

GCOOS-RA Long-range Communications Plan July 9, 2014

This Communications long-range plan is designed to guide the communications strategy and actions of the GCOOS-RA. The Communications Team (Communications and Strategy Lead, Executive Director (ED), Associate Executive Director, Outreach and Education Coordinator, Website Staff, and Newsletter Staff) will implement the communications activities, in coordination with the Outreach and Education Council, the Data Management and Communications Team (DMAC), and the Products and Services Advisory Committee (PSAC). The overarching goal of the Communications plan is to enhance participation in, and awareness and support of, GCOOS and the GCOOS-RA. Specific goals, objectives, and actions are identified by year. However, not all identified goals, objectives, and actions may be implemented in the year identified, because activities must be linked to available resources and opportunities. This plan is intended to be a living document that will be reviewed and updated annually within the regular GCOOS-RA planning process. It is a companion document to the short-term, GCOOS Communications Strategy.

The Vision for GCOOS Communications is to provide communications materials through various media to enhance broad stakeholder participation in, and knowledge and support of, the GCOOS and GCOOS-RA. [It should be noted that the GCOOS-RA is not primarily a “News” organization. It should use communications as a means toward fulfilling its mission and meeting stakeholder priorities in the Gulf of Mexico.]

The GCOOS Communications Team will provide the guidance and leadership essential for the development of materials designed for different media to communicate awareness of GCOOS and the coastal, ocean, climate, and energy issues affecting the Gulf of Mexico, and to generate support for the GCOOS-RA, our members, and our partners/data providers. The Communications and Strategy Lead reports to the Executive Director of the GCOOS-RA.

Goals [Areas for Improvement]

1. Maintain and enhance GCOOS Communication through mechanisms such as the GCOOS website, the GCOOS electronic monthly newsletter, and GCOOS success stories.
 - Issue.* The website needs updated material, particularly for the “Public” and “Education” sections. The website also needs to highlight the GCOOS data portal and products pages more prominently.
 - Issue.* There is a need to allocate more staff time resources to the development and dissemination of GCOOS success stories to targeted audiences.
 - Issue.* There is a need to reduce staff time resources spent on the website and newsletter through the use of automated mechanisms.

2. Enhance communication within the GCOOS-RA and its partners
 - Issue.* The GCOOS-RA members and partners could do a better job of efficiently coordinating to secure funding for effective observations and information for Gulf stakeholder priorities.
 - Issue.* Many GCOOS-RA members and partners are not aware of the value of GCOOS-RA communications as a tool to raise awareness of, and help support, their programs.
 - Issue.* Some GCOOS-RA members and partners are not aware of GCOOS-RA activities, products, and tools for data providers.

3. Enhance communication beyond the GCOOS-RA to reach more stakeholders
Issue. Beyond the GCOOS-RA members and partners, many Gulf stakeholders and decision-makers have limited awareness of the GCOOS-RA activities. This translates into relatively low levels of broad support for GCOOS throughout the Gulf. Specifically, State and Federal government, the shipping/ports industry, the tourism industry, the oil and gas industry, and the emergency management community need to be made more aware of GCOOS-RA activities.
Issue. Due to the plethora of organizations advocating for Gulf observations, there is a general lack of understanding of what GCOOS is and how the GCOOS-RA relates to other Gulf organizations.
4. Enhance the use of information provided by GCOOS and document that usage
Issue. The current use throughout the region of GCOOS observations, products and services is quite limited. If the information is used, it is often not tracked, nor documented as originating through GCOOS.
5. Evaluate GCOOS Communication activities
Issue. The GCOOS-RA management and the Communications Team need a mechanism to provide feedback on the success of GCOOS Communication activities. As examples: Do stakeholders and decision-makers know what the GCOOS-RA does? Do they know what observations and products are available? Do they understand the priority issues for the Gulf of Mexico? Do they provide support toward resolving those issues, either through support of legislation, allocation of funds toward programs or projects, other contributions? Do they seek the GCOOS-RA as a productive partner organization for the Gulf?

Milestones [Timeframes for needed actions]

Goal 1 Maintain and enhance GCOOS Communication through mechanisms such as the GCOOS website, the GCOOS electronic monthly newsletter, and GCOOS success stories. [Lead: Communications and Strategy Lead]

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| 2014 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement prioritized changes to the website, as listed in the short-term Communications Strategy • Begin using Really Simple Syndication (RSS) to help populate website • Implement Constant Contact for newsletter • Continue to publicize online “story submission” form for newsletter and website stories from members and partners • Write and disseminate success stories for targeted audiences as needed • Make more media contacts to help spread GCOOS communications • Semi-annual coordination with O/E Council, PSAC, and DMAC Team |
| 2015 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue implementing changes to website, as listed in the short-term Communications strategy • Use RSS more extensively and, potentially, other social networking options • Continue to publicize online “story submission” form for newsletter and website stories • Write and disseminate success stories for targeted audiences as needed • Enhance media (e.g., online and print newspapers, journals) contacts to help spread GCOOS message • Semi-annual coordination with O/E Council, PSAC, and DMAC Team |
| 2016 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as 2015, with changes evaluated for 2017 |

Goal 2 Enhance communication within the GCOOS-RA and its partners [Lead: Communications and Strategy Lead]

- 2014
- Use the GCOOS newsletter and web site banner stories to more effectively share activities of the GCOOS-RA councils, committees, and task teams
 - Encourage use of online “story submission” form among members and partners
 - Include periodic updates of “What’s New to the GCOOS Data Portal and Products Pages” on the website and in the newsletter
 - ED to actively coordinate GCOOS participation in events, with notification to all GCOOS staff and select Board members during regular staff call or via emails
 - Provide GCOOS Letters of Support signed by ED for relevant grant proposals from members and partners
 - Post GCOOS presentations and posters on GCOOS website
 - Semi-annual coordination with O/E Council, PSAC, and DMAC Team
- 2015
- Continue 2014 activities, with changes evaluated for 2015
- 2016
- Continue 2015 activities, with changes evaluated for 2016

Goal 3 Enhance communication beyond the GCOOS-RA to reach more stakeholders [Lead: Communications and Strategy Lead]

- 2014
- Write and disseminate success stories for targeted audiences (e.g, Capitol Hill Oceans Week, State and Federal government, the shipping/ports industry, tourist industry, and the oil and gas industry) as needed.
 - Develop one-pagers describing the different Gulf organizations and how GCOOS relates to them
 - Contact Emergency Management leads from each Gulf state.
 - Engage priority membership targets, as identified by the GCOOS Membership Committee
 - Enhance media (e.g., online and print newspapers, journals) contacts to help spread GCOOS message
 - Use GCOOS “brand” Powerpoint template at events
 - Improve and use GCOOS display(s) at events
 - Continue and expand coordination with other Gulf-wide organizations, such as GOMA, GOMURC, NOAA Gulf Regional Collaboration Team
 - Coordinate with Associate Executive Director to identify strategic visits and information needed for those visits. Help provide the information needed.
- 2015
- Continue 2014 activities, with changes evaluated for 2015
- 2016
- Continue 2014 activities, with changes evaluated for 2016

Goal 4 Enhance the use of information provided by GCOOS and document that usage [Lead: Communications and Strategy Lead]

- 2014
- Enhance the profile of the GCOOS Data Portal and Products on the website
 - Include regular updates on GCOOS Data Portal and Products on the website and in the newsletter
 - Include a Data Policy that provides free and open access to data and products on the GCOOS pages.
 - With DMAC and O/E Teams, develop and publicize online tutorials for Data Portal and Products
 - Semi-annual coordination with O/E Council, PSAC, and DMAC Team
- 2015
- Continue 2014 activities, as appropriate
- 2016
- Continue 2014 activities, as appropriate

Goal 5 Evaluate GCOOS Communication activities [Lead: GCOOS Communications and Strategy Lead]

- 2014
 - Prepare quarterly website use reports [Responsible party: Website staff]
 - Annual number of newsletter subscriptions, as an indication of success of newsletter
 - Annual membership number, as an indication of success of GCOOS Communications
 - Regular surveys of members and partners on the utility of the GCOOS newsletter, website, success stories, etc.
 - Annual number of GCOOS invited talks, as an indicator of success of GCOOS Communications
 - Evaluate Communications activities for changes in 2015
- 2015
 - Continue 2014 activities, as appropriate
 - Evaluate Communications activities for changes in 2016
- 2016
 - Continue 2014 activities, as appropriate
 - Evaluate Communications activities for changes for 2017