COMMUNICATIONS
United Methodist Communications
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

RESEARCH TEAM

2021 Conference Communicator Study

about this project

Every four years, the Conference Relations team at United Methodist Communications (UMCom) collects data regarding the structure, personnel and church communication programs of the denomination's annual conferences. Insights from this research help strengthen relationships with annual conferences.

Methodology

A Survey Monkey link was sent to 54 annual conference communicators on September 30, 2021. The questionnaire included 33 questions and the estimated completion time was 10-15 minutes. Two follow-up, reminder emails were sent before the study closed on October 18, 2021. In total, 47 annual conference communicators completed the questionnaire.

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study participants

The study comprises 47 respondents from across the U.S.

68% female
32% male

58% aged 35-54
37% aged 55-64

8 from the Northeastern Jurisdiction

11 from the Southeastern Jurisdiction

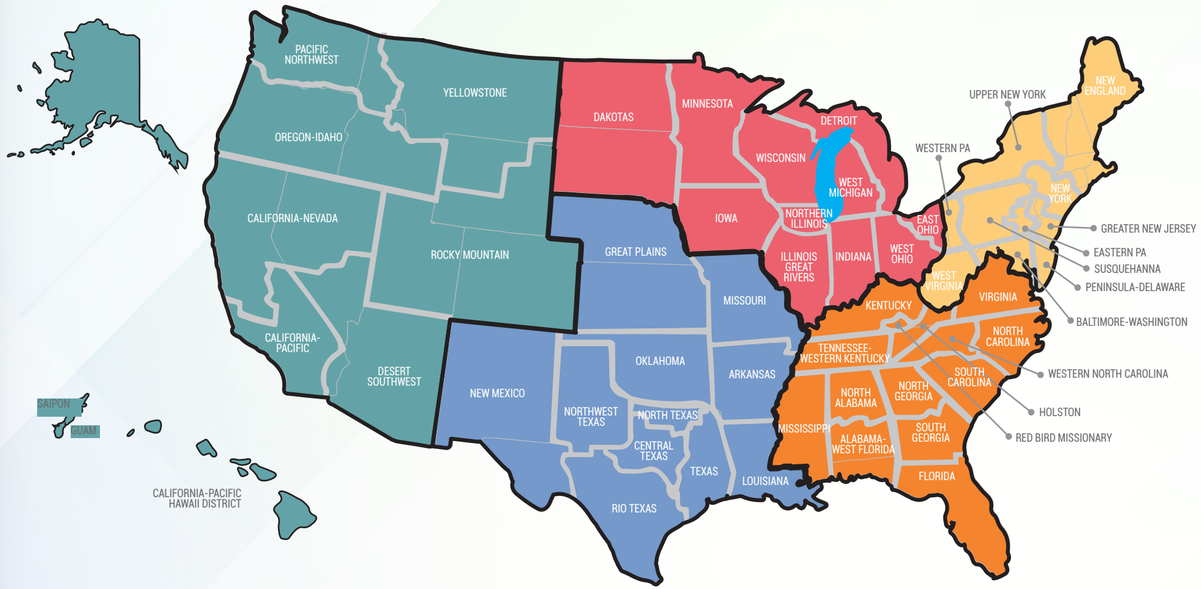
7 from the North Central Jurisdiction

11 from the South Central Jurisdiction

5 from the Western Jurisdiction

5 people offered no response

United Methodists Jurisdictions and Annual Conferences in the United States of America



Work and tools

UMCom materials and services that communicators most recommend:

87% Connectional Giving

80% ResourceUMC.org

76% UMC.org

71% Local Church Services

71% UM News RSS feeds

69% Training

Communicators utilize a myriad of tools to connect with local churches.

95-100% use Facebook, a website and email regularly.

28% use podcasts. This is a ***20% increase*** from 2016

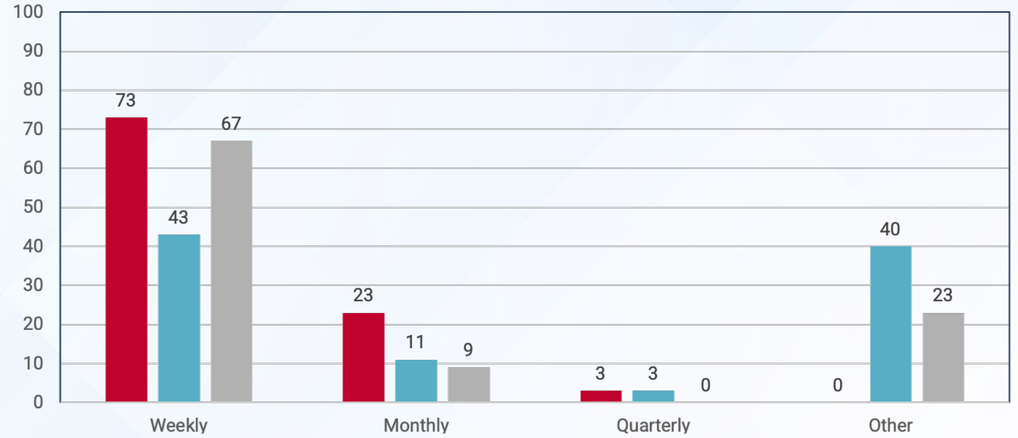
67% say they "very or somewhat frequently" send materials from UMC boards/agencies. This is a ***10% increase*** from 2016.

55% use Twitter. This is a ***29% decrease*** from 2016

51% use YouTube. This is a ***15% decrease*** from 2016

32% use Print. This is a ***13% decrease*** from 2016

Newsletter Distribution Frequency



There is a continuing trend toward digital-only newsletters.

49% in 2011

62% in 2016

87% in 2021, weekly newsletters are the norm.

Time and budget

The number of communicators responsible for 500 to 999 churches has increased over time.

38% in 2011

49% in 2016

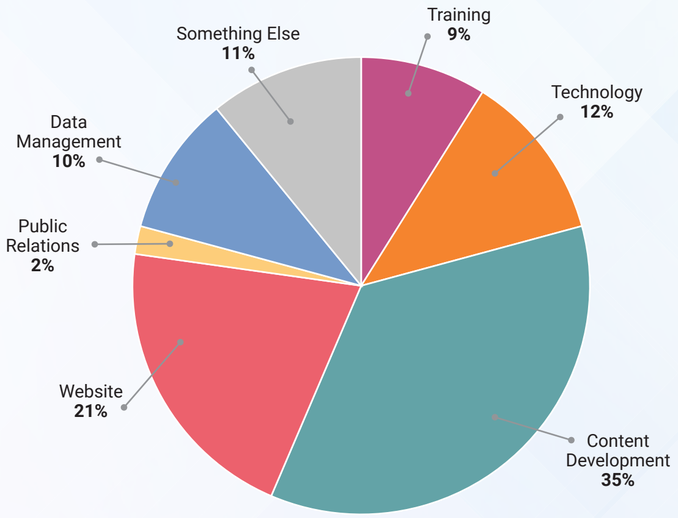
57% in 2021

How funds are utilized:

Most communicators expect their budget will remain the same in 2022.

After staffing, budget is allocated to the annual conference website, videos, technology, digital newsletters and social media management. Very little budget is allocated to print or radio.

How conference communicator teams spend their time:



Communicator job responsibilities

Which of the following activities are included in your job description/responsibilities?	2011	2016	2021
Social media management	73%	92%	91%
Media relations	91%	92%	91%
E-newsletter to clergy	91%	95%	89%
Website management	73%	95%	89%
Crisis communications	91%	92%	89%
Communications consulting within the conference	82%	81%	86%
E-newsletter to laity	86%	92%	84%
Video production	na	89%	82%
E-newsletter to members*	50%	41%	80%
Communications training	82%	87%	77%
Supervising staff	n/a	81%	77%
Budgeting	n/a	70%	77%
Marketing/Advertising	77%	87%	73%
Producing communications for boards, commissions and committees	55%	68%	64%
Conference journal production or management	32%	43%	43%
General church campaign or support	55%	49%	39%
IT/Data management	32%	30%	32%
Benevolence interpretations	55%	27%	20%
Radio programming	9%	11%	5%

**2011 & 2016 was "print to members"*

Relationships

Most communicators are at a director level, meaning full-time positions reporting directly or indirectly to the bishop. Over half of respondents earn $50-$100K.

While communicators feel a strong connection to their annual conference, they feel much less connection with UMC boards and agencies:

44% of communicators describe their conference communications as “very effective” over the past two years.

53% of communicators describe their conference communications as “somewhat effective” over the past two years.

25% have been in their current position ***for more than 10 years.***

27% have been in their current position for ***less than 3 years.***

47% have an onboarding process.

47% do not have an onboarding process, but would like to have one.

48% would be very likely or likely to volunteer for an exchange program in which a conference communicator from another annual conference could be temporarily assigned to offer back up and assistance.

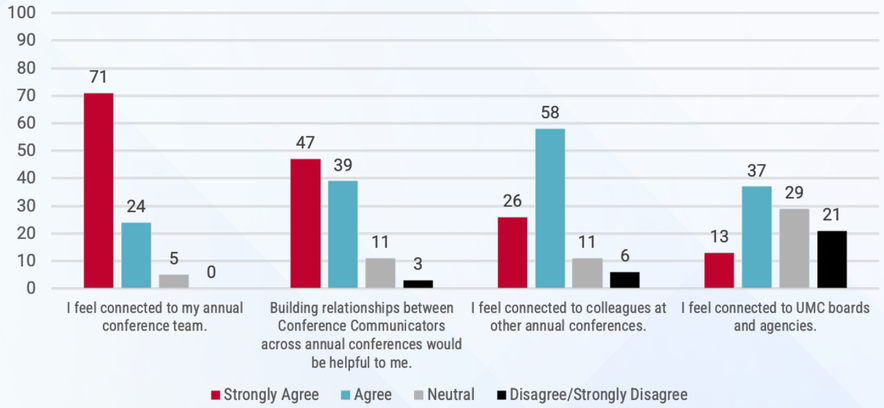
74% think a conference communicator exchange program would be helpful to them.

Employment Overview

YEARS	2011	2016	2021
0-1	18%	5%	9%
1- 3	32%	43%	18%
4-6	41%	24%	32%
7-9	5%	14%	16%
10+	5%	14%	25%

SALARY RANGE	2011	2016	2021
$20,000-$49,999	21%	5%	2%
$50,000-74,999	42%	51%	32%
$75,000-$99,999	21%	24%	25%
$100,000+	0%	5%	16%
Prefer not to answer	16%	14%	25%

Interaction with UMC Entities



Help is available!

The Conference Relations team at UMCom strives to build community and to support communicators and the work of their annual conferences. UMCom hosts monthly conference communicator meetings to encourage camaraderie and learning.

What can the team do more of, less of, or do differently to strengthen our relationship with you and your annual conference?

To offer feedback and to learn more about the monthly meetings, contact Royya James, Senior Manager, U.S. Conference Relations: RJames@UMCom.org

To learn more about this study, contact Teresa Faust, Senior Manager, Market Research & Metrics: TFaust@UMCom.org

Explore UMCom's work and available resources at ResourceUMC.org/UMCom.

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