

# Nevada State GEAR UP Strategic Communications Plan FY 2019



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## Strategic Communications Plan Abstract

This manual outlines the policies required of all Nevada GEAR UP professionals relative to external and internal communications and are hereby incorporated into the duties and responsibilities of each GEAR UP staff member. The following pages outline how all GEAR UP professionals are to produce and disseminate important information about GEAR UP's role in college readiness to students, parents, school leadership, and the wider community.

## About Nevada State GEAR UP

Nevada State GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) is a federally funded grant designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Generally, students are identified as GEAR UP during their 7th grade year and participate in GEAR UP activities that continue through high school and into their first year of college. 14 middle schools, 4 combined schools, 16 high schools, and the UNR Dean's Future Scholars, approximately 5,500 students, participate in Nevada GEAR UP. To qualify for program participation, school selection was based on a federally free or reduced lunch rate of 50% or higher, and agreement with the school districts in question.

## Nevada State GEAR UP Goals

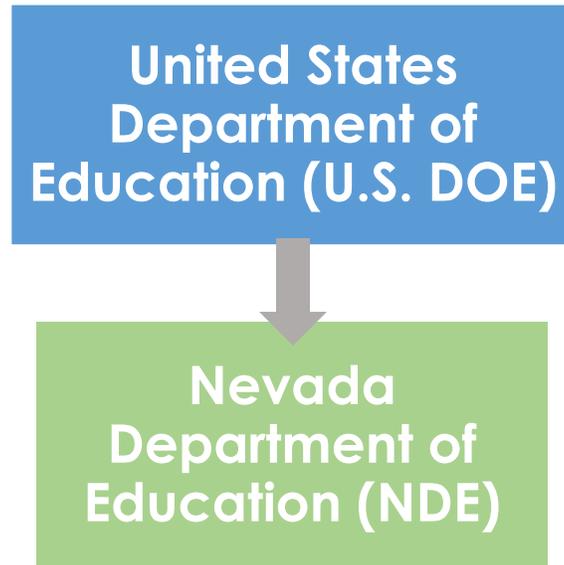
1. **Academic Preparation:** Increase academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education.
2. **Graduation and College:** Increase high school graduation rate and participation in postsecondary education.
3. **Knowledge:** Increase student and parent/family knowledge of postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing.
4. **College-Going Culture:** Create a college-going culture in GEAR UP schools to ensure all students have the opportunity, support, guidance, and information to obtain the skills and knowledge necessary to apply for and succeed in postsecondary education.

## State or Partnership Grant

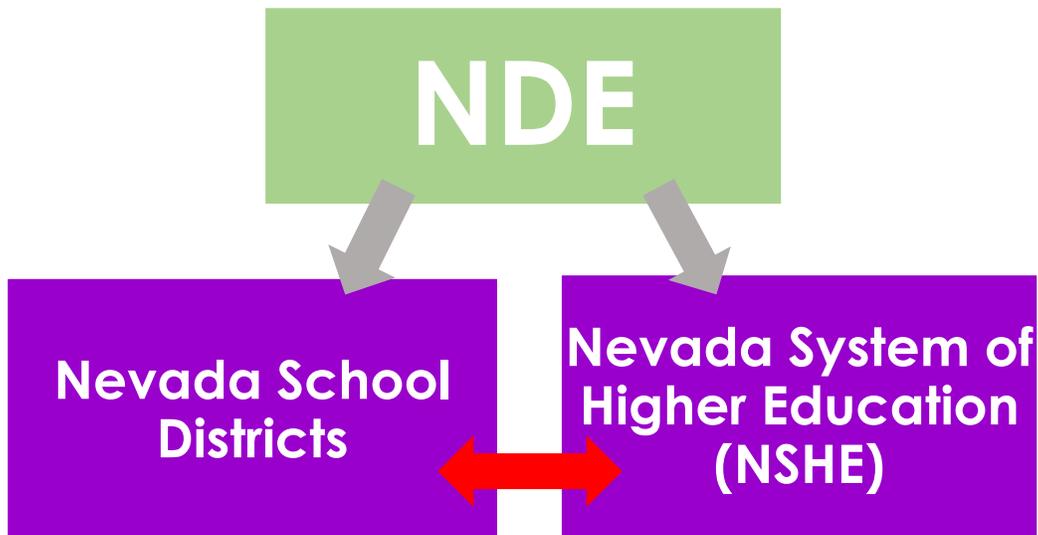
There are two types of GEAR UP grants. Typically, state grants serve the entire state, and partnership grants serve one specific region. The Nevada state grant is housed out of the Nevada Department of Education. The Nevada partnership grant serves only schools in the Clark County School District and is housed at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

### **GEAR UP Organizational Structure**

GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) is a grant program funded by the U.S. Department of Education and aims to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Funding flows from U.S. DOE to NDE.



In Nevada, NDE uses its GEAR UP grant funding to sub-award grants to school districts across the state as well as the public higher education system. NDE provides oversight to all entities and facilitates collaboration between the school districts and higher education system



## **GEAR UP Organizational Structure: Explanation**

The Nevada State GEAR UP grant program is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and brought to you by the Nevada Department of Education, and the Nevada System of Higher Education. The program is designed to increase the number of students from low-income families who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.

### **School Districts**

There are a total of 21 GEAR UP schools in eight school districts. This includes Clark County, Elko County, Humboldt County, Lyon County, Mineral County, Nye County, Pershing County, and Washoe County. The school districts work collaboratively with the NSHE institutions. From 2012-2016, students from GEAR UP middle schools were served. From 2014-2019, students from GEAR UP high schools will be served as well as our first cohort and graduated seniors now at NSHE institutions.

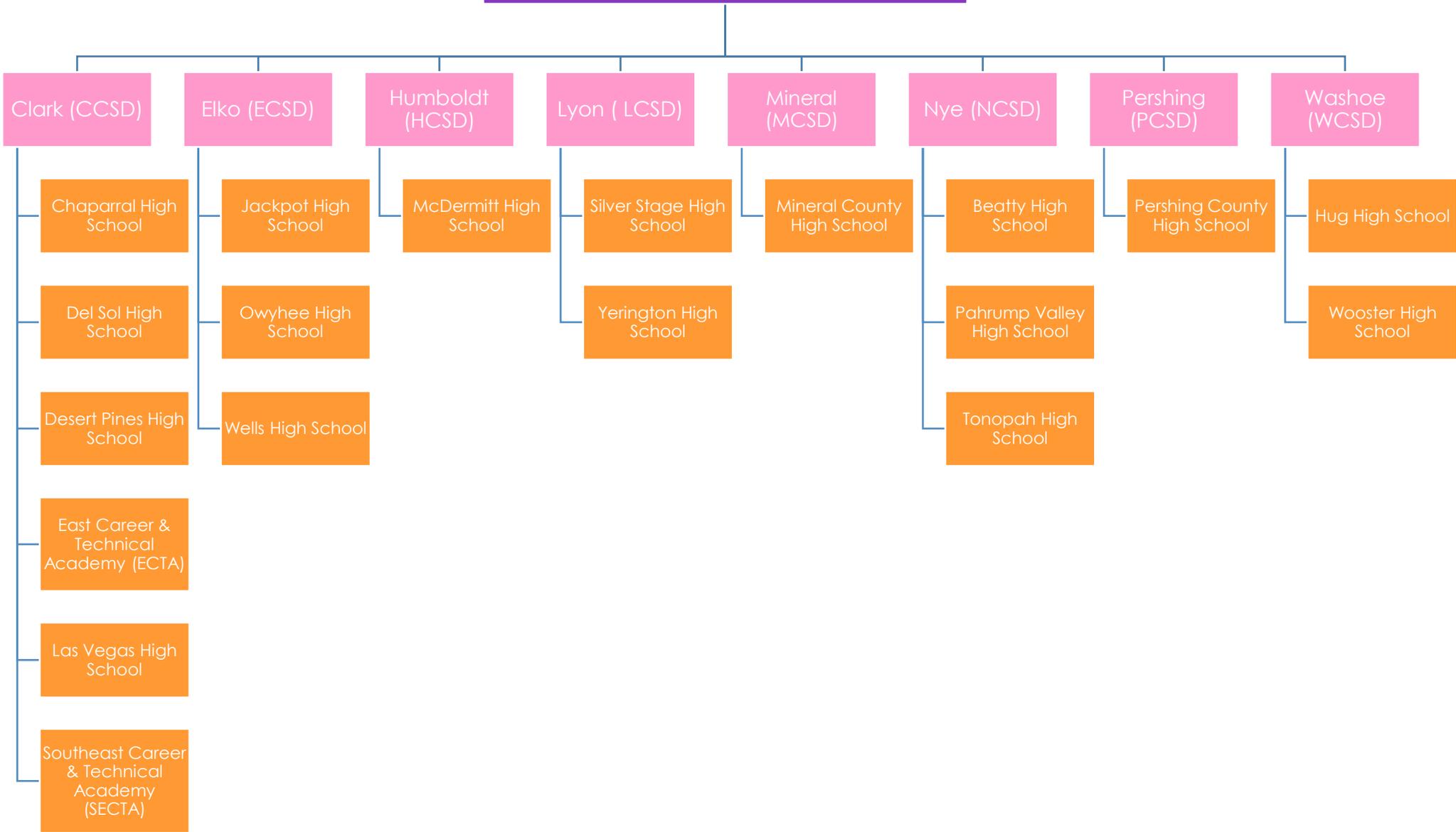
For a more comprehensive list of schools within each school district, visit <https://gearup.epscorspo.nevada.edu/services/> for more information. Each school has a designated Student-Parent Interaction Facilitator (SPIF). Clark County also has a designated District Coordinator.

### **NSHE Institutions**

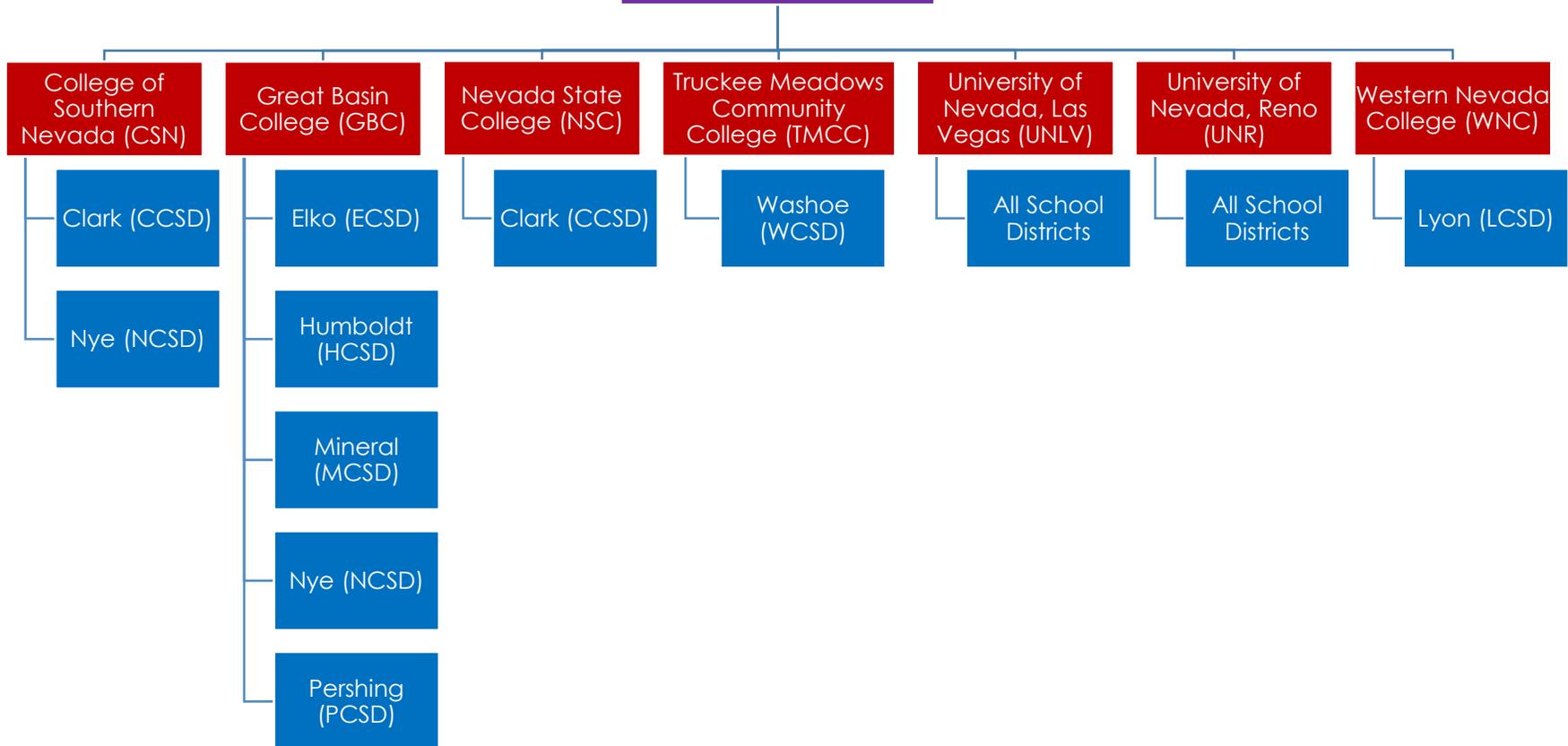
There are seven public institutions of higher learning in Nevada and they are present in a total of eight school districts. UNLV and UNR are required to serve all GEAR UP schools. Other institutions are encouraged to provide services beyond their specific region. All NSHE campuses are available for campus tours for any GEAR UP group.

In addition to the public institutional programs, NSHE also has subawards for the following: UNR Longitudinal Study and Dean's Future Scholars.

# Nevada School Districts



# NSHE



## Roles and Responsibilities of Each Position

**GEAR UP Director and Assistant Director:** These staff members ensure that the state program complies with all federal regulations and that each subawardee meets the terms of their approved grant application. The Director is also responsible for overseeing SPIF training and professional development, along with the Business Network, advocacy activities, review and approval of annual plans, monitoring programs and services, and any corrective action plans as needed. The Assistant Director works very closely with the Director in the overall management of the grant program as above, monitors database operations, and works closely with the external evaluator tracking program success.

**Administrative Assistant:** The Administrative Assistant provides the administrative support for the grant program to include database maintenance and scholarship support from the previous GEAR UP grant.

**NSHE Project Director:** The Project Director provides leadership and oversight of the GEAR UP programs and serves as the point of contact between NSHE, the GEAR UP State Director and Assistant Director in programmatic matters.

**NSHE Grants Administrator:** The Grants Administrator coordinates the GEAR UP subawardees, provides facilitation of externally funded research and other scholarly activities as well as maintenance of fiscal accountability and regulatory compliance. The administrator is also responsible for all financial actions, grants management, required reporting and program budget administration.

**GEAR UP Program Officer:** The Program Officer works alongside the GEAR UP Director and Assistant Director with budget, training and management of the grant. The Program Officer serves as a member of the Nevada State GEAR UP Evaluation Team and works with other partners to accomplish the goals and objectives specified in the GEAR UP State application.

**GEAR UP Ambassador Coordinator:** The Coordinator oversees the working relationship between GEAR UP Ambassadors and SPIFs, and coordinates planning for large-scale GEAR UP events (summer academies, etc.) facilitated by more than one NSHE institution. He or she shall meet with GEAR UP Ambassadors and SPIFs on a regular basis to ensure that all communications are seamless and unified, and that the content offered to students, parents, and professionals is as uniform and professionally provided in each Nevada region as possible. The Coordinator is also responsible for regular professional development training for Ambassadors, assistance in GEAR UP advocacy efforts, and convening the GEAR UP Business Network.

**GEAR UP Communication Specialist:** The Communication Specialist develops GEAR UP material, manages all website content, social media outreach, publications for professionals, students, and families, and media coverage on occasions. The Communication Specialist will remain current on trends and technology to improve, adapt, and grow communications efforts for the GEAR UP Program.

**GEAR UP Ambassador(s):** Ambassadors are responsible for planning and executing school activities that promote student achievement and college preparation. They operate summer and year-round programs at institutions of higher education that provide exposure and orientation to college campuses and courses. They are also responsible for organizing activities to foster parental involvement in preparing students for college.

**SPIFs (Student-Parent Involvement Facilitators):** SPIFs are professionals at each school site responsible for maintaining regular communication between GEAR UP students and parents. They conduct family workshops with school administration and GEAR UP Ambassadors. SPIFs are also responsible for maintaining accurate and current records of GEAR UP student grades, attendance, and behavior; student and family agreements; referrals; other program involvement. SPIFs also enter all student participation in GEAR UP services in the GEAR UP master database.

**GEAR UP District Coordinator:** School districts that have more than four GEAR UP schools have a coordinator in place. Clark County School District is the largest school district in the state; they have approximately half of the GEAR UP students attending their schools. They have a separate Coordinator whose responsibilities are to manage the grant funds, coordinate events across multiple schools, and oversee the fulfillment of the obligations as set forth in the grant application.

## **GEAR UP Ambassador & SPIF Relationship**

### **Why is the relationship important?**

GEAR UP Ambassadors and SPIFs provide direct services to our students and maintain direct communication with them. A positive and professional working relationship between Ambassadors and SPIFs is crucial for day-to-day activities with students and families.

### **Why is communication important?**

An important part of Ambassadors and SPIFs' relationship is to maintain an on-going communication regularly. This will make the daily responsibilities more efficient and smooth.

### **Methods of Communication**

*Email* – Email is the most efficient way for Ambassadors and SPIFs to maintain communication. Email is also used to document all important information and details. Emails between staff members and the public should be responded to within 48 hours of receipt, either with the information requested, a notice that the information will be provided in a specific time frame, or an automatic out-of-office notification with expected return date.

*Phone* – Calling can be used specifically for faster and immediate communication. However, if planning an event, it is important to make sure you have written confirmation from all parties to ensure no scheduling conflicts.

*Texting* – This is not an appropriate first point of contact, but it can be helpful in updating each other quickly on the day of events in case of changes that has been made. It is advised to directly ask Ambassador or SPIF if texting is an acceptable method of contact to reach them. Texting between Ambassadors and SPIFs to students or parents from personal devices is not acceptable (use apps such as Remind, p. 14). As a reminder, when texting regarding planned activities, a follow up confirmation of pertinent planning information in the text(s) must occur via e-mail as well.

### **Who plans and executes events?**

Both GEAR UP Ambassadors and SPIFs are responsible for planning events for students. It is important that staff also work together to brainstorm ideas for future events and show support to one another.

## SPIF Calls

- Monthly SPIF Calls – NDE plans regular phone conference meetings with SPIFs. Likewise, the Ambassador Coordinator is also expected to contact SPIFs regularly for follow up and feedback as appropriate.

## Regular Planning Meetings

- Who is Included?
  - It is mandatory for Ambassadors and SPIFs to attend these meetings. District Coordinators and the GEAR UP Ambassador Coordinator may also attend these meetings if the event(s) involve more than one GEAR UP school, school district or NSHE institution.
  - On occasions, school administrators, counselors, and teachers will also attend these meetings.
  - Clark County SPIFs meet on a regular, but flexible schedule.
  - The Ambassador Coordinator is expected to meet with each rural SPIF at least once per semester.

## Event Management Spreadsheet (EMS)

The Event Management Spreadsheet is a tool to collect dates, times and details of Ambassador-provided, Ambassador-coordinated, and Ambassador-visited events each grant year. Ambassadors are required to have an appropriate e-mail account for EMS access. Ambassadors – and up to one other delegated staff member at their institution - have EMS editing access, but Ambassadors are ultimately accountable for entering all information to the best of their knowledge when planning an event involving themselves or SPIFs in their region. The EMS should be kept as up-to-the-minute as possible.

In no case should an Ambassador facilitate, attend, or provide services that have not been listed on the EMS prior to commencing the activity.

## **GEAR UP Websites**

The official Nevada State GEAR UP website is <https://gearupnv.org>

The website provides various information and resources for students, parents, Ambassadors, SPIFs, and school leaders.

The website was updated and enhanced in November 2017. Content useful to GEAR UP strategic communication includes:

- A redesigned home page with links to content tailored to the interests of students, parents, GEAR UP professionals, school administrators, and our Business Network;
- Highlighted statewide events, particularly College Application Month and summer programs;
- A picture gallery;
- The latest GEAR UP news and events, and a link to sign up for the GEAR UP Digest;
- Student Success Stories profiling GEAR UP students from our current cohort and related cohorts;
- Useful “front page” statistics to assist in advocacy for GEAR UP and its services; and
- An updated page for easier contact with appropriate GEAR UP staff

### **Other GEAR UP Websites**

#### **Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR)**

EPSCoR has a GEAR UP page at <https://epscorspo.nevada.edu/nshe-programs/gear-up/> with additional information about the GEAR UP grant. It also includes resources about subaward administration and performance reports.

#### **GEAR UP Database**

GEAR UP has a database maintained by an external evaluator. Those who wish to access this resource must get approval. To request access, please send an email to: [lbotelho@doe.nv.gov](mailto:lbotelho@doe.nv.gov) or [tbolen@doe.nv.gov](mailto:tbolen@doe.nv.gov).

### **Publications, Manuals and Handbooks**

*All resources below are on the Nevada GEAR UP website. Updates to these materials on our new website will be conveyed via e-mail.*

1. **The GEAR UP Digest:** A monthly electronic newsletter sent out to GEAR UP staff and community partners, highlighting GEAR UP news, announcements, updates, and important dates.
2. **Nevada GEAR UP Ambassador Handbook FY 2018:** An overview of GEAR UP Ambassadors' role in the final year of the current grant, the GEAR UP schools they serve, suggested benchmarks by grade level, GEAR UP student service definitions, and more.
3. Nevada GEAR UP Campus Visit Guide 2012-2019
4. GEAR UP Ambassadors & SPIFs Handouts
5. Resources for Nevada State GEAR UP Ambassadors & SPIFs: College Affordability
6. Resources for Nevada State GEAR UP Ambassadors & SPIFs: Addressing Absenteeism
7. Resources for Nevada State GEAR UP Ambassadors & SPIFs: Financial Education
8. Resources for Nevada State GEAR UP Ambassadors & SPIFs: Career Exploration
9. Resources for Nevada State GEAR UP Ambassadors & SPIFs: Parental Involvement
10. Resources for Nevada State GEAR UP Ambassadors & SPIFs: Latino Students & Families
11. Resources for Nevada State GEAR UP Ambassadors & SPIFs: Tools to Incorporate STEM
12. Resources for Nevada State GEAR UP Ambassadors & SPIFs: Summer Programs

## Culturally Responsive Communications

Cultural responsiveness is defined as identifying student's cultural strengths and helping to support the growth of their cultural identity<sup>1</sup>.

In order to better serve students, it is important to use cultural responsiveness in online and in-person communication. This includes:

- Understanding your own beliefs
- Making an effort to understand other's beliefs
- Intentionally focusing on multicultural visuals (diverse ages, ethnicities)
- Paying attention to diverse expressions of oral and written language
- Understanding access issues with regard to technology – use multiple platforms for same message
- Resisting the assumption that your experience of college, etc. is normative
- Posting communications that start conversations as well as act as one-way streets
- Researching modes of communication different between communities
- Researching modes of communication common to different communities
- Recognizing the contributions of diverse individuals and communities as part of overall communication strategies
- Holding your team and GEAR-UP students to high standards regardless of type and diversity of communication modes
- Ensuring that all voices are respected in online and print dialogue
- Avoiding making generalized statements that create a stereotype.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-lynn-edd/culturally-responsive-pedagogy\\_b\\_1147364.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-lynn-edd/culturally-responsive-pedagogy_b_1147364.html)

## Communication between GEAR UP Direct-Service Providers

### Communication Goals

Effectively use an assortment of communication efforts to reach GEAR UP students, their families, our communities, educational partners, and professional team to:

- a. raise awareness of events and opportunities,
- b. increase participation and engagement,
- c. increase the impact to the overall state GEAR UP goals, and
- d. share successes and contributions of GEAR UP students with the wider educational and professional community.

### Target Audiences

1. GEAR UP Students
2. Parents
3. Teachers and Counselors
4. School Administrators
5. GEAR UP Professionals
6. Community Allies and Stakeholders

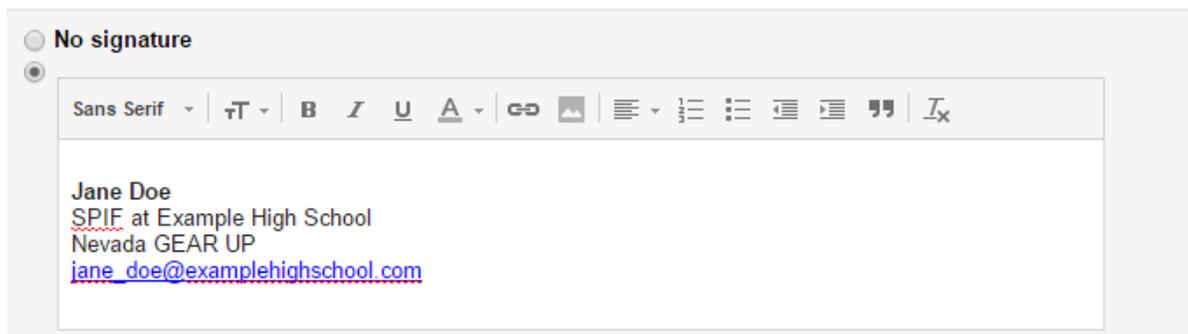
### Communication Channels

1. Email
2. Phone calls
3. Text messages
4. In-person
5. Social Media
6. Website
7. Event Management Spreadsheet

### Email Protocols

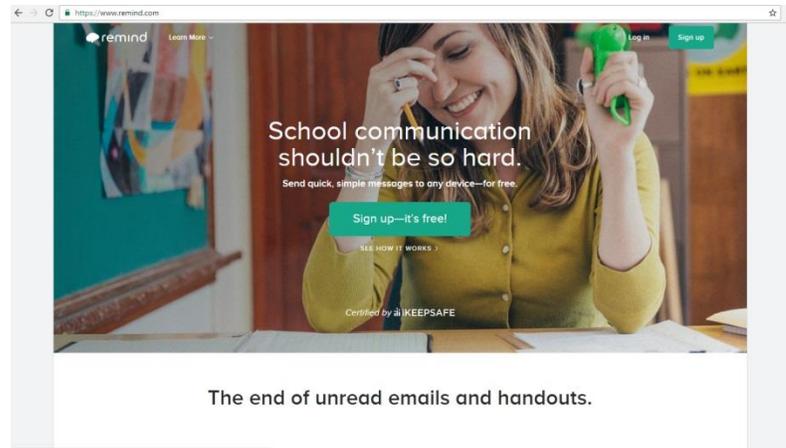
1. Always remember to use professional language in all emails. Be aware of emotional appeals – or those expressing inappropriate levels of emotion. In these cases, a phone call is advisable rather than other means.
2. Reply to every initial email inquiry within 48 hours, either with:
  - a. The specific information requested, or
  - b. A brief reply saying, “I will have to research this,” or similar, or
  - c. An automatic out of office message. If out of the office, automatic out of office notices with expected return date are required.

3. It is important to use email for final confirmations of events or updates, regardless of which means of communication was used to plan events.
4. Please respond to all questions asked in an email. If you are unsure of a definite answer, please communicate that in the email as well.
5. In the e-mail subject line, ensure the subject aligns with what is discussed in the email. For example, if it is a request for an event, note the date and title of the event within the subject line of the email.
6. When details have changed on an event, please make note that they have changed before offering new information. This will help others pay close attention and make adjustments if needed.
7. When beginning conversations about another event or activity, please create a new email thread with an updated subject line. This will make emails easier to find in the future.
8. It is important to set an email signature that includes your name, job position, location and contact information. Below is a sample email signature:



## Texting Protocols

1. When contacting other GEAR UP employees via text message, be sure to use professional language.
2. When sending information to GEAR UP students, do not use your personal phone number to contact them. Instead, use an online service such as <https://remind.com>. Below is the home screen for Remind:



3. It is important to keep text messages short and concise. Texts should be used to quickly remind and/or inform others about changes. Otherwise, you should send an email.
4. It can be helpful to set up groups for your texting communications. You can have a group for each of your student cohorts, or a parent group, SPIF group, etc.
5. As mentioned above, if a text exchange is expected to be (or escalates into) a situation where emotions are running high or are tense, a phone call is certainly the preferable option.

### Checking in with SPIFs at Schools

Whenever an Ambassador or other GEAR UP staff member visits a school, the SPIF must be made aware of the visit to ensure all student services are tracked in the database.

### Advance Notice – Changes to Events

All GEAR UP staff should be given at least two weeks' notice of a change to a planned event. This should be sent in writing to all key participants, including NDE. The master database and Event Management System must also be updated as required.

Regardless of changed dates, the prior approved plan for the activity is considered to still be in effect. Thus, changes other than date or time must be approved by all planning staff prior to confirming changes to the event. Advanced notice of any changes is required to be given to all planners.

Requesting or changing campus visit appointments should be entered and updated with as much lead time as possible but with no fewer than two weeks' notice.

## Social Media accounts

Social media is an important aspect of GEAR UP, and it is expected that each GEAR UP school and Ambassador will maintain active Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages, subject to individual district social media policies. GEAR UP staff are encouraged to monitor, engage with, follow, and like other GEAR UP Nevada social media in addition to their own, and to repost or retweet information of value to their region and school.

Social media allows for key outreach activities targeting students, parents, educators and allied stakeholders. Topics such as scholarship opportunities, event announcements, financial aid information, college preparation, and major and career exploration are addressed on our social media. Information of interest must be disseminated to a wider audience (GU student successes at the high school and college level, college/university staff testimonials, contributions of GU students to high school and college excellence, benchmarking).

### Various Social Media Platforms You May Use



### Social Media Policies & Guidelines

The NSHE GU Project Director, the GEAR UP Ambassador Coordinator, and the GEAR UP Communications Specialist share responsibility for social media management and updates on the official Nevada GEAR UP accounts.

Some guidelines about posting on GEAR UP social media:

Use common sense and good judgment. If you have reservations about posting something, don't post it.

- Always refer inquiries and questions to the Program Director, Project Director, Ambassador Coordinator, or Communications Specialist.

Don't post information or news that you know is unreliable or unverifiable.

Like/follow important or educational social media pages relevant to GEAR UP. Actively share and retweet information from reputable sources.

Connect with other GEAR UP media pages in your county or state.

## Nevada GEAR UP Social Media

Ambassadors and SPIFS are encouraged to regularly email event photos/videos to our Communications Specialist or Ambassador Coordinator. Media will be posted on our social media accounts provided below or our website gallery.

**FACEBOOK:** <https://www.facebook.com/gearupnv/?ref=hl>

**TWITTER:** <https://twitter.com/gearupnv>

**INSTAGRAM:** <https://www.instagram.com/gearupnv/>

**YOUTUBE:** <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2skD9oKy73cMSZlwnmLVsw>

**PINTRIST:** <https://www.pinterest.com/gearupnv/>

When submitting event media, remember to add a description of the event that includes names of students if possible, dates, and other details about the event.

## Marketing and Branding

### Utilizing the Logo

The official Nevada State GEAR UP logo is located to the right side of this document.

The logo cannot be altered to a different color except black and white or grayscale. No changes to angle or shape are allowed. The logo must be clear, and not pixelated, or distorted. To use the logo for print purposes, request this at GEARUPNV@nshe.nevada.edu.



### Press Release

A press release is a written statement submitted to multiple media sources to gain their attention and invite them to events. Press releases are usually written for events such as Summer Academies, College Application Month, and National GEAR UP Week. Ambassadors should also cultivate professional connections with the media relations professionals at their institutions to assist in creation and dissemination of press releases and articles on GEAR UP events.

The following excerpt should always be included in press releases:

*"Nevada's State Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) is a federally funded, competitive grant that is designed to increase the number of students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Students are identified to participate in GEAR UP during their 7<sup>th</sup> grade year and take part in GEAR UP activities that continue through high school and into college. The state grant currently serves 21 schools and over 5,000 students throughout the state. For more information, contact Tammy Bolen, State GEAR UP Director at [tbolen@doe.nv.gov](mailto:tbolen@doe.nv.gov)".*

## Capitalizing GEAR UP

GEAR UP is an acronym that stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs. It must be capitalized in all publications and media.

**Branding Message:** Branding is not a mission statement, but a phrase or sentence common to SPIFs, Ambassadors, and statewide GEAR UP leadership such as #FutureProof, #GEARUPWORKS #GEARUPNV or similar.

**Elevator Speeches:** GEAR UP staff and students are encouraged to create short summaries of GEAR UP's benefits and services, and these can be practiced at events and workshops to address the following categories:

- From Perspective of SPIF
  - To a student
  - To a parent
  - To a teacher
- From Perspective of Ambassador
  - To a student
  - To a parent
  - To a teacher
  - To a politician
  - To a donor
- From Perspective of Student
  - To a parent
  - To a teacher
  - To a friend
  - To a politician
  - To a donor
  - To a stakeholder
- **The Business Network**
  - Job shadowing opportunities
  - Creating internships
  - Potential Match/In-kind support
  - Advocacy efforts
  - Facility and venue assistance
- **Advocacy**
  - Providing online resources to parents and students
  - Telling positive stories of GEAR-UP participants
  - Amplifying and connecting the impact of GU students
  - Publicizing meetings, etc. of interest

## Professional Development and Trainings

### Fall and Spring Trainings

NDE provides SPIF trainings in both the fall and spring terms. NSHE staff and school district administrators may also attend. However, unless specified, attendance by NSHE staff and school administrators is not required and you must notify NDE if you plan to attend to ensure there is space available.

GEAR UP Ambassadors must attend four yearly Professional Development meetings (typically online), and two all-hands training sessions at the beginning and end of each grant year. In addition, attendance at all listed conferences below is mandatory for Ambassadors with the exception of the Capacity Building Workshop.

### Professional Conferences

