GLIA Communications Strategy

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GLIA's stated Charter goals are (1) connecting remote, distant communities, (2) facilitating information access and sharing, (3) advancing opportunities for multi-island collaboration, and (3) amplifying island voices to mainland audiences. In keeping with these goals, a two-pronged strategy is needed.

Firstly, robust internal communications and resource-sharing through discursive spaces, such as message boards, alongside fixed resource access, such as databases and toolkits should be established and promoted. Secondly, measurable objectives for attracting new audiences must be set; this includes marketing to mainland audiences who may have vested interest in Great Lakes islands, but more crucially in identifying when, why, and how to attract new membership to GLIA, both on the individual level (i.e. new members on existing member islands) and the community level (i.e. new member islands themselves).

Achieving these goals requires a long-term strategy that is in harmony with the GLIA Strategic Plan (2024-2034); in particular the task of identifying new audiences requires input from GLIA membership. As described in the position description for Communications Specialist, a subcommittee will be formed to address these overarching elements of the strategy, and will also serve to assist in the generation and/or discovery of meaningful content for each of the following tools, once established.

Internal Communications and Leveraging Existing Tools

The problem of internal communications is complex due to the fact that many existing tools and conduits of discourse already exist (email, social media, monthly GLIA Zoom meetings), and the user base has a diverse range of demographics and comfort levels with technology. Adding brand new tools and technologies to the mix may be inadvisable in the near-term. New tools should only be considered contingent on expression from membership that current needs are not being met by existing tools. The existing tools can be leveraged to increase internal communications in the following ways:

Tool	Use Case	Resources needed
Email	While at times cumbersome, email has the benefit of near-universal usage by GLIA members. The development of a periodic newsletter on a particular topic, and the acceptance and use of such a newsletter will cut down on superfluous email noise as members can direct ideas and information to the newsletter workflow with confidence that the information will be shared among the membership in a timely manner.	A comprehensive listserv tool such as MailChimp or Constant Contact. An online sign-up form that may also double as a mode for prospective members to submit an application for membership.
Facebook (Group)	There currently exists two Facebook profiles for GLIA, one is a "Page" which only functions for one-way communication from GLIA to the user-base. The other profile is a "Group" which allows for robust communications between GLIA and members, and between members and each other. There are many examples of Facebook Groups being used for highly successful community organizing, from emergency response to commerce. A campaign to promote the use of the Facebook Group could result in much more consistent and meaningful discourse among members. Facebook Groups require moderation, and the most successful ones have two or three moderators.	A dedicated workflow for moderation/admin on both profiles. A timetable and calendar for posts of original content and a robust internally-monitored feed of secondary sources for re-sharing. Some of these tools already exist and are in use.
Zoom calls	The monthly GLIA Zoom meetings represent by far the most meaningful and direct discursive space currently in use. Expanding on and continuing the conversation from the Zoom calls is a golden opportunity. Crafting a newsletter to accompany the topic of the monthly Zoom call is one way to amplify the conversation and make it available to those who were not in attendance. Conversation prompts and social media posts on topics covered at the Zoom sessions could also amplify the conversation and increase its accessibility.	A calendar of topics and speakers for four to six months out.
Islands Summit	The Islands Summit itself is a hub of communications, which itself feeds into all other communications channels in both directions: in generating ideas and inspiration for topics, and in providing a culmination point for ideas and	The Summit is a people-driven program, and as such individual speakers, leaders,

	topics that may already be in play. As a touchstone event for GLIA, the Summit can play a role in shaping the direction of resources, topics, and campaigns.	panelists, etc. are the starting point for connecting the Summit to communications broadly.

There may be additional tools that can be repurposed or added to the mix. Although Facebook is the most broadly used by the demographics served by GLIA, there is value in considering Instagram and and expanded presence on YouTube to reach a more media-focused audience (often folks with a more artistic or cultural focus are on those platforms as they are more content-driven). TikTok, Snapchat, and BeReal also have value in reaching younger audiences, although they are notoriously decentralized and more difficult to use for organizations vs. individuals. A "Slack" group might exist and some users might already know how to use it. GLIA already makes use of Google Workspace for file management and email admin needs; Google Chat could be made available to all members, or to select members, or could be used by staff for ongoing project management and communication supplementing email. These tools require greater technical know-how and may have a steeper learning curve for some members, and thus should not be the primary or sole communications tools used by GLIA.

Internal Communications and Other Tools (i.e. New Tools or Tools Currently in Limited Use)

While the aforementioned tools are in place for internal discourse, opportunities for "tools that offer best practices and solutions to island challenges" are less obvious and seem to exist currently in a kind of "dropbox" format on the GLIA website. Databases and toolkits that are maintained and up-to-date as well as easily searchable and accessible will prove invaluable to both existing and prospective GLIA membership. Since development of a new website is on the horizon, a key priority in the short term should be to organize existing toolkits and complete standing resource lists that contain gaps. The following tools need to be refreshed and/or revitalized:

Tool	Use Case	Resources needed
Great Lakes Islands Community Resource Directory	The Resource Directory has not been updated since 2018. This will be a time-intensive task to update and may require the use of additional staff or volunteers (i.e. an intern). Since the directory was under-utilized, it needs to be promoted internally, but it also should contain resources that are of such high value that users are compelled to use it. This could include information or instructions that are not readily available to typical constituents or are difficult to locate, such as FOIA datasets, master plans,	Dedicated human resources to build the directory: this could be staff time, an internship, or volunteer time from GLIA membership. Plugins for Wordpress may

	ordinances, census data, affordable housing projects, etc. The Resource Directory should endeavor to avoid redundancy with existing resources, but instead should be the first-stop for islanders to locate information on certain topics where they cannot easily get such information anywhere else. Interactive tools that can be user-driven (i.e. Web 2.0) or a submission-based system that can be kept up-to-date by members may prove especially useful.	also be needed to create interactive elements that users can update in real time, or use to submit updates to staff for publication.
Media Network	The Media Network is essentially a media list with an added interactive component. While a list of media outlets will suffice for now for the purposes of distributing press releases, an interactive component, such as a column that is widely distributed, or the development of a resource for media to use (such as an event calendar or press release database) should be considered. GLIA should also explore whether the media leaders across all the islands would see value in periodically convening (e.g., monthly zoom meeting) and if so, would they need GLIA assistance to facilitate.	A framework for meeting times and topics if the Media Network is to have periodic meetings. A media list with complete contact info for each partner media outlet or individual.
Expert Webinar Series	The Expert Webinar Series has great potential for both enriching and enhancing internal GLIA educational offerings and also for attracting new members. Aligning the series with the topical elements of monthly Zoom calls and accompanying newsletters is a great opportunity to enhance and expand synchronicity across programs and create a unified strategy that keeps the focus on key issues and ensures content remains relevant and meaningful for membership.	Aligning with GLIA meetings, a list of topics and potential speakers going out four to six months will be needed to adequately promote and execute a successful webinar series.
Website	The existing website contains a great deal of useful links, records, files, and information. Much of the information on the website needs to be updated as some of it has not been updated since GLIA's initial formation. There also are areas of the site that are partially incomplete and can be fleshed out. The task of updating the website will be ongoing, but it has the greatest potential of all the existing media tools to be a	Additional Wordpress plugins may be needed for interactive elements of the website. Some design changes may need to be

	"one stop shop" for information, resources, fundraising, and networking.	implemented to make the website more user-friendly and easier to navigate.

External Communications

External communications itself is a two-pronged strategy with two distinct audiences: prospective GLIA membership (i.e. islanders and islands who are not currently engaged), and mainland audiences. These must be treated separately in terms of strategy. The unique needs of island residents must remain a priority in all communications, while the cultivation of increased attention on island communities from mainland audiences emerges. Demonstrating to mainland audiences the needs of island communities and the unique value they bring to the Great Lakes region serves the mission of GLIA as it ultimately supports island communities first and foremost through advocacy and visibility.

Attracting new membership to GLIA should take priority over engaging mainland audiences as GLIA is still a relatively new organization and the task of building its core image and membership is still ongoing.

The development of new tools to reach these audiences is not necessary, rather the above resources can be marketed to prospective members and outside individuals and organizations. While some tools, such as the Zoom calls and internal emails are by nature exclusive to existing GLIA members, a newsletter, the Expert Webinar Series, and even the Facebook Group could be made broadly accessible by the general public through signup forms. Likewise, the website, if proper Search Engine Optimization is applied, can become an easily accessible resource for anyone looking for information about their own island, or about islands in general.

Examples of individuals who may not be GLIA members who would make use of the website are prospective employees or retirees who are considering a move to a Great Lakes island, tourists who may be considering a visit to a Great Lakes island, developers who may be considering an entrepreneurial venture on a Great Lakes island. Economic, environmental, and demographic data as well as public resource information will be of value to these audiences.

While true "mainlanders" (i.e. individuals and organizations with no vested interest in Great Lakes islands communities) will never be a main target audience, knowledge and understanding of Great Lakes islands communities and their ecological, economic, and culture significance among the general population is an important feature of GLIA's work in shaping public perception and influencing decision-makers as it relates to the Great Lakes watershed and to the prosperity of all people in the Great Lakes regions. As such, GLIA should endeavor to produce a few press releases or content pieces annually that are of general interest. This could be news about new developments or human interest

stories. Anecdotal examples may be news about interesting people (such as "Mackinac Island has the longest-serving mayor in the USA") or about ecological issues such as invasive species, butterfly migrations, etc.

Summary

As a broad regional collective, GLIA requires communications that utilize a multimodal approach and target a range of interests and specific audiences as well as general needs. The cultivation and health of internal communications should be a top priority, and existing tools with high potential for usefulness should be given immediate attention (Facebook, Zoom, and email). Other tools and opportunities for cross-relations (such as the Expert Webinar Series and the Resource Directory) should be developed alongside these efforts. Finally, growth among GLIA membership should occur as a byproduct of producing content that amplifies island voices and maintains a positive image for Great Lakes islands to the general public.

In order for effective communications to result in positive outcomes for GLIA, a dedicated team must be tasked with content discovery, strategy implementation, and expanding reach. Because of the disparate nature of island communities, one or two individuals will never be able to source content effectively that covers the vast array of topics, news, and resources inherent to each community. Thus, a sustained effort is needed to keep communications relevant, fresh, and successful.

Figure 1: example of interconnected internal and external communications:

- ■ GLIA members only
- ■ GLIA members + interested audiences, mostly islanders
- ■ General public

| MONTHLY TOPIC: |
| **MONARCH BUTTERFLIES** |

| **Zoom call** invited guest speaker on butterfly migrations on Beaver Island |

| **Newsletter** | **Expert Webinar** | **Permanent addition to Island Resource Directory** |
| Includes article on butterfly migrations, plus other tools and info on island insect life and migration patterns of wildlife in the Great Lakes | Same speaker as guest on Zoom, but presents additional content for a longer period. | Map(s) of migration and links/other resources for documenting migrations in the Great Lakes watershed. |

| Links and/or posts on **social media**, prompting discussion in comments | **Press release or column** distributed to island media networks on the topic of butterfly migrations on Great Lakes Islands | |