

**Communication Assessment**  
**Cowlitz Youth Soccer Association**

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**I. Introduction**

The Cowlitz Youth Soccer Association (CYSA) is a non-profit organization established in 1982 in Cowlitz County that serves approximately 2,000 youth, ages 5-17, per year through an inclusive soccer program (Cowlitz Youth Soccer Association, 2025). The organization oversees local recreational soccer clubs, including Kelso, Longview, Kalama, Castle Rock, and also the competitive Timber Barons select program. The CYSA mission focuses on providing a fun, safe, and educational soccer program that supports player development and instills a lifelong passion for the sport.

This assessment will examine CYSA's organizational structure and communication flow, identify areas for improvement, and develop recommendations to strengthen communication within CYSA. We will evaluate CYSA's communication strategies through surveys, interviews, and analysis of past and current practices. While recognizing the challenges faced by CYSA in maintaining consistent, transparent communication, this assessment aims to provide recommendations that will create a more transparent and inclusive soccer community by implementing surveys for feedback, maintaining consistent and transparent communication, and utilizing platforms for effective organization-wide communication. CYSA must prioritize effective communication throughout the organization, as it directly impacts the experience of players, parents, coaches, and volunteers.

## II. Corporate Background



Washington Youth Soccer (WYS) serves as the governing body for US Youth Soccer in Washington State and provides overall governance to CYSA. WYS was initiated by Jack Goldingay in 1961 with a four-team program at the Bellevue Boys Club. Their mission is to foster physical, mental, and emotional growth and development of the State of Washington’s youth through the sport of soccer at all levels of age and competition (Washington Youth Soccer, 2020).



The CYSA board is composed of a volunteer Executive Board that consists of the president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, head registrar, referee assignor, and members at large. The Executive Board is elected by CYSA club members at the Annual General Meeting (AGM), which is a yearly gathering of all interested stakeholders and board members. The annual financial report is presented, new board members are elected, and any proposed changes are made to the bylaws, as well as current and future strategies.

The recreational soccer clubs within CYSA include Kelso, Longview, Kalama, and Castle Rock. There is a spring season and a fall season, with training camps, tournaments, and other opportunities offered throughout the year. The CYSA Timber Barons are Cowlitz County’s select soccer program, which means it is competitive. Timber Barons require more commitment than recreational soccer due to the fact that teams play summer tournaments, fall season, and one other season (either winter indoor or spring indoor), practice twice per week, and have up to two games per weekend.



### **III. Corporate Culture**

In about 2007, WYS mandated that all clubs in Cowlitz County be unified under CYSA. Prior to this, the clubs operated independently in Cowlitz County. This consolidation created tension as the clubs wanted to maintain their autonomy in decision-making and financial control. Longview Soccer Club decided to obtain its own 501(c)(3) status to become a separate legal entity while remaining under CYSA's umbrella for state purposes. This state-mandated restructuring strained inter-club relationships and made communication difficult. Although the clubs eventually achieved a degree of cohesion, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted operations and exacerbated communication issues. The communication breakdown within CYSA stemmed from several factors, including personality conflicts, individuals overstepping their roles, a lack of transparency, and power struggles among those prioritizing personal interests over the organization's mission. These factors contributed to dysfunctional monthly board meetings, leading to heated arguments and frequent resignations. The resulting turmoil negatively impacted the individual clubs and severely affected CYSA's communication effectiveness within its soccer community. CYSA is now under new leadership, with Michael Cunningham as president, and is currently restructuring the organization.

CYSA's communication flow is structured around monthly board meetings, where state-level information is disseminated to local clubs through club representatives and an agenda is followed. These monthly meetings are open to the public and all CYSA members. Individual clubs hold monthly meetings to discuss local business, and the club representatives share CYSA updates. Although CYSA has its own website and Facebook, the organization is reliant upon the clubs to share information with their respective communities through the use of various channels including mass emailing, websites, and Facebook. However, despite this structured approach,

CYSA and individual clubs struggle with maintaining consistent and transparent communication, causing confusion, misunderstandings, and missed opportunities. The organization's heavy reliance on email and social media for communication falls short of reaching all stakeholders due to inconsistent updates, lack of engagement, and the fact that not everyone uses email and social media regularly, so exploring other communication options is necessary. As Quintanilla & Wahl (2017) note, "There are still many 'traditional' communicators who prefer the intimacy of face-to-face interactions and find email or text interactions to be dismissive or insulting, especially if the conversation is a serious or important one." This communication gap shows the need for a more effective and inclusive communication strategy.

#### IV. Communication Samples and Analysis

Gathering feedback from key stakeholders, including parents, coaches, and past and current board members helped give key insight into the need for communication improvement. Through interviews and surveys, their input shows just how significant communication improvement is needed for CYSA's success. From the pie chart below, it is clear that all individuals surveyed felt there was room for communication improvement within the CYSA organization.



Almost all respondents felt there needed to be major changes in communication strategies. The concern expressed repeatedly was that a change needs to be implemented, but CYSA does not have enough volunteers to structure a comprehensive communication plan.

**V. Assess Roles/Responsibilities**

The following is a summary of the roles and responsibilities of each Executive Board member:

- President - Responsible for leading the monthly meetings, serving as the public face of the organization, and ensuring effective communication and decision-making.
- Vice President - Responsible for leading the disciplinary committee and responding to incident reports, as well as standing in for the president in their absence.
- Treasurer - Responsible for preparing financial reports, monitoring and maintaining financial records, bank reconciliations, and making sure all tax obligations are met. The CYSA treasurer also conducts regular meetings with club treasurers to maintain financial transparency practices across the organization.
- Secretary - Responsible for keeping and maintaining records, handling correspondence, drafting meeting agendas, and taking minutes.
- Head Registrar - Oversees the entire registration process, managing databases with up-to-date information, and team formation. Holds meetings with club-level registrars to assist in uniform registration processes.
- Referee Assignor - Manages matching referees to games, establishes and provides training programs for referees, and coordinates with clubs.
- Members at Large - Attend monthly meetings, serve on committees, vote, and offer support to the organization.

## **VI. Identify Trends**

CYSA's communication flow is structured around monthly board meetings, where state-level information is disseminated to local clubs through club representatives. Individual clubs hold monthly meetings to discuss local business and share CYSA updates. To disseminate information even further, CYSA and its clubs use various channels including mass emailing, websites, and Facebook. However, despite this structured approach, CYSA and the individual clubs under its umbrella struggle with maintaining consistent and transparent communication, causing confusion, misunderstandings, and missed opportunities. The organization's heavy reliance on email and social media for communication falls short of reaching all stakeholders due to inconsistent updates and a lack of engagement. This communication gap shows the need for a more effective and inclusive communication strategy.

Michael Cunningham, CYSA's President, stated, "A recent ongoing issue has been communication being misinterpreted through text. We are in the process of resolving the issue and have had in-person meetings to get all on the same page, which has helped with some of the communication issues." When I was with the organization as the treasurer, this same issue came up frequently. This reiterates the need for board members to complete some form of communication training to help them learn how to effectively communicate.

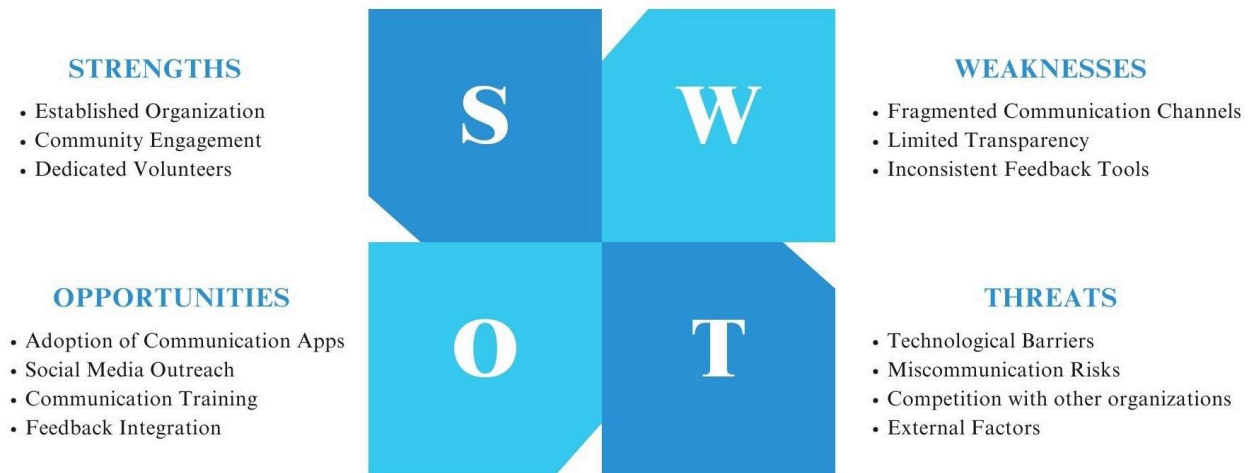
**VII. Clarify Stakeholders**

When identifying the stakeholders of CYSA is important to understand their roles, influence, and communication needs to ensure effective engagement. The growing number and variety of stakeholders, their interconnectivity, contradictory interests and demands, and the need to satisfy and prioritize them all may not seem feasible, although identifying stakeholder groups that have or may have a significant influence on the organization's ongoing operations and development is of the highest importance (Slawik, 2017).

Internal stakeholders include board members, coaches, referees, players, and volunteers, while external stakeholders include parents and guardians, sponsors, Washington Youth Soccer, Southwest Washington Youth Soccer Association, community organizations, and schools.

**VIII. SWOT Analysis**

CYSA’s strength lies in its community engagement and dedicated volunteers, including board members, refs, and coaches who contribute their time and effort to the organization. However, CYSA faces communication challenges. While they utilize multiple channels such as their website, Facebook, and mass emailing, the organization relies heavily on local clubs to disseminate information to community members. This decentralized approach leads to inconsistencies in messaging and miscommunication issues. The fragmented communication structure presents a significant weakness. Different clubs may not communicate the same information uniformly, resulting in gaps or discrepancies in the information received by members across the county. This inconsistency can lead to confusion and potentially impact the organization’s effectiveness.



To address these weaknesses, CYSA could implement more centralized, consistent communication strategies. For example, adopting communication apps or enhancing their social media outreach could help streamline information dissemination. Implementing training programs for club leaders on effective communication practices could improve consistency across all clubs. By addressing these communication challenges, CYSA can better leverage its

strengths as an established community organization and ensure that all members receive consistent, timely, and accurate information about soccer programs, events, and important updates.

**IX. Social Media Influences/Technology**

To attract stakeholders, social media platforms must be used effectively. Schmitz & Trusmei (2023) point out that organizations' use of social media should not be limited to just posting and sharing but should involve users by asking them about their opinions by distributing surveys, contests, and prizes. By engaging more with the soccer community through social media, CYSA, and its affiliated clubs will not only strengthen the communication flow but also have the potential to recruit volunteers, attract community support, and create a deeper connection within the community. Utilizing platforms beyond Facebook, such as Instagram and YouTube, could help CYSA and the affiliated clubs engage more frequently with the soccer community by not only establishing and maintaining trusted relationships but also fostering a sense of belonging.

As convenient and prominent as social media has become, it is important for organizations to remember that there is a large population of individuals who do not use social media or email. This could create a large disconnect within the soccer community. Quintanilla and Wahl (2023) note, "Clearly there are advantages and disadvantages when it comes to the use of technology, but it is important to be aware that not all individuals are comfortable with the use of technology, and other communication options should be explored." It is essential to have CYSA and club representatives present and on the fields on game days to interact with coaches, players, referees, parents and guardians, and other spectators. This interaction is crucial to establishing, building, and maintaining relationships with stakeholders. All members should feel like they belong and face-to-face engagement helps to foster a sense of community, trust, and inclusivity, which are all key components for creating a supportive and positive environment within the soccer community.

**X. Plan/Recommendation**

First, establishing clear communication channels and clear guidelines for communication protocols to ensure consistent messaging across all clubs is crucial. This will be complemented by a comprehensive communication plan outlining protocols, responsibilities, and timelines for different types of information, as well as identifying responsible individuals for maintaining consistent communication. Enhancing digital presence is also essential, updating and keeping the club websites unified and current, as well as boosting social media engagement, will help to ensure consistent information across all clubs. Implementing regular feedback mechanisms such as monthly surveys at board meetings to gather input from stakeholders could be beneficial in improving communication effectiveness and building relationships. Additionally, board members should receive communication training to enhance their skills and improve their communication within the organization. Adopting a user-friendly mobile app to facilitate real-time updates and easy access to important information would ensure the CYSA stakeholders stay informed and engaged with the organization more effectively. Last but not least, a commitment to increasing transparent and inclusive communication by regularly sharing updates on organizational decisions about board decisions and their impact on the soccer community.

By implementing these strategies, CYSA can significantly enhance the effectiveness of communication, leading to better engagement with all stakeholders and a more cohesive organization overall. With these recommendations in place, we are not just fixing communication gaps; we are building a stronger, more connected community.

Using social media platforms to engage with stakeholders, such as Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, could help to reach a wider audience and open the door for more youth in Cowlitz County to register and engage in the soccer community.

Communication channels must be established clearly for board members by utilizing a platform that is accessible to all individuals. Designating individuals who are specifically responsible for maintaining and regularly updating websites and Facebook will help to ensure consistent and timely information sharing, improve transparency in decision-making processes, facilitate quick responses to urgent matters, and create better collaboration among board members.

Maintaining uniform communication across all of the clubs is essential to eliminating confusion. If one club is doing something completely different it leads to misalignment in organizational goals and objectives, potential conflicts in scheduling or resource allocation, challenges in maintaining a cohesive brand identity for CYSA, and inconsistent messaging to players, parents, and the community.

Engaging more in face-to-face communication amongst the community members by having representatives of CYSA on the fields on game days to engage with parents, refs, players, and coaches. This would provide opportunities to invite volunteers, hear innovative ideas, allow parents to voice concerns, and show that CYSA cares about the relationship between the clubs, parents, and the organization. Maintaining a unified and effective communication structure that supports the organization's goals and enhances its overall operations shows the community that the Cowlitz Youth Soccer Association is committed to transparency, accountability, and excellence in serving its members and stakeholders.

## **XII. Conclusion**

CYSA has a strong foundation as an established organization with dedicated volunteers and community engagement. We began by identifying a shared common goal: to improve communication within CYSA for the benefit of all stakeholders, especially our young athletes. We've examined CYSA's communication flow and identified key areas for improvement through the SWOT analysis and stakeholder feedback, and the findings clearly show there is significant room for enhancing communication strategies.

The recommendations we have discussed, from establishing clear communication channels to fostering transparent and inclusive communication, are not just suggestions, but stepping stones to a more connected and effective CYSA. By implementing changes, the Executive Board of CYSA can create an environment of open, effective communication that aligns with Monica Scott's (2008) emphasis on leadership's role in fostering organizational success through communication. She states "Although members of the organization contribute to the success of an organization, it is the leadership with its inherent influence that creates the conditions for effective communication within the organization."

The success of these changes depends on all involved in CYSA working together towards a common goal. Each individual has a role to play in improving communication and building a stronger CYSA for our children and future youth soccer in Cowlitz County. "All organizations are faced with crises from time to time; these crises must be handled professionally, as outcomes are always unpredictable and also open up power struggles between communicators regarding how the problem is to be defined" (Engelstad, 2017).

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