.
- Promote ASI spokespeople as speakers for network conferences and other major meetings.
- Organize press and policy-maker briefings, which feature ASI leaders.

5. **Be creative and use a diversity of tactics for gaining media awareness and developing relationships. (Time and Dollar Recommendation; Optional)** Keep in mind that generating positive media coverage of ASI is not the main goal, but an effective method for increasing your influence and leveraging real-world impact out of your work. Constantly brainstorm new ways to get a foot in the door with target media and utilize all your available resources to develop connections with journalists. Here are a few examples/suggestions:

- Consider becoming a sponsor of Capital Public Radio.
- Propose a regular feature on California Report about food, like a modern-day farm report, possibly using Michael Pollan and The Packard Foundation as partners.
- Team up with Michael Pollan and others to develop a California Food Writers Workshop that would bring journalists to UC Davis for a weekend (Consider teaming up with UC Berkeley’s Graduate School of Journalism. *Note:* Most of the Journalism School staff are still semi-active journalists and often write articles for top-tier publications, such as *New York Times*).

## IX. BOOST YOUR VISIBILITY AMONG SACRAMENTO POLICYMAKERS

You have identified government officials and policymakers as a primary target audience because they have the ability to influence the behavior of other key audience groups. While we recognize the opportunity and need to work with policymakers at the local and national levels as well, your greatest opportunities lie in Sacramento. Because of both proximity and legacy, UC Davis already has a very strong reputation in Sacramento as a leader on agricultural issues. California state government also has a unique relationship to the UC System as a whole. In a sense, they are part of the same family, and the fact that you represent that system and serve as a bridge to it gives you additional cache in the state capital.

For those reasons, developing and maintaining strong relationships and brand awareness in Sacramento will help you keep your finger on the pulse of California's ever-changing political landscape, which should be a factor in how you prioritize — or at least frame — ASI's work. It will also help you develop the influence you need to shape farm and food policy in ways that will benefit the economy, the environment and communities.

The recommendations below are designed to help you efficiently develop these relationships while simultaneously reinforcing your brand of being a practical, solutions-oriented resource.

### Recommendations

1. **Conduct a regular survey of key policymakers to identify places where they need research assistance or scientific input. (Time Recommendation; Key)** The survey audience could be very targeted or very broad and be done formally or informally, depending on resources. Ideally, the survey would entail both an online version — sent out via email using a service like Survey Monkey — and a handful of one-on-one interviews with top targets. The survey could be done annually or every two years, depending on whether you wanted to time this research to the annual legislative calendar or the two-year election cycle.

The benefits of actively surveying this audience are two-fold. First, ASI will be able to use the results to determine some of your target audience's most relevant interests and informational needs. Second, the survey itself will put ASI on their radar as a proactive organization working on farm and food policy.

2. **Develop simple briefing documents tailored to policymakers. (Time Recommendation; Core)** Most policymakers do not have time to track the latest research and they often lack the expertise necessary to know what information is most important. They are more likely to rely on you to help them navigate the complex issues. In order to play that role effectively, you will need to deliver your advice in a form that is easy for policymakers, with a range of knowledge about farm and food issues, to understand (*See Appendix XI for a sample briefing document for policymakers*).

In general we recommend that you develop briefing papers for the following:

- Issues that are flagged as priorities in the survey of policymakers.
- Issues related to your Signature Initiatives.
- Other hot or controversial issues that emerge, like a relevant food safety scare, a spike in energy prices or a water shortage.

We recommend that you develop a standard template for these briefing documents so that they all have the same look and feel and to make it easier to pull them together. We also recommend that you develop an online version first and then turn that into a print version; this is generally much more efficient than starting with the print version. The following are some additional tips for making your briefing papers effective:



- Aim for no more than 5 pages in length.
- Use a problem-solution-action narrative.
- While science should be the criteria for defining the problem, be clear that the solution you are offering is practical.
- Show the links between economy, environment and community health as you define the problem and in the solution you offer. Even when you are talking about environmental implications, show how people are impacted.
- Demonstrate that there is common ground around your solutions by including the perspective of different stakeholders in the briefing document.
- Design and lay out the document so that it is highly readable, with headlines, photos, charts, and “blow up” statements or quotes.

**3. Develop a close relationship with UC’s Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources, Daniel Dooley, in order to leverage his influence and access in Sacramento. (Time and Behavior Recommendation; Core)** Simply put, if you can get Vice President Dooley to carry your message and push your priorities in Sacramento, you will get much further than if you try to go it alone. In order for that to happen, he must understand ASI’s priorities and be able to communicate effectively on your behalf. The following are some suggestions for how to maximize that relationship:

- Develop a relationship with his assistant in order to keep track of his schedule. It’s important for you to know if he is meeting with someone you are trying to reach before that meeting takes place so that you can help set that agenda. And you may want to give him some fresh produce from Student Farm for him to take to his meetings.
- Schedule a regular meeting — perhaps quarterly and over lunch — to keep him briefed on important issues.
- Look for opportunities to include him in briefings for policymakers, telephone press conferences, VIP or media tours, etc. And definitely have him play a key role in promoting your Signature Products.
- Involve him in the development and analysis of the policy-maker survey.
- Sign him up for your CSA program. He should think of you every time he gets a shipment of delicious, fresh produce.

**4. Hold biannual lunch briefings with policymakers on key issues. (Time and Dollar Recommendation; Key)** Holding a briefing in the capital is a great way to increase your visibility in Sacramento. Not only do you influence and educate the people who do attend, but you also increase your brand awareness among everyone you invite. Although these briefings should be relevant to ASI’s priorities and could even be used to unveil Signature Initiatives/Products, success will depend on how effectively they inform policymakers on the issues *they* care about. That is why we recommend using the surveys to determine topical agendas.

Here are some tips to making these briefings effective:

- Use food to lure a crowd. If you develop a reputation for always having great food, it will be much easier to get policymakers to attend.
- Time briefings to maximize their relevance to the policymakers’ decision-making promise. For example, hold a briefing shortly after you’ve surveyed policymakers to share with them the top line results of the survey and what solutions or tools you have to help them with the issues they themselves have identified. Or if you know that CARB is working on AB32 rules for farmer and food-related businesses, that’s a good time for you to have a briefing on food, energy and climate.
- The best formula for the speakers’ panel would be to have one scientist flanked by two strange bedfellows (e.g. an environmentalist and a farmer or agribusiness leader; or a

farmer and a school principal or hospital administrator.) ASI should generally play the role of moderator.

- You should prepare a briefing paper (see above) for every briefing. Don't just hand them out at the briefing itself but distribute them electronically at least to everyone you invite as part of the follow up.

**5. Organize at least one showcase event with a notable policy-maker annually to highlight a solution that can be replicated in other parts of the state. (Time and Dollar Recommendation; Key)** The benefit of doing this type of event is that you create several opportunities at once:

- Building a relationship with a key policy-maker
- Reaching out to the media
- Convening other stakeholders
- Promoting solutions and Signature Initiatives
- Creating an opportunity for online and newsletter content

In addition to government officials, farmers and partners from the NGO community should be a part of the event as well. You should set your sights on doing an event with the Governor, knowing that it's a stretch with a huge payoff. But more realistically, you'd be doing an event with the Secretary of Food and Agriculture, or a key State Senator or Assembly member from the appropriate district.

Note that you could potentially repurpose your annual Field Day at Russell Ranch to meet the goals of this recommendation. What you would miss by doing that is the opportunity to celebrate what other people are doing around the state and boost your presence in other media markets.

**6. Build strong relationships with reporters, editors and producers at important mainstream media outlets in Sacramento, especially the *Sacramento Bee*, Capital Public Radio, and *Capitol Weekly*. (Time and Behavior Recommendation; Core)** While you will want to build relationships and secure coverage from media around the state, you should invest additional time and energy on the Sacramento media market. See the Media Relations section for details on implementing this recommendation.

## X. CULTIVATE EXISTING NETWORKS

Given your size and resource limits, we recommend that you prioritize building strong relationships with existing networks in order to reach individual farmers, NGOs and other stakeholders. Here are just a few examples of such networks:

- Roots of Change Ag Innovations Network
- California Federation of Certified Farmers Markets
- California Council of Land Trusts
- Cal Rice Growers
- California Grocers Association
- California Organic Farmers Association

## Recommendations

**General Best Practices for Networks (Time Recommendation; Key)**

The following are some recommended best practices for engaging key audience networks generally.

- Identify most important networks for each Signature Initiative



- Get ASI listed as a resource on their Web sites, and reciprocate on yours
- Participate, ideally with a speaking role, in their conferences and major meetings
- Feed major announcements and stories to their newsletters
- Invite network leaders to speak to students and faculty at UC Davis
- Promote opportunities for student internships
- Include network leaders in your briefings to reporters and policymakers

## XI. HARNESS THE POWER OF CE FARM ADVISORS

High on the list of networks to cultivate would be Cooperative Extension (CE) farm advisors. If you can harness their ability to educate individual farmers and ranchers, you'd have a major impact on agricultural behavior in the state.

### Recommendations

The following are recommendations for how to strengthen your ties to farm advisors and create new incentives for them to educate farmers and ranchers around sustainable practices:

1. **Add someone from the CE community to your advisory board. (Time Recommendation; Key)** Doing so, would enhance your credibility, give you better intelligence on opportunities to collaborate and groom someone who can serve as an ambassador to that community.
2. **Build CE projects and partnerships into your own fundraising and policy proposals. (Time Recommendation; Key)** We already know that the budgets for CE programs are hurting. If you can raise even a little bit of money, publicly or privately, to help cover the cost of outreach by farm advisors — on your Initiatives, for example — then you would be investing them directly in the work you are doing.
3. **Do a regular survey of farm advisors to identify their needs and the needs of the communities they are serving. (Time Recommendation; Core)** You will be most successful in reaching out to farm advisors if they see the programs you are promoting as helping them do their jobs. By asking them for their input up front, you increase the likelihood that your outreach efforts are relevant. You also buy yourself good will by showing that you are interested in what they think.
4. **Follow up the survey with an annual meeting or training with CE farm advisors at UC Davis. (Time and Dollar Recommendation; Key)** The best way to build relationships with farm advisors as a group is to spend some face time with them and to give them tools to help them do their jobs better. A two-day learning retreat or workshop would help them accomplish that. (You would want to explore whether they could get some kind of continuing education credit by attending.) We recommend using the survey in part to identify areas where farm advisors want help or training, either from you or from each other, and then use that to build your agenda. Ideally, you would also want to use the training to advance other program goals, like unveiling new water-friendly farming best practices or helping local farmers make connections to potential institutional buyers like schools and hospitals. And you would want them to spend some time learning about the research you are doing at Russell Ranch and the education taking place at the Student Farm.
5. **Use SAREP grants process to strengthen relationships with farm advisors.** The SAREP grants offer a great opportunity to get and keep the attention of farm advisors. It will be important to ensure that you publicize the grants to that audience before, during and after the awards are made. Here are some suggestions:

- Create a landing page for SAREP grants that makes clear through the design that SAREP is housed within ASI **(Time and Dollar Recommendation; Key)**
  - Send out an email from Tom to farm advisors encouraging them to apply, and include a link back to the landing page **(Time Recommendation; Core)**
  - Profile any success from the grants in your newsletter or on your Web site **(Time Recommendation; Core)**
  - Include a question about the grants in any survey to farm advisors **(Behavior Recommendation; Core)**
  - Promote and review the grants process during any workshop or training for farm advisors at UC Davis **(Behavior Recommendation; Key)**
  - Urge UC's Agriculture and National Resources leadership to send an email about the grants to farm advisors and to post something on their Web site **(Time Recommendation; Key)**
  - Secure space to advertise the grants in any publications widely read by farm advisors, like California Agriculture **(Time and Possibly Dollar Recommendation; Optional)**
- 6. Look for regular opportunities to applaud or spotlight leadership and best practices among farm advisors.** Farm advisors, like farmers themselves, rightly believe they are doing important work, but they rarely get much recognition. One great way to expand the use of sustainable farming solutions is to shower farm advisors who are doing a good job with positive feedback. Here are some simple ways to do that:
- Profile a farm advisor's success in your newsletter or on your Web site **(Behavior Recommendation; Core)**
  - Invite them to come speak to students and faculty on campus **(Time Recommendation; Key)**
  - Invite them to participate in a press briefing **(Behavior Recommendation; Key)**
  - Write a letter to CE leadership acknowledging the good work of one of their farm advisors **(Time Recommendation; Optional)**
  - Organize a local media or policy briefing to showcase the local success **(Time and Dollar Recommendation; Optional)**
  - Pitch a local reporter to do a story highlighting a local success, and position ASI as a validator in that story **(Time Recommendation; Key)**
- 7. Create an annual award for sustainable innovations among farm advisors.** Giving an award would be a more high profile way to single out the achievements of a particular farm advisor and reinforce the importance of sustainable practices. And because current farm advisors would be able to nominate their peers for the award, they would communicate about the award among themselves. **(Time and Dollar Recommendation; Optional)**

## XII. ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS

For many of your priority audiences, ASI's Web site *is* ASI. Visiting your Web site is likely to be the first, and possibly only, way that policymakers, farmers, NGOs and journalists come into contact with your organization. For this reason, your Web site must align with and reinforce your positioning and your brand promise. For example, if you decide to position ASI as a "navigator," the site must be focused on helping target audiences navigate food systems issues by providing relevant information, resources and connections to other key stakeholders in your network. If it is going to communicate that ASI is focused on solutions with economic, social and environmental benefits, the content on the site must convey that.

Attracting new audiences to a Web site is challenging enough considering the millions of other sites vying for limited attention, but grabbing and retaining new visitors' attention is even more

difficult. Fortunately, you should be able to provide meaningful content that your key audiences will find informative and useful.

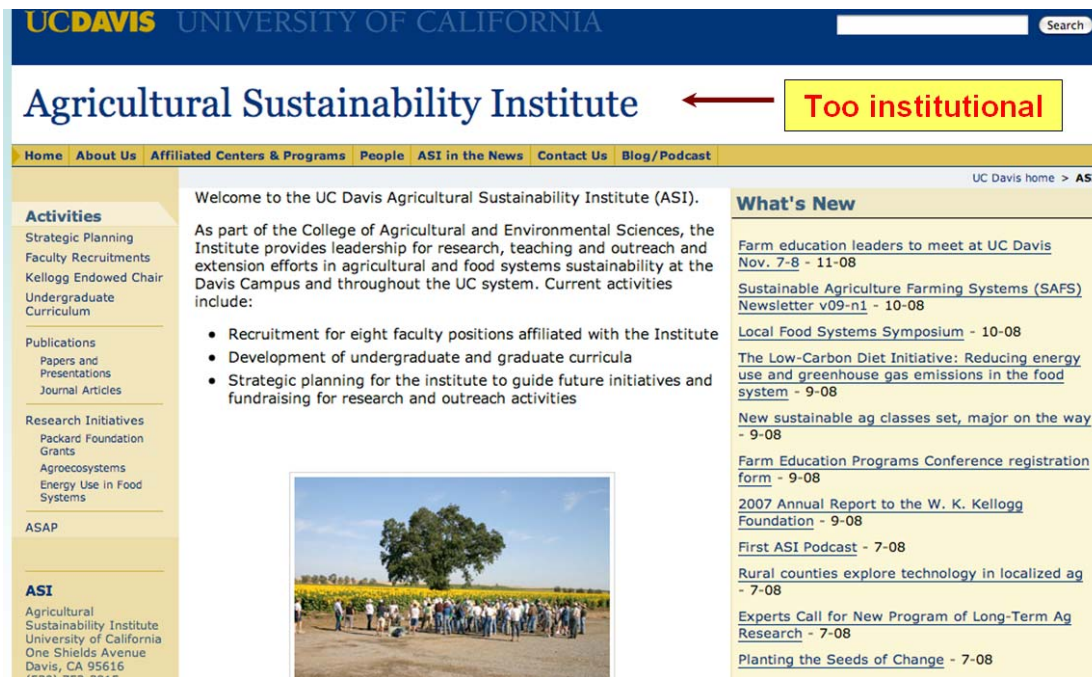
In addition to the Web site recommendations below, we also include a more complete set of best online practices, including search engine optimization tips in the appendix.

## **Recommendations**

1. **Develop ASI's Web site to be a useful, if not indispensable, resource for your target audiences. (Upfront cost is a Time and Dollar Recommendation; Core. But once the current site is updated and redesigned, it becomes a Behavior Recommendation; Core)** Currently, much of the site's content is focused on internal information, such as curriculum, strategic planning, etc. While hosting this information on your site may be necessary, its prominent placement on the home page can be de-emphasized in favor of content that your key audiences will see as useful resources. When you update your site, approach this project with the goal of providing what your desired audiences want or need rather than just reporting on ASI. Here are a few additional suggestions:
  - **Give your site a heading to position it as the first place your audience should turn for information.** (e.g. "Agricultural Sustainability Institute at UC Davis: California's leading resource for science and solutions.")
  - **When prioritizing your content, be sure to emphasize Signature Initiatives and Products.** Your audiences will find the "About Us" page if they want to learn more about ASI; you want them to be coming to the site because they're interested in your work, not your institution.
  - **Recognize that your priority target audiences have different interests and design the site accordingly – and don't be afraid to be "too obvious."** Have different tabs on the homepage to guide audiences that might need specialized information, including farmers, policymakers, and farm and food businesses.
    - Out of all the audiences, farmers will need the most practical and hands-on information. So you may just want to have a button clearly labeled "For Farmers" to get their attention. There should be a benefit to having other audiences see that ASI does work that is directly relevant to farmers.
2. **Make education the primary goal of your site. (Behavior Recommendation; Core)** The most important question we always ask our clients when it comes to Web design and strategy is: "What do you want your audience to do when they come to your site?" When the purpose of your site is to educate, you ultimately want site visitors to do things that are educational, like:
  - Read a profile
  - Download a report
  - Listen to a podcast
  - Watch a video
  - Share an article with a friend or colleague
  - Sign up for ASI's newsletter

With that in mind, active verbs like *learn more*, *read*, *download*, *watch*, *listen*, *share*, and *sign up* should all appear regularly and prominently throughout your site. See the series of screen shots below for a visual summary of the previous two recommendations.

## CURRENT SITE



## HIGHLIGHT YOUR BRAND PROMISE AND HOW THIS SITE WILL BENEFIT TARGET AUDIENCES





LEVERAGE YOUR CONTENT → INCREASE YOUR INFLUENCE



- Optimize the site for functionality and user-friendliness. (Upfront cost is a Time and Dollar Recommendation; Core. But once the current site is updated and redesigned, it becomes a Behavior Recommendation; Core)** In addition to prioritizing the homepage content, you will need to ensure that the site is easily searchable and navigable. Also, since one of the main functions of the site is hosting research reports and publications, the content of those reports needs to be indexed for search engine optimization. The importance of having the site's content optimized so that reports and research are indexed by Google and other search engines can not be overstated. Here are some tips to help key audiences find your site and navigate it successfully once they get there:

  - **For reports in PDF format, post a text version of the executive summary** so that key terms will show up in Internet searches (See *Appendix VIII* for more SEO tips).
  - **Make the presentation of publications more user-friendly and visually appealing.** Include a thumbnail or icon of the cover and an accompanying abstract or executive summary.
  - **Make sure all content is intuitively categorized** (e.g. by creating a navigation bar with links to Initiatives or tabs for specific audiences) and easily searchable (by making sure all content is meta-tagged for internal and external searches).
  - **Replace “ASI in the News” with a “Media Room”** that will include an index of press releases, contact info for the communications director and an archive of media coverage (which includes either the full text or links to the original articles). This will be useful for both journalists and prospective partners
- Update the site frequently with compelling content representing various communities. (Changes to the Web functionality would be a Time and Dollar Recommendation; Key. But once those changes are in place, they would become Behavior and Time**

**Recommendation; Key)** Since ASI is composed of people representing different corners of the sustainable agriculture and food systems world, from farmers to consumer advocates, give space to these perspectives on the Web site.

- One format that lends itself to frequently updated, dynamic content is a blog. The ASI blog could be managed and moderated by students who could recruit guest bloggers from the faculty and other outside experts. And the nice thing about blog tools is that they lend themselves to tagging and syndicating content.
- Use multi-media profiles to put a human face on our site. There could be a rotating front-page feature highlighting a notable person (farmer, scientist, Cooperative Extension farm advisor, student, NGO leader, rancher, etc.) who illustrates a trend or perspective worth promoting.

**5. Use offline and online communication to direct people back to your Web site.**

**(Behavior Recommendation; Core)** In printed collateral (including brochures, reports, business cards, etc.) and in verbal communications, such as panel discussions or speeches, ASI and its staff should always promote the Web site as an important resource. Some effective ways of doing this include:

- **Instead of sending your full newsletter via email, send an abbreviated version with links to the full version online.**
- **Ensure that your Web site address is always featured on collateral.**
- **Encourage staff to include a link to the site in the signature line of their email.** In order to maximize the click-through rate, update signature lines to promote recent reports. For example,

Best regards,

John Appleseed  
Agricultural Sustainability Institute (ASI)  
University of California  
One Shields Avenue  
Davis, CA 95616  
Tel. (530) 752-3915  
Fax: (530) 752-2829

*Check out ASI's latest report: [Guide to Efficient Nitrogen Fertilizer Use in Walnut Orchards](#)*

**6. Ensure that subsidiary sites share a common brand “DNA” and convey a relationship with ASI. (Changes to the SAREP page mentioned below would be Time and Dollar Recommendation; Core. Changes to other pages would be Time and Dollar Recommendation; Key)**

You should make sure that landing pages for the Student Farm, Russell Ranch and SAREP all have a common ASI look and feel. It should be clear to the visitor that they are affiliated with ASI and there should be easy and obvious ways to link back to the parent ASI homepage.

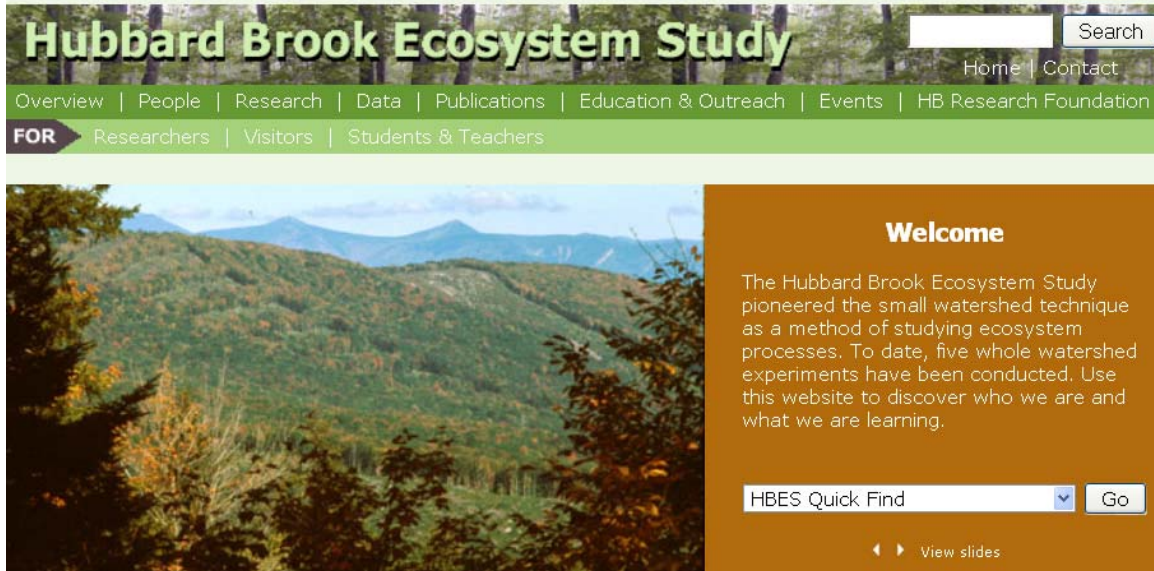
Note: The most visited page in the ASI universe is a SAREP page, entitled “What is sustainable agriculture?” (<http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/Concept.htm>) In fact, if you Google the phrase “sustainable agriculture,” that page comes up second, among sites that are not paying for Google placement. It is extremely valuable online real estate, which you do not want to give up and which you should try to leverage for ASI. You should explore the possibility of redirecting traffic to an ASI page with similar content or change the page design so that it clearly conveys a relationship to ASI. In addition, you should check out the sites that currently link to that page and encourage them to link to other resources within the ASI online universe as well.

### XIII. LEVERAGING YOUR FACILITIES: STUDENT FARM AND RUSSELL RANCH

#### Russell Ranch

Russell Ranch offers a great opportunity to showcase your research and the practical application of your solutions. Here are just a few suggestions for how to use Russell Ranch to help you reach your other communications objectives:

1. **Bring reporters, NGOs and CE farm advisors to the Ranch for targeted meetings and special briefings. (Time and Dollar Recommendation; Optional)** ASI has a unique opportunity to convene key food and farm stakeholders. In this plan, we recommend organizing targeted workshops for reporters and CE farm advisors. The agenda for those and similar meetings should include a stop at Russell Ranch and highlight any relevant research taking place there.
2. **Clearly demonstrate how research at the Ranch fits into Signature Initiatives and include important research findings in your communications for those Initiatives. (Behavior and Time Recommendation; Core)** You should make a point of highlighting relevant research in the following places:
  - On your Web site, in the section on Signature Initiatives
  - In any print collateral for your Signature Initiatives
  - In your newsletter
  - In your briefings for policymakers or reporters and in any press materials
  - In a standard presentation or PowerPoint about each Initiative
3. **Create an enhanced Russell Ranch landing page and micro-Web site. (Time and Dollar Recommendation; Optional)** Most of the people you need to reach will not be able to visit Russell Ranch in person. But you can give the Ranch a second life online. We recommend designing a new micro-site for Russell Ranch, aimed at the audiences most likely to benefit from it. We recommend using the Web site for the Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest, which is affiliated with the University of New Hampshire, as a model. We would recommend offering the following types of content:
  - Relevant information for farmers
  - Basic agricultural and food science curricula for teachers
  - Science to support your Initiatives
  - Ability for faculty to track and participate in research on the ranch



4. **Look for opportunities to promote research on common, everyday foods. (Time Recommendation; Key)** For example, we understand that you have done interesting research on tomatoes and the nutritional benefits of growing them organically. Using that as an example, here are a few things you could do:
  - Send out a media alert to food and science writers and editors before tomato season begins. Keep in mind that newspaper food sections and food magazines have a long lead time – sometimes several months.
  - Invite regional TV and radio reporters, food writers and editors to visit the Ranch during tomato season for an on site briefing and tour. Maybe team up with an area chef or caterer to prepare some special tomato-themed foods to help lure them.
  - Feature the findings on your Web site and in your newsletter.
  - Encourage stakeholders who advocate more organic farming to promote the research on their Web sites and in their newsletters.

### Student Farm

1. **Use the Student Farm to debunk myths about the preparedness of UC Davis students. (Time and Behavior Recommendation; Optional)** We understand that UC Davis does not have a reputation for training its graduates to do actual farming. One way to debunk this misperception is to ensure that farmers, especially those who might be in a position to hire UC Davis students, know about the Student Farm. One way you could do that is to invite farm leaders to speak on campus to students and faculty, as part of a special lecture series or as part of a class or seminar. When they come to campus, be sure to give them a tour of the Student Farm so they can see first hand the kind of practical experience that your students are gaining. You should also occasionally feature profiles of students on your Web site. Finally, we recommend that Tom and other ASI and UC Davis leaders get into the habit of bringing produce from the Student Farm to meetings with donors and stakeholders to give them a “taste” of the hands-on work that Davis students are providing.
2. **Use communications to boost impact of Children’s Garden. (Time and Dollar Recommendation; Optional)** We also know that the Student Farm has an important role to play in your Children’s Garden program with K-12 schools. While many regional schools have the luxury of coming to visit the farm directly, you would be able to reach even more schools and students by bringing the Student Farm to life online. As with Russell Ranch, you could create a micro-site for the Student Farm that would offer Children’s Garden curricula and



training materials. You might also encourage schools to post pictures of their school farm on the site and encourage teachers to blog about their experiences and ask other teachers for advice.

Note: We recommend that you promote the Children's Garden program as a *science* education in order to better position it as a way to help California make science more interesting and engaging for students.

#### XIV. STAFFING AND CAPACITY-BUILDING TO IMPLEMENT THIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

We recognize that the recommendations may seem overwhelming given your current staff resources and communications capacities. As communications becomes more essential in helping ASI meet its objectives, you will need to consider adding capacity.

You currently have an in-house public information officer, who can handle a fair amount of media outreach, gathering stories, developing materials, and writing content for the newsletter, among other things. You are fortunate to have someone in that role like Lyra Halprin who has been covering these issues for a long time. She knows many of the players within the UC community and outside it. In particular, she has very good relationships with the staff in the UC Davis communications department and news service, and with Pam Kan-Rice in the Office of the President, both of whom can provide additional media outreach capacity.

The problem is that your public information officer isn't really in a position to provide the strategic direction and accountability for communications to make sure that your communications are consistent, that your materials and programs are really geared toward your primary audiences and that you are making progress toward major communications goals. Normally that would be the role of a communications director, someone who has a combination of expertise, strategic vision and authority. It may not be feasible to create this position in the short-term, but it certainly should be part of a longer-term strategic plan. As you grow your programs overall, it will be very much to your advantage to grow your capacity for communications leadership.

Whether or not you add additional communications capacity from within, you should also consider bringing on outside help, either as an ongoing strategic partner in the absence of a communications director, or to help with discrete projects. For example, you could bring on a communications consultant to help design and rollout a Signature Initiative or Product, or to help boost your presence in Sacramento, or to develop and execute an online strategy.

#### XV. ASSESSING THE ROLE OF ADVERTISING

You asked us to consider the value of advertising in achieving your communications objectives. Advertising can be a very effective way to establish brand awareness, but it often comes with a higher price tag. With that in mind, here are three types of advertising which are more cost-effective and specifically help you reach your key audiences. All of the recommendations below are **Time and Dollar Recommendations; Optional.**

##### Recommendations

##### 1. Advertising in trade publications

Generally, the cost of advertising in trade publications is substantially less than the mainstream media. You could target your outreach to farmers, for example, with a series of ads in *California Agriculture*, *Western Farm Press*, or *California Farmer*. You might use these ads to promote a particular report, signature product or event, or publicize your SAREP grants. You could also pay for space to run a regular column from Tom, if you can't get that opportunity for free.

## 2. Underwriting Capitol Public Radio

Since you are specifically interested in building brand awareness in Sacramento, you may want to consider underwriting Capitol Public Radio. It would be especially useful to time it with the launch of a particular initiative or signature product.

## 3. Marketing Yourself Online

Probably the single most important advertising investment you could make would be what we call *Search Marketing*. For example, every time someone does a Google search for the terms that are highly related to your work — like *climate change and farming*, or simply *sustainable agriculture* — you can arrange to have a small ad come up directing people to your Web site. This kind of advertising is an especially good value because:

- a) You can reach a very targeted audience of people who are interested in particular issues;
- b) The cost of the ads can be very inexpensive, ranging from as low as \$.05 per click; and
- c) You only pay when someone clicks on your ad and you can cap the amount you want to pay as much or as little as you want.

## XVI. IMPLEMENTATION CALENDAR

### ONGOING

#### **Branding**

- Ensure that your name consistently appears as *Agricultural Sustainability Institute at UC Davis* in all communications. Consistently use your tagline.
- Ensure that all communications reinforce your position as a *navigator*.
- Consistently frame your work around food and farm *solutions* that are good for our economy, environment and communities. Avoid just talking about problems.
- View all communications from your audience's perspective. Avoid simply reporting your own process, especially in your newsletter and on your Web site.
- Use words and phrases that evoke images and speak plainly and directly to your audiences.

#### **Signature Initiatives and Products**

- Build fundraising strategies around Signature Initiatives and Products, and budget accordingly for communications activities.

#### **Media Relations**

- Consistently describe ASI in conversations with media and ensure that UC Davis and UC communications colleagues do the same.
- Look for opportunities to respond to real world events that make food and agriculture a front-page issue.

#### **Sacramento and Policymakers**

- Develop and maintain a close relationship with UC's Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources, Daniel Dooley, in order to leverage his influence and access in Sacramento.

#### **Existing Networks**

- Build and maintain strong relationships with existing networks in order to reach individual farmers, NGOs and other stakeholders.

### ***CE Farm Advisors***

- Look for opportunities to highlight model work by farm advisors on your Web site and in your newsletter.
- Look for opportunities to include work related to CE farm advisors in fundraising proposals.

### ***Online Communications***

- Prioritize the content on your Web site based on the stories and information that will be most valuable to your audience.
- Consistently give visitors opportunities to read, watch, listen to, share or download a resource.
- Reuse compelling and relevant online content from other places in the UC Davis or UC universe.
- Use offline and online communication to direct people back to your Web site.
- Optimize the content you post for searchability.

### ***Leveraging Your Facilities***

- Any time a member of your audience visits UC Davis to speak or meet with faculty or students, invite that person to tour the Student Farm and Russell Ranch.

### ***Staffing and Capacity***

- Ensure that someone on your staff is charged with managing the ASI brand and communications with external audiences to ensure that you are consistent in achieving your strategic communications objectives.

## **PHASE 1: JANUARY 2009 TO JUNE 2009**

### ***Branding***

- Update your tagline so that it clarifies the brand and role of your organization.
- Develop a message platform that tells the ASI story in a problem-solution-action narrative.
- Incorporate the recommendations in this plan into any refresh of your brochure.
- Revisit or create an editorial calendar for your newsletter and your Web site and prioritize content to educate your audiences rather than report on process.

### ***Signature Initiatives & Products***

- Considering the criteria outlined in the communications plan, begin process to select 2-3 Signature Initiatives.
- Pick the one initiative that would be easiest or most important to develop right away. (Initiative 1). (Note: It is very likely that your first initiative will likely deal with nitrogen, given the recent Packard grant.)
- Identify specific target audiences for Initiative 1 you have chosen.
- Develop a message platform for Initiative 1.
- Identify 2-3 key stories you want to tell around Initiative 1, including scientific research, practical solutions and best practices or people who are leading the way. Write them up as one-page profiles. Share those stories with UC and UC Davis communications colleagues.
- Considering the criteria outlined in the communications plan, begin process to select first Signature Product. It would be ideal if your Signature Product was relevant to Initiative 1.

### ***Media Relations***

- Identify 5-7 media outlets that are especially influential with your audiences and that you can proactively target for coverage. It would be ideal if some of those priorities were in Sacramento, especially the *Sacramento Bee*.

- Map out the key reporters, editors and producers at those outlets, with the help of UC and UC Davis communications colleagues.
- Identify your best pitches for each of those outlets for Phase 1. It would be ideal if some of those pitches overlapped with the stories you selected for Initiative 1.
- Identify an opportunity to host a press briefing for reporters during Phase 2. It would be ideal if this opportunity had something to do with Initiative 1.

#### ***Sacramento and Policymakers***

- Through conversations with a few Sacramento policymakers or informed stakeholders, identify the food and agriculture issues most likely to get attention in 2009.
- Use one-on-one meetings to educate key policymakers, especially those with the greatest potential to show leadership on Initiative 1.

#### ***Existing Networks***

- Identify top 2-3 networks that are most important for Initiative 1, along with opportunities to engage those networks (i.e. newsletters, conferences, one-on-one meetings, etc.).

#### ***CE Farm Advisors***

- Make arrangements to do an online survey of farm advisors to determine their needs and the needs of the communities they are serving. Include questions that help you get information relevant to Initiative 1 (It's fine if this happens in Phase 2).
- Use the survey to explore demand for a workshop or retreat for farm advisors at UC Davis.
- Publicize SAREP grants process.
- Send out e-mail from Tom (or someone more prominent) to farm advisors encouraging them to apply for grants.

#### ***Online Communications***

- Assess the resources you have to refresh your Web site design and content.
- Prioritize changes that replace process-oriented content with information that would be of particular interest to your external audiences.
- Update the design of the SAREP pages, especially "What is sustainable agriculture?" so that it's clear that it is connected to ASI (We recommend this in Phase 1, so that the site is updated in time for grants process in Phase 2).

#### ***Leveraging Your Facilities***

- Incorporate relevant research at Russell Ranch into Initiative 1.

#### ***Staffing and Capacity***

- Assess any opportunities you have to add communications capacity, by shifting responsibilities internally, hiring additional staff or bringing on a consulting partner. It is especially important that you have someone playing a strategic leadership role.

### **PHASE 2: JULY 2009 TO DECEMBER 2009**

#### ***Branding***

- Roll out a new brochure.
- Update the language on your Web site to reflect new messaging.

#### ***Signature Initiatives & Products***

- Considering the criteria outlined in the communications plan, begin process to select second Signature Initiative (Initiative 2).
- Identify specific target audiences for Initiative 2.
- Develop a message platform for Initiative 2.

- Identify 2-3 key stories you want to tell around Initiative 2, including scientific research, practical solutions and best practices or people who are leading the way. Write them up as one-page profiles. Share those stories with UC and UC Davis communications colleagues.
- Considering the criteria outlined in the communications plan, determine whether there is an opportunity for a Signature Product associated with Initiative 2.
- Develop Signature Product for Initiative 1.

#### ***Media Relations***

- Hold one telephone press briefing, either on Initiative 1 or on an issue that is especially topical. Coordinate with UC and UC Davis communications colleagues.
- Write and place one op-ed tied to Initiative 1. Ideally, this would be placed in one of your priority outlets.
- Identify the best pitches you have for each of your 5-7 priority outlets during Phase 2. It would be ideal if some of those pitches overlapped with the stories you selected for Initiative 1 or Initiative 2.

#### ***Sacramento and Policymakers***

- Develop 1-2 briefing documents for policymakers on Initiatives 1 and 2 or on issues you identified as important to them during Phase 1.
- Identify an opportunity to do a lunch briefing for policymakers during Phase 3.
- Use one-on-one meetings to educate key policymakers, especially those with the greatest potential to show leadership on Initiative 1 and 2.
- Explore opportunities to do a showcase event with a policy-maker.

#### ***Existing Networks***

- Identify top 2-3 networks that are most important for Initiative 2, along with opportunities to engage those networks (i.e. newsletters, conferences, one-on-one meetings, etc.).
- Continue to pursue the opportunities you identified to engage networks relevant to Initiative 1 in Phase 1.

#### ***CE Farm Advisors***

- Add someone from the CE farm advisor community to your advisory board.
- Conduct survey of farm advisors, if that did not happen in Phase 1.
- Determine whether and when to have a retreat or workshop with farm advisors at UC Davis.

#### ***Online Communications***

- Continue process of refreshing Web site as needed.
- Ensure that all subsidiary sites share a common design DNA with ASI site.
- Develop and publish online content for Initiative 1.

#### ***Leveraging Your Facilities***

- Incorporate relevant research at Russell Ranch into Initiative 2.

#### ***Staffing and Capacity***

- Evaluate whether current staffing and consulting combination is working, and make changes as needed.
- Begin to explore options for hiring a communications director.

#### ***Advertising***

- Develop and launch Search Marketing strategy for Initiatives 1 and 2.

## PHASE 3: JANUARY 2010 TO JUNE 2010

### **Branding**

- Identify and develop group of scientists and allies to serve as messengers on key issues, especially Initiatives 1 and 2.

### **Signature Initiatives & Products**

- Complete and launch Signature Product 1.
- Repeat steps outlined for Initiatives 1 and 2 for Initiative 3, as appropriate.
- Develop Signature Product 2 as appropriate.

### **Media Relations**

- Organize a telephone press briefing either around Signature Product 1 or Initiative 2. (Or do both, if you have the capacity to do so.)
- Identify 3-5 additional media outlets that are especially influential with your audiences and that you can proactively target for coverage. It would be ideal if any key Sacramento outlets not targeted in Phase 1 were included in this round.
- Map out the key reporters, editors and producers at those outlets, with the help of UC and UC Davis communications colleagues.
- Identify your best pitches for all of your target outlets, including those identified in Phase 1. It would be ideal if some of those pitches overlapped with the stories you selected for Initiative 1 and 2.
- Write and place one op-ed, ideally for Initiative 2.
- Assess the feasibility of doing a workshop for reporters at UC Davis. Include Michael Pollan and others from UC Berkley School of Journalism in those conversations.

### **Sacramento and Policymakers**

- Hold lunch briefing with policymakers around Signature Product 1.
- Organize one showcase event with a notable policymaker to highlight a solution that can be replicated in other parts of the state.
- Conduct a survey of key policymakers to identify their priorities as they relate to food and agriculture.
- Develop a policy brief for Initiative 2.
- Use one-on-one meetings to educate key policymakers, especially those with the greatest potential to show leadership on Initiatives 1, 2 and 3.

### **Existing Networks**

- Identify key networks for Initiative 3 as needed.
- Identify top 2-3 networks that are most important for Initiative 3 as needed, along with opportunities to engage those networks. (i.e. newsletters, conferences, one-on-one meetings, etc.).
- Continue to pursue the opportunities you identified to engage networks relevant to Initiatives 1 and 2.
- Get ASI listed as a resource on Web sites of partner networks, and reciprocate on yours.
- Invite network leaders to speak to students and faculty at UC Davis

### **CE Farm Advisors**

- Plan a retreat or workshop for farm advisors as appropriate.
- Explore options for annual award for farm advisors.

### **Online Communications**

- Develop and publish online content for Initiative 2 and Signature Product 1.
- Continue process of upgrading and refreshing your Web site.

- Assess resources and options for enhanced Russell Ranch landing page or micro-site.
- Develop Search Marketing strategy for Initiative 3 as appropriate.

#### ***Leveraging Your Facilities***

- Identify any opportunities to promote research on common, everyday foods and add them to the media outreach calendar.
- Incorporate Student Farm and Russell Ranch into any workshop or retreat for farm advisors.
- Incorporate relevant research from Russell Ranch into Initiative 3 as appropriate.

#### ***Staffing and Capacity***

- Hire a communications director, if resources allow.
- Evaluate where you have students, interns or others who could help take on specific tasks.

#### ***Advertising***

- Continue Search Marketing campaign for Initiatives 1 and 2 and develop for Initiative 3 as appropriate.

### **PHASE 4: JULY 2010 TO DECEMBER 2010**

#### ***Branding***

- Conduct an audit of all of your communications to evaluate whether branding is consistent and on target.

#### ***Signature Initiatives & Products***

- Launch Signature Product 2 as appropriate.
- Develop the second iteration of Signature Product 1 as appropriate. (Some Signature Products, like a poll or an index, lend themselves to being updated and re-released annually).

#### ***Media Relations***

- Hold telephone press briefing around Signature Product 2 or any of your Initiatives or another topical issue.
- Write and place one op-ed, ideally around Initiative 1, 2, or 3.
- Identify the best pitches you have for each of your priority outlets during Phase 4. It would be ideal if some of those pitches overlapped with the stories you selected for Initiatives 1, 2 and 3.

#### ***Sacramento and Policymakers***

- Hold lunch briefing with policymakers.
- Create one new policy brief.

#### ***Existing Networks***

- Continue to pursue the opportunities you identified to engage networks relevant to Initiative 1, 2 and 3.

#### ***CE Farm Advisors***

- Publicize SAREP grants.
- Identify key success stories from last year's SAREP grants.
- Create and announce award for farm advisors as appropriate.



### **Online Communications**

- Continue creating interactive and compelling content for your Web site, especially around your three Initiatives.

### **Leveraging Your Facilities**

- Create an enhanced Russell Ranch landing page and micro-Web site.

### **Staffing and Capacity**

- Work with communications director to develop a new two-year plan.

### **Advertising**

- Begin underwriting Capitol Public Radio, if resources allow.
- Launch series of ads in trade publications, if resources allow.

## **XVII. MEASURING SUCCESS**

The following measures of success indicate where you should be at the end of the next two years. We recommend charting your progress toward these actions and outcomes at the end of 2009 and 2010.

## **BRANDING**

### **Actions**

- 100% of communications identify your organization as ASI at UC Davis.
- 100% of print and online collateral incorporate new tag line.
- 60% of your communications focuses on food and farm *solutions* that are good for the economy, environment and communities.
- Consistent use of an ASI message platform that follows a problem-solution-action narrative and places you in the role of navigator for your audiences.
- ASI at UC Davis brochure developed and distributed to target audiences.
- One scientist, farmer, NGO leader and agribusiness leader trained as ASI spokesperson ideally for each Signature Initiative.
- 60% of content in newsletter focuses on educating audiences rather than reporting ASI process.

### **Outcomes**

- ASI at UC Davis recognized by target audiences as a navigator of sustainable food and farm solutions.
- ASI spokespeople are accurately identified in media coverage and communications opportunities.

## **SIGNATURE INITIATIVES & PRODUCTS**

### **Actions**

- At least two Signature Initiatives each addressing an important problem with economic, environmental and social implications launched in conjunction with a network of allies.
- At least one Signature Product showcasing your brand launched.
- 60% of your communications focused on advancing your Signature Initiatives.

### **Outcomes**

- Your individual communications efforts add up to a greater whole.



- Target audiences report greater awareness of ASI and the issues raised through the Signature Initiatives.
- Clear progress toward advancing the solutions highlighted in Signature Initiatives.
- Stronger relationships with your audiences, who identify ASI with real-world results.

## **MEDIA RELATIONS**

### ***Actions***

- Tracking and targeted, ongoing pitching to at least 10 key media outlets essential to reaching and influencing important audiences.
- At least two successful telephone press briefings held, one for each Signature Initiative.
- At least two op-eds written and submitted to target media outlets.
- Rapid response to two opportunities when food and farm issues are in the news.
- Regular communication with UC and UC Davis communications colleagues about your ongoing media priorities.

### ***Outcomes***

- Reporters and editors from at least 10 key media outlets call you when they need information.
- At least one op-ed successfully published in a priority outlet.
- Quality and quantity of coverage of the issues addressed in your Signature Initiatives improves substantially and there is a corresponding increase in the attention your key audiences are giving those issues as a result.

## **SACRAMENTO AND POLICYMAKERS**

### ***Actions***

- Regular meetings with UC's Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources, Daniel Dooley, are held to discuss how he should present ASI to target audiences in Sacramento.
- At least one informal survey and one formal survey of key policymakers to identify where they need assistance.
- Develop at least two briefing documents, at least one per Signature Initiative.
- At least one lunch briefing for policymakers in Sacramento.
- At least one showcase event with a notable policymaker to highlight an ASI solution that can be replicated in other parts of the state organized.

### ***Outcomes***

- Increased brand awareness of ASI as a center of excellence in Sacramento.
- Policymakers in Sacramento contact you when they need information.
- Issues raised in your Signature Initiatives become higher priorities in Sacramento.

## **EXISTING NETWORKS**

### ***Actions***

- Key networks mapped for all Signature Initiatives.
- ASI spokespeople invited to speak at 3-5 key conferences or meetings for networks deemed strategically important for Signature Initiatives.
- Content is provided to 3-5 networks for their newsletters or Web sites, potentially around your Signature Product(s).

### **Outcomes**

- Your Signature Initiatives become priorities among key network groups.
- Networks see ASI as a center of excellence and approach you for information.
- ASI is listed as a resource on Web sites of three partner networks.

### **CE FARM ADVISORS**

#### **Actions**

- One representative from the CE farm advisor community added to ASI external advisory board.
- At least one survey of farm advisors to identify their needs and the needs of the communities they are serving conducted.
- At least one workshop or retreat for farm advisors held.

#### **Outcomes**

- 25% increase in grant applications from farm advisors.
- Better intelligence on what farm advisors and the communities they serve need most.
- 5-10 examples of local farm advisors advocating for innovative and practical solutions in their local communities, especially solutions identified in your Signature Initiatives,.
- 5-10 great stories about innovative work farm advisors are doing compiled, for potential use in print and online collateral.

### **ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS**

#### **Actions**

- Web site design updated to feature educational information useful to key audiences.
- Site updated frequently with compelling content representing target audiences.
- 100% of new print collateral directs people back to Web site.
- 100% of staff email signature lines include link to Web site.
- Web site content, especially research reports, formatted for search engine optimization.
- Implement search marketing strategies for Signature Initiatives

#### **Outcomes**

- 25% increase in traffic to your site.
- 25% increase in the amount of time visitors spend on your site.
- A new baseline for action on the Web site (downloading, sharing, listening, watching, etc.) is established and goals for improvement set.
- Greater audience awareness of your site as a resource, mostly through anecdotal evidence.
- Visitors to your site leave feeling like ASI is the best resource for information about California's most important sustainable food and farm issues.
- ASI begins to rank highly when most key sustainable agriculture or food terms are searched in Google.

### **LEVERAGING YOUR FACILITIES**

#### **Actions**

- Guest speakers, especially from the farm community, routinely visit Russell Ranch.

- Russell Ranch research is featured prominently in communications around Signature Initiatives.
- Russell Ranch and Student Farm landing pages are updated to provide more educational content.

**Outcomes**

- Farm community begins to change misperceptions about UC Davis students' lack of hands-on training.
- Russell Ranch begins to be seen as the gold-standard of sustainable agriculture research by external audiences
- Student Farm and Children's Garden Program is able to more effectively serve school groups that are too far to visit UC Davis.

**STAFFING AND CAPACITY**

**Actions**

- New capacity is created for strategic communications leadership at ASI, most likely through the creation of a new communications director position, or an ongoing consulting relationship.
- Ongoing management and tracking of ASI brand and communications to external audiences ensure that goals are being met.
- New communications plan is developed for 2011 and 2012.

**Outcomes**

- Consistent and effective delivery of ASI brand to external audiences, who begin to see ASI as a center of excellence.
- Clear priorities and strategic direction set for future years.

**XVIII. APPENDIX**

I. ....	Writing Effective News Releases
II. ....	Writing Effective Op-Eds
III. ....	Writing Effective Letters to the Editor
IV. ....	Editorial Board Meetings: Tips & Tactics
V. ....	Print Interviews: Tips & Tactics
VI. ....	Radio Interviews: Tips & Tactics
VII. ....	Television Interviews: Tips & Tactics
VIII. ....	Search Engine Optimization
IX. ....	Media Intake Form
X. ....	Sample Message Platform
XI. ....	Sample Policy Brief

## I. WRITING EFFECTIVE NEWS RELEASES

### **Write in “inverted pyramid style”**

Hard news stories are often written using an inverted pyramid style. Your press releases should be too. Print journalists use this style of writing so that news readers can make a quick decision on whether they're interested in reading the entire story. The same rule applies to press releases because journalists will make the same type of snap decision on whether to continue reading your press release based on the headline and the info in the first paragraph.

In inverted pyramid writing, you should put the most important facts of your story – the base of the pyramid – in the first and second paragraph of your release. The pyramid declines in width the farther you get into the story with the least essential information found at the bottom of the release. The inverted pyramid follows the following formula: (1) Begin with your conclusion; (2) Follow with information that supports your conclusion; and (3) End with background and technical information.

### **Develop a headline and intro paragraph that leaps off the page**

Imagine a newsroom fax machine with news releases equaling half a ream of paper. Or think about a reporter's email in box where a journalist must sift through several dozen email news releases a day. This is life in a newsroom. The news releases that stand out are those with headlines and intro paragraphs that leap off the page. In fact, these two elements of a press release are so important; you should plan on spending 50 percent of your release-writing time on the headline and the first paragraph. Develop headlines and intro paragraphs that scream “Newsworthy!” To be newsworthy, your headline needs to employ some type of compelling news hook – like urgency, compelling human drama, or an important emerging trend.

### **Use the press release to frame your news**

Don't make your press release about the trees, make it about the forest. That is, take a step back and tell the more compelling, bigger picture story. Don't make it about just “another bill” but make it about how this newest piece of legislation fits into a long-term campaign to “save the endangered coast.” And use superlatives – first, most important, largest, last remaining – to make your frame more compelling.

### **Shoot for one- to two-sentence paragraphs**

Pick up a newspaper and you'll notice that every paragraph has no more than two sentences – and many with just one. You should adopt the same standard. Your goal should be to write news releases the way that journalists write their stories. There are two reasons that print journalists write in this way: (1) They recognize that they must capture and keep the attention of readers in a short span of time; and (2) Long, run-off paragraphs scream to the reader, “Do not read this: It is way too long!!” Journalists have the same reaction to news releases with paragraphs that don't seem to have an end in sight. Don't make it easier for a reporter to toss your release in the trash.

### **With quotes, focus on quality over quantity**

Joel Engardio, a former print journalist once wrote, “A good newspaper quote is like a crouton in a salad. It is there for accent, flavor and a touch of texture.” You (hopefully) wouldn't eat a salad where croutons make up more than 50 percent of the salad; likewise, your press releases shouldn't be overwhelmed with too many quotes. If possible, 80 percent or more of your press release should include the background and the facts. No more than 20 percent should go to quotes.

### **Short is sweet**

Resist the temptation to write a four-page screed. One- to two-page releases are acceptable. Anything longer than that will end up in the circular file and frustrate the people working in a newsroom, especially if it's being faxed. Enough said.

## II. WRITING EFFECTIVE OP-EDS

### **Timing is everything**

The lead MUST refer to the current news cycle or be looped into a policy process. Put yourself in the seat of the skeptical op-ed editor. Why this piece, why now?

### **Give people the lay of the land**

Readers need to be drawn into a piece by the familiar. They need to be grounded in their own observations (brought along through your filter, of course) of what's going on before they're willing to take the leap with you on your analysis.

Provide key fact and figures and other background elements of your story. So, for example, if you're writing about juvenile lock-up, it makes sense to mention the era in the 1990s when the myth of inner-city black youth as 'super predators' spawned the biggest prison expansion in American history. How did we get here, and what's happening right now. If you refer to a person, place, thing, don't assume your readers know what it is and provide them a one-sentence description that communicates its significance.

### **Neutralize the opposition**

Draw out your opposition's arguments and deflate them.

### **Give anecdotes where possible**

Pull from high-profile news stories about individuals if you don't have them yourself.

### **Use analogies and metaphors**

Think about whether there is a familiar metaphor that describes the situation: cart before horse, for example.

### **Watch out for technical jargon**

Be specific where it counts but don't bog your reader down with the names of federal agencies, laws, etc.

### **Don't overtly promote yourself**

Do not mention the name of your organization or other groups, with rare exceptions. Op-ed editors hate it when they feel like you're using the space as a billboard. Along those lines, Web sites won't typically fly either.

### **Offer deep analysis and a compelling argument**

The best op-eds function more or less like winning speeches in debate class or before a jury. A recent op-ed on Darfur by Robert Rotberg (below) broke down, one by one, all the possible and proposed analyses and remedies. By the time he makes his "opinion" clear, you're with him because he's shown he has a layered, credible grasp of the situation.

### **Demonstrate a sophisticated grasp of the players**

In the same piece, the author comments explicitly on the roles of the Sudanese government, the UN, the NATO, the EU, etc., etc. and says what he thinks all of them are up to, and what they should do to fix the problem. Again, this demonstrates a penetrating level of analysis. He also clearly assigns accountability (i.e., "Annan could and should demand action.")

### **Provide key facts**

The author is good about quantifying his case by dropping in key factoids – everything from how many Darfurians have been killed to date to how much petroleum exports are worth a year to Khartoum. This gives the piece a scholarly, well-read, sophisticated sheen.



**Make your writing sharp and snappy**

There's a definite art to op-ed writing that walks the balance between wonky talk and popular, clever colloquialisms. Political columnists like Frank Rich and Nicholas Kristof have it down to a science. In the Darfur piece, the language is extremely lively: petroleum exports are described as a "national lifeline." Janjaweed are "marauding," he refers to nations as "big powers" and drops in rhetorical devices like "Why wait?" Transitions are fast and smart.

**Be colorful and vivid**

The author enlivens his piece with images: Refugees are huddled in "precarious huts of palms, reeds and plastic bags." He also evokes images even when he's not describing an actual "scene": the African Union is depicted as having "their hands tied by the wrong orders."

**Confirm logistics**

Before drafting an op-ed, confirm the details of the target outlet's word count range; most newspapers want op-eds ranging from 650-750 words. When submitting an op-ed make sure that it's going to the editorial page editor or the opinions editor, not just to a general newstips inbox or a newsroom editor.

**OP-ED EXAMPLE****Why Wait on Darfur?**

Robert I. Rotberg

*The Boston Globe*

October 24, 2005

"NEVER AGAIN!" promised Washington, London, Brussels and the United Nations after the massacres in Bosnia, Cambodia, and Rwanda. But the killing fields of Darfur are more than two years old, and still the world permits innocent farmers, children, and displaced people to be killed and women repeatedly raped. What is to be done?

Despite the presence of African Union military observers, displaced people living in squalid encampments in Darfur and along the western border have been attacked by marauding janjaweed, Arabic speaking militia on camelback. Official Sudanese military helicopters have reputedly strafed villages in support of janjaweed assaults. Soldiers from several armies of the African Union have "monitored" many of these attacks, but without interfering.

Robert I. Rotberg is director of the Belfer Center's program on intrastate conflict in Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and president of the World Peace Foundation

Their limited and constrained mandate and their insufficient numbers (not yet at the 7,000 target strength for a war-ravaged area the size of France) give the African Union effort more of a cosmetic than a meaningful role in damping down the persistent conflict between the government-backed janjaweed from northern Darfur and their prey from southern Darfur.

More than 100,000 Darfurians have been killed since 2003. Nearly 2 million people, pushed out of their homes and fields by combat and the janjaweed, are attempting to survive in precarious huts of palms, reeds, and plastic bags in the dozens of camps in Darfur and along the western border with Chad. The scale of Darfur's human tragedy dwarfs natural disasters and all but the most destructive recent wars of Africa. President George W. Bush has called the mayhem "genocide." UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has used equally strong words. Must the powers of the world merely wring their collective hands, but do nothing?

So far, the big powers and the UN have respected the Sudan's sovereignty and avoided forceful intervention. African Union observers have served as proxies for real action, but they are too few, have little equipment, fuel, and ability to patrol, and have their hands tied by wrong orders. Waiting for the AU to become more robust is a recipe of despair, because of the Sudan's prominent membership in the organization. Given the UN's newly endorsed "responsibility to protect" norm, much more can and should be done to save lives.

Negotiations between the rebels and the Sudanese government are now into their sixth round. But the talks being held intermittently in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, show no signs of progress. The Sudanese government, having concluded a major peace agreement earlier this year with the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement of southern Sudan, and established a joint government for the entire country, hardly wishes to cosset new separatists in Darfur.

The 22-year war between south and north Sudan, now concluded, was largely over access to petroleum resources. In some respects, because of suspicion that oil will also be found in Darfur, the battles are also more about control of future oil possibilities than about land, discrimination, respect, or local self-government. They are not about religion, for all contenders are Muslims (albeit some are more Islamist than others), nor about language or race.

Petroleum exports, worth about \$1 billion a year to Khartoum, provide the national lifeline. They are the military government's only means of support. Cutting off exports, easily done at Port Sudan on the Red Sea by one or two American, British, or French frigates, authorized by the UN, would concentrate the minds of the rulers of the Sudan and presumably compel them to restrain the janjaweed and negotiate sensibly in Abuja.

So would the insertion of NATO or European Union troops into Darfur with a clear mandate not to watch, but forcibly to prevent further losses of life. Annan could and should demand such action before thousands more are killed senselessly across the desert wastes of Darfur.

So far the Sudan has called the UN's bluff. It must not be allowed to operate any longer with impunity.

Why wait? It is true that China, which imports oil from the Sudan, might object. So might Russia, or African nation-states attempting to protect the Sudan.

But the UN General Assembly is now on record in favor of "protecting" innocent civilians within sovereign countries and within war zones. Local commanders of the AU monitoring force also know that they are making little difference in halting hostilities. They have told their governments they feel powerless and frustrated. Darfur is the place to begin showing that the world cares.

### III. WRITING EFFECTIVE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the Editor — also known as LTEs — are an important way for your supporters to communicate and reinforce positive messages around ASI's programs and priority issues.

The LTE section is a popular part of the newspaper. If you let the opposition dominate this section, it could appear that their opinion is the prevailing point-of-view.

**To maximize the likelihood that your letter gets printed, follow these guidelines:**

#### **Timing is Everything**

It's important to have your letter ready to send the day of the article is printed. If you wait to start writing your letter until after the opposition has had their letters published, you are too late.

#### **Short is Sweet**

LTE editors will always choose a short, pithy letter over a lengthy, rambling treatise. So make your letter short, punchy and to the point. Focus on keeping your letter to 100-150 words, and use the "Word Count" function on your word-processing program to check the length. For example, this paragraph is already 55 words long.

#### **Short Sentences, Short Paragraphs**

If you write like a journalist — short sentences and short paragraphs — editors will be more likely to choose your letter. Pick up any newspaper and you'll notice that most paragraphs are about two sentences long — sometimes only one sentence. Long, wordy sentences send one clear message to the reader's brain: "Don't read this: It's way too long!"

#### **Make It Personal**

Personal stories beat out statistics nine times out of 10. That's why Americans rush to movie theatres — and not to college statistics courses. Our inclination is to use statistics to support our argument because we assume readers will make decisions based on facts. That is not the case. People form opinions based on emotions and values. And the best way to communicate values and emotions is by telling a (short!) personal story.

#### **Repeat Key Messages**

Use every opportunity — meaning every sentence — to communicate your most important message. Ultimately, the LTE editor has final say over which of your sentences stay and which of them go. Don't risk the chance that your key message will be left on the editing room floor.

#### **Don't Repeat Your Opponent's Message**

Use your letter to respond with your key messages rather than to react to the messages of the opposition. If you repeat the language of the opposition, you are giving their voice one more opportunity to be heard. A letter that begins, "The court's decision is not about special rights," will reinforce the idea that the court decision is *exactly* about special rights. You wouldn't give the opposition money to run a commercial against us; don't give them a voice in your letter, either.

#### **Include Your Full Name, City and Phone Number**

Your letter should always include your complete name, phone number and the city you live in. Your phone number will not be published, but many newspapers will call to verify that you actually wrote the letter.

#### **Send by E-mail, If Possible**

Although newspapers usually accept letters by fax and snail mail, many editors prefer email. Why? Because it means the difference between an editor spending five to ten seconds to cut and paste your letter, compared with five to ten minutes to retype it. E-mail also arrives faster than snail mail. When sending by e-mail, paste your letter into the body of an e-mail. Never send attachments.

#### **IV. EDITORIAL BOARD MEETINGS: TIPS & TACTICS**

##### **Pick the best team**

Pull together three to four strategic individuals to attend the ed board meeting – and no more. A good combination: the figurehead, the wonk and the grassroots. The figurehead, or an executive director of an organization, can give the overview of the what, who, when and how behind the issue and why it deserves attention. The wonk – a researcher or policy analyst – can answer the more technical questions. And the grassroots – a person who is impacted directly by the issue – puts a face on an abstract problem. You can also bolster your team with the strange bedfellow – the person whom pundits would not expect to endorse your position, demonstrating the breadth of your support.

##### **Thank them for previous coverage**

Don't thank them for advancing your position, but for informing their readers about the issue. Newspapers usually make a point of creating a firewall between their editorial department and their newsroom so that their regular news remains neutral. As such, you should steer clear of any comments that suggest that their editorial position is linked to their news reporting on the issue.

##### **Expect to be grilled**

If they're tough on you – and they will be – remember it's their job to play devil's advocate. They want to hear you defend your position so they'll have ammunition if they decide to agree with you. Don't be defensive and be prepared to hold your ground.

##### **Cut to the chase**

Often, you'll only get 30-45 minutes of their time, so cover the main points right away. Make sure they're asking questions within 10 minutes into the meeting so you have a conversation, rather than a lecture. That said, it's a good idea to take the pulse of the room to clarify how much background to give depending on how up to speed on the issue the editorial board members are. Don't sidestep the sticky parts; address potential concerns upfront. And always try to appear more reasonable than your opponents.

##### **Give them a timeline**

Editorials are all about timing. A timeline will give them a full sense of the debate and will help you to maximize the frame of the story. This will help them to think about future stories or editorials.

##### **Close the deal**

Before you leave, clarify what you're asking for and what you would like them to say in their editorial. Press them to say which position they intend to take based on the meeting.

#### **AFTER THE MEETING**

##### **Say thank you**

Don't wait for a positive editorial to appear before sending a letter thanking them for taking the time to meet with you. If they publish a favorable editorial, thank them for their support as well.

##### **Follow-up with relevant information**

Include new information and address specific issues that they may have raised during the meeting that perhaps you were unable to respond to fluently at the time.

##### **Explore other options**

Ask to submit an op-ed if at any point in the process they say they will not editorialize on your issue or if they end up editorializing against you. An op-ed is second best to an editorial, but nonetheless allows you to use the opinion-editorial page to frame your issue and move the needle.

##### **Don't neglect LTEs**

*You (and your supporters) should plan to do this regardless of the editorial position the board*

*takes. If the newspaper's editorial is supportive, letters to the editor can keep your positive story alive a few days longer on the editorial page. If they write against you, letters help reframe the debate from your perspective. And remember, good letters to the editor don't repeat the messages of the opposition, but respond with your own key messages.*

## V. PRINT INTERVIEWS: TIPS & TACTICS

### Preparation

- Prepare your key messages and talking points before the interview. Preparing messages and talking points will help you control the message and prevent a reporter from misquoting you.
- Never “wing it”; if a reporter calls you, never agree to an interview right at that moment. You need to give yourself time to develop your talking points. Ask the reporter the nature of the interview, the other people she will be interviewing for her story, and when her deadline is. Then set up an interview time later in the day, but with plenty of time to make the deadline. If someone else sets up your interviews, they should ask the same questions and give you enough time to prepare.
- Get familiar with the newspaper or magazine with which you’ll be interviewing. What is its political slant? Who is its readership? Do some research and read a couple of articles written by the reporter with whom you’ll be speaking. Is this a column that’s likely to be heavy on opinion or is it a news article, which is likely to be more fact-driven. Is the reporter sympathetic to your cause? Is she liberal? Conservative?
- Role-play with one of your colleagues prior to your interview. The role-play should anticipate the types of question the reporter is likely to ask.
- If you are interviewing over the phone, print out any “cheat sheets” that you need for reference. The beauty of phone interviews is that the reporter can’t see you, so you can use notes to help you make your points.

### Your message

- Speak in sound bites—or short, pithy, attention-grabbing quotes that communicate the gist of your message. If you want to make sure you are quoted accurately, repeat your message a few different times. Print reporters, especially those working for dailies, have no time to transcribe an interview from a tape recorder. They spend most of their time looking for colorful sound bites. It’s your job to make sure you repeat your message throughout the interview, and deliver your message through colorful sound bites.
- Remember that the person you are communicating with isn’t the reporter, but the people who will read her story the next day. Think about the readers while you’re delivering your sound bites and messages.
- If a reporter asks you a detailed, multi-part question, focus on answering the one question that leads you back to your key messages.
- You never have to answer a question directly. Bridge back to your messages with a prefatory statement like, “The single most important thing to remember is...”

### Speaking tips

- If you hear a reporter typing while doing a phone interview and you’re delivering one of your sound bites, slow down to let the reporter catch up. Then repeat the exact quote again.
- Strive to appear more reasonable than your opponents.
- If appropriate, humor can help you score a memorable quote. Use a funny sound bite or wry or glib quote to get across your message.
- Don’t use sarcasm; it doesn’t translate well in the media, especially in print.
- Avoid using jargon, acronyms or insider vocabulary.
- Don’t overwhelm a reporter with too many numbers or statistics. Key findings are good if they help define the story, but to languish in numbers bores anyone who may be reading the story.
- Never say “no comment”. It sounds like you have something to hide. It’s better to tell a reporter that you don’t know the answer or that you’re unclear about the answer based on your current understanding of the information.
- Assume everything you say is on the record unless you have a very specific agreement otherwise. Just because the pencil has been put away doesn’t mean that the reporter might not use something you say on the way to the door.



## VI. RADIO INTERVIEWS: TIPS & TACTICS

### Preparation

- To get a sense of the host's style, listen to the show before you go on.
- What's the format of the show? Live? Live-to-Tape? Call-In? One-on-one interview? Debate? Is it liberal? Conservative?
- If you can't listen to the show because you're outside of the market, find out as much as possible from the Web or from the show's producer.
- Find out who the other guests may be and do some opposition research if they will be representing an opposing point-of-view.
- Always choose an in-studio interview over a telephone interview, if you have a choice. The quality of the interview will be better, you'll be less likely to be cut off in mid-sentence, and you'll have an opportunity to establish a rapport with the host.
- Bring along a blank tape and ask one of the studio technicians to record the program for you. It's sometimes difficult to get one after-the-fact.
- If you have a chance, practice by taping yourself, so you can rehearse important things like voice inflection and speech cadence.
- Print out any "cheat sheets" that you need for reference. The beauty of radio is that nobody can see you, so you can use notes to help you make your points.
- For call-in shows, notify supporters, friends and co-workers about the program, so that they can call in with supportive questions.

### In the studio

- Ask the producer what the best position is for you in relation to the microphone.
- Maintain eye contact with the host or the engineer while you are on air, so that you can time your comments. Don't lose an opportunity to make a strong closing point because you're out of time.
- For call in, use the listener's name in your response. This is an excellent way to establish a rapport with the listener and your audience.
- Refer to the station's call letters, the show or the host by name – it's always a sign of a seasoned pro.
- Assume that everything is being recorded, so don't make any off-the-cuff remarks.

### On the phone

- If you must participate by phone, call from a landline, not a mobile phone or cordless phone.
- Disable call waiting.
- Have the phone number of the studio on hand in case you get cut off.
- If you must use a cell phone and you're calling from a car, pull over and park – both for safety reasons and to help you concentrate on your message.
- If you're doing a live interview by phone, turn off the radio in your home or car to prevent feedback.

### Your message

- Make sure to get out your key messages in your first answer – you may only get that one opportunity.
- No matter what happens, stay calm and on message.
- Treat the host and listeners, even those hostile to you, with respect. This will usually disarm their hostility. If hostility continues, "I'm sorry you feel that way," will often win you points from the audience.
- Radio audiences change every 15 minutes; if you are on a one-hour show, repeat your messages often.
- Avoid sarcasm; it doesn't translate well on radio – or in other media for that matter.

- Mention your organization or campaign by name, saying it at least twice. Don't use the acronym of your organization, rather say your full name. Don't count on the host to mention it for you.

**Speaking tips**

- Don't speak too rapidly; in fact, speak more slowly than usual. It will be the perfect speed for radio.
- Avoid popping your "Ps" or smacking your lips into the microphone.
- Smile, it will actually "show" in your voice.
- Ask the production staff for water, and drink periodically during the show (away from the microphone).
- Speak in short sentences and pepper your remarks with sound bites.
- Use appropriate vocal variation. To avoid sounding monotone, try punching, or emphasizing one word or phrase in each sentence.
- Use humor as appropriate, but only if it comes naturally to you.
- If possible, stand rather than sit (during phone interviews). It will give your voice more energy.

## VII. TV INTERVIEWS: TIPS & TACTICS

### Preparation

- Develop your key messages and know how to deliver them effectively prior to your interview. To get a sense of the host's style and show's format, watch the show before you go on. What's the format of the show? Live? Live-to-Tape? Call-In? One-on-one interview? Debate? Is it liberal? Conservative? What other guests have been booked? What point-of-view are you expected to fill? Is she impartial? Is she combative? Does she use her questions as a way to ambush her guests?
- Ideally, you'll have a chance to watch the show several times before your appearance. If you can't, milk the producer for as much information as possible before you agree to do the show. Look for transcripts on their Web site.
- Role-play with one of your colleagues prior to your interview. The role-play should mimic the show in length and style.
- Always choose an in-studio interview over a satellite interview. You'll have a better opportunity to establish a rapport with the host – which will strengthen your appearance.
- If you want to improve, watch and critique your interview.

### In the studio

- When interviewing in studio, don't look at the camera, make eye contact with the host.
- Smile! It will help you to relax; it will project confidence and will help to win over your audience.
- If the host is combative, don't be afraid to sit closer and touch her arm and smile – it will make it harder for her to be nasty to you.
- If she's got you on the defensive, interrupt her, but do it with a smile. Keep interrupting to repeat your messages. As long as you keep a smile on your face, you won't seem rude.
- Don't be fooled by a host who is as sweet as sugar before the show begins; she may turn into an attack dog as soon as the show goes live.
- Don't be distracted by the stage crew.
- Refer to the show or the host by name – it's always a sign of a seasoned pro.
- Assume that everything is being recorded, so don't make any off-the-cuff remarks.
- Use natural hand gestures that don't distract.
- Remember that every "um" and twitch is magnified, so relax, breathe and ground yourself.
- When the interview is over, sit still until the producer or host tells you that you are done.

### Via satellite

- Make sure the audio earpiece fits properly. Alert the producer or technician immediately if it doesn't stay in your ear or if sound is cutting in and out.
- If your opponent is in studio and you're via satellite, you are at a disadvantage. To even the playing field, be conversational, smile and interrupt if needed.
- Although it may feel awkward, always maintain eye contact with the camera in via satellite interviews; otherwise you will appear shifty-eyed, and it will distract viewers from your message.

### Your message

- Make sure to get out your key messages in your first answer – you may only get that one opportunity.
- Repeat your messages as often as possible.
- No matter what happens, stay calm and on message.
- If you're doing a taped interview and you make a mistake, stop and start over.
- If a host asks you a detailed, multi-part question, focus on answering the one question that leads you back to your key messages.
- Avoid sarcasm; it doesn't translate well on TV – or in other media for that matter.

**Speaking tips**

- Don't speak too rapidly; in fact, speak more slowly than usual. It will be the perfect speed for TV.
- Use appropriate vocal variation. To avoid sounding monotone, try punching, or emphasizing, one word or phrase in each sentence.

**What to wear**

- Grays, blues and browns.
- Do not wear white – it glows on TV; don't wear black – it's too harsh and sucks up all the light.
- Wear pastel shades for shirts/blouses.
- Do not wear patterns, plaids, florals, checks, stripes or dots.
- Avoid big jewelry, especially dangly earrings. Do not wear buttons or slogans – no one will be able to read the slogan, and it will just come across as tacky.
- If you wear glasses most of the time, then wear your glasses, however, you may want to get glare-proof glasses.
- Even if you don't normally perspire, you will on TV because of the hot lights. Makeup will make you look like you're not sweating. Ask the production crew for help if you don't normally wear makeup.

## VIII. SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Most people find information they're looking for through a quick Google search. A primary communications outreach goal for a non-profit organization is to position its site on the top of the results from search engines. Below is a list of current best practices that will help your organization attract new viewers, members and donors.

### **State who you are**

When people search for your organization, they look for what your organization does, stands for and the services they provide. Search engine "spiders" do the same thing. Organizations all too often shoot themselves in the foot by burying this information deep within their site, meaning it's not the first thing that search engine spiders find when they evaluate your site. Be sure to put the most important information about who you are and what you do first and foremost on your home page.

### **Encourage organizations to link to you**

Not just any organization, but related and/or reputable websites such as news organizations, Wikipedia and other partner organizations. Include your URL in press releases: if news organizations pick up your press release verbatim, search engines will count the link in the press release as a link directly from a news site. Reach out to your e-mail lists and partner organizations and ask them to link to your Web site: be cautious, though, as reciprocal links cancel each other out.

### **Keep content fresh**

Search engines take note of when you update your site, so update it as frequently as possible.

### **Actively maintain your site**

Search engines can demote a Web site's ranking based on simple errors – broken links, faulty web code and common spelling mistakes. Ensure all of your site's pages are working and information is correct.

### **Label photos and images**

Search engines can't see photos, images or videos; they can only analyze the coding that accompanies these elements. Label all photos, images and art on your site in accurate, descriptive ways.

### **Avoid PDFs and flash introductions**

While these formats can be great ways to deliver your message, they are not easily searchable by spiders. If you must use flash pieces and PDF files, keep them on pages other than your home page.

### **Index each page and label it based on content**

Search engines take note of every page of your website as long as each page is individually indexed and has page-specific key words and meta-tags. Meta tags are pieces of HTML coding that provide information about a given Web page, most often to help search engines categorize them correctly.

### **Create a site map**

A site maps serves as a table of contents for not only users, but for search engines. Use both html and xml site maps.

### **Use accurate key words**

Organizations need to develop key words that are used in the content of each page and in meta tags. Meta tags and keywords are no longer the key to great search engine results that they were in the 1990's – spammers and incorrect site tagging have forced search engines to largely rely on

other qualifiers of Web site content. However, they are still a basic element that is necessary for search engines to be able to find — and classify — your Web site.

### **Drive traffic to your site**

Search engines pay attention to Web sites that are visited frequently. Drive traffic to your website by reaching out to your members, conducting an online campaign, developing media stories on your organization or anything else that drives traffic to your site.

### **Register your site**

While search engines do reach almost every site, you can make their search easier by telling them about your Web site. Submit your URL to Google by visiting <http://www.google.com/addurl/?continue=/addurl> and registering your site at the Open Directory Project at <http://www.dmoz.org/>.

### **Wikipedia is a key resource — Use it**

Wikipedia is one of the top sources of information on search engine returns for almost any term, often ranking above organizations' own Web sites. As an "open-source" site, an organization can edit its own Wikipedia page. Be sure to follow Wikipedia's guidelines (they can be found here [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Wikipedia\\_content\\_guidelines](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Wikipedia_content_guidelines)) and monitor any future edits — your competitors are also free to alter your site.

### **Analyze how your site is used**

Once you have your site up and running, use a service like Google Analytics to help you monitor how people find your site and what they do once they are there. This is a great way to learn about your audience, how best to communicate with them and what changes you need to make to your site. Once you have discovered how users get to your site, mold your keywords to reflect your users' search terms.

### **Focus on the user experience**

Users' experience can affect your search engine results because search engines pay attention to your site's analytics — how long people stay on your site, whether they keep coming back to your site, and how many pages within your site they view. So while creating a useful and informative Web site will help you in the immediate future — by keeping your current users happy — it will also help you gain new users who keep coming back for more.



**IX. Media Intake Form**

**Agricultural Sustainability Institute at UC Davis  
Media Intake Form**

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Staff Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Journalist Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Outlet or Show Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Outlet or Show: \_\_\_\_\_

If a broadcast outlet, is the interview live or taped? \_\_\_\_\_

Deadline: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Call Specifics: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Was this media request fulfilled? \_\_\_\_\_

Who did the interview/answered the question? \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## X. Sample Message Platform

### The Problem

America was once a place where good jobs could be taken for granted. Communities and families could safely pin their hopes on homegrown, American industries that offered good jobs — with both high wages and benefits — to people with a high school degree.

Today far too many communities and families cannot find good jobs. The technology revolution has left much of our workforce without the skills to perform in the 21st century economy, while the global marketplace has brought intense new competition to companies that used to be reliable sources of American jobs.

Leaders in government, business and education face the responsibility of navigating the new economy and creating job opportunities for those who need it. Today's leaders shouldn't have to face this challenge alone.

### The Solution

The Corporation for a Skilled Workforce is the partner leaders trust most to help them create good jobs so that families and firms can thrive in the changing economy. We help communities innovate so they can compete. We help businesses cultivate talent so they can grow. We help people learn so they can find good jobs — or create their own.

When leaders work together, everyone has the power to prosper. That's why we take pride in making collaboration the cornerstone of our approach. Our unrivaled blend of expertise and experience gives us the tools to tackle the toughest problems and discover the greatest opportunities. Our partners come to us because they need solutions. They stay with us because together we find solutions that are right for them.

### Impact Stories

#### In Michigan

When Michigan needed a way to put people back to work after 300,000 manufacturing jobs left town, we helped Governor Granholm design the *No Worker Left Behind* initiative. Now thousands of displaced auto workers are getting free tuition to transition into new, well-paying jobs.

#### In Louisiana

In New Orleans, we are working with Microsoft to close the digital divide by deploying an innovative curriculum that provides technology skills to thousands of people with little or no computer experience.

#### In Oklahoma

With Oklahoma anticipating a major shortage of skilled labor over the next decade, we helped the state to launch *Grow Oklahoma*, an initiative which aligns the education system with the emerging job market in order to meet the growing demand for workers.

## XI. Sample Policy Brief

**Note: The actual policy brief is in PDF format, so it is included as an attachment. However, here is an analysis of why this policy brief works:**

**The layout is simple, but dynamic and engaging.** This policy brief proves that you don't need to hire a professional designer to convey information effectively. This brief accomplishes this by including:

- Clear, descriptive headlines and sub-heads for different sections
- Easy-to-understand graphs that convey significant information
- Lists of bullet points to convey long lists without overwhelming
- Compelling pull quotes to support and define the problem

**Information that is both important for the target audience and supports IREPP's brand is effectively, yet unobtrusively, laid out on the front page of the briefing.** This includes:

- IREPP's logo
- A brief overview of the report's mission and background
- Link to the online, full-text version and other related reports
- Contact information

**The narrative structure is compelling and makes sense.** The brief follows the following outline:

- Overview/Introduction
- The Problem
- Potential Solutions
- Conclusion

**The language speaks to the target audience: policymakers.** Although the full report includes sections that are clearly "by academics for academics," this policy briefing speaks to legislators about issues that are important to their constituents in non-partisan language that they can understand and addresses core concerns always facing legislators regarding money, accountability and implementation.