

Developing a Communication Plan- Aim

Aim

The aim of a communication plan states the overall goal of the communication effort.

Determining the Aim

Ask yourself or your team what the overall goal of the communication plan is. A communication plan generally has one main aim. Examples could include:

- Substantially increase public use of your organization's internet portal,
- Explain and promote the benefits of a newly developed technology, and
- Ensure that a stakeholder group is informed about the availability of important services.

It is possible to have more than one aim, but be careful that you do not set more aims than you can feasibly achieve.

Background research may be necessary before you can determine the aim. For example, you may need data on the numbers and type of people accessing the current website, or a survey of what stakeholders currently know about your organization.

Developing a Communication Plan- Objectives

Objectives

Objectives specify exactly what needs to be achieved by your communication plan. The key to developing objectives is that they are **SMART**.

- **Specific**—The objective is clear about what you are going to do and exactly how are you going to do it. Questions to ask include: “What am I going to do? Why is it important? Who is going to do it?”
- **Measurable**—You should be able to measure the objective (Example: % people contacted, number of presentations completed).
- **Achievable**—The objective is achievable given market conditions, time period, resources allocated, etc.?”
- **Realistic**—The objectives can be achieved using the time and the resources available.
- **Time-bound**—The objective is clear about how much time it will take to achieve.

Objectives are written in an active tense and use strong verbs like “plan”, “write”, “conduct”, and “produce”, rather than “learn”, “understand”, and “feel”.

Resources for developing communication plan objectives:

The Practice of Leadership Blog:

<http://www.thepracticeofleadership.net/2006/03/11/setting-smart-objectives/>

RAPIDBI—Rapid Business Improvement

<http://www.rapidbi.com/created/WriteSMARTobjectives.html>

Developing a Communication Plan—Key Messages

Key Messages

Key messages are the most succinct statement of the message you want the target audience to receive. Key messages should be clear, benefit-oriented, and written in language that your target audiences can understand and relate to.

Why are Key Messages Important?

Key messages are important because they help everyone focus on exactly what is being communicated, thereby reducing the possibility of mixed messages.

Developing Key Messages

- Determine your audience's current awareness, knowledge and attitudes towards the issue.
- Determine the response you want from your target audiences. Are you educating or informing the audience, or are you trying to change attitudes or behavior?
- There is a limit to the number of messages which can be communicated. Limit the number (between 3 and 5) and complexity of your key messages, and vary the message depending on the target audience.
- Keep your messages consistent. Make sure that everyone is communicating the same message.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms, and keep the message concise.
- Keep the message short, with one memorable sentence that takes 10-15 seconds to say.
- Make the message specific to the target audience.

Resources for developing communication plan key messages

Lupinworks-Resources for Business and Technical Writing
<http://www.lupinworks.com/roche/pages/keyMessages.php>

World Health Organization—Water, Sanitation and Health: Develop Key Messages
http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/advguide/en/index5.html

Developing a Communication Plan-Target Audiences

Target Audience

Target audiences are the groups of people that you want to receive your message. Sometimes the target audience can be a single, homogenous group of people. Other times you may have multiple audiences.

Determining the target audience

- Who do you want to hear or see your target message? Who needs to receive your message?
- Do you have primary, secondary or tertiary audiences?
- Avoid identifying very broad target audiences (like “all politicians”). Reduce the audience to a tightly defined audience (or set of audiences), which may then be targeted more accurately.
- What is your purpose for reaching the audience? For example, do you want them to become clients, stimulate discussion, tell them what to do, educate them, or help them to develop opinions?
- Do you have the necessary resources to reach your target audience?
- What are you prepared to invest to achieve your desired result?
- Is anyone else communicating the same information (or have they in the past)? Can you learn from them or partner with them?
- Does your target audience have any special needs? For example, do they have low literacy rates, limited access to media, or disabilities that may prevent them from receiving your message?
- Become familiar with your target audience. Depending on your communication aim and objectives, you might want to know:
 - Age and other demographic characteristics,
 - Geographical location,
 - Problems they want to solve,
 - Educational needs/gaps,
 - Recreational or leisure interests,
 - Where the audience likes to get new information,
 - What group activities do they participate in, or
 - Specific behavior patterns related to the outreach goal.

Resources for determining communication plan target audiences

Greenmedia Toolshed: Target Your Audience

<http://www.greenmediatoolshed.org/training/TargetAudienceMessage/TargetYourAudience.adp>

Developing a Communication Plan-Tasks and Timelines

Tasks and Timelines

A key component of the communication plan sets out tasks to be done, their timelines, and who will be responsible for them. Failure to develop an adequate tasks and timelines schedule can lead to confusion, missed deadlines, misunderstandings and tension and, ultimately, failure to achieve objectives.

- Ideally, one person should oversee the entire effort and act as project manager.
- Develop a step-by-step timeline to keep your program, staff, and partners on track. Make sure to build in reasonable review time for all products and activities.
- Ask your staff and partners to review the timeline to ensure that they can carry out their responsibilities in the proposed timeframe.
- You may want to use software packages like Microsoft Project to help plan the project if it is very big and has lots of tasks and deadlines.

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Developing a Communication Plan-Evaluation

Evaluation of the Communication Plan

The main reasons for evaluating communication activities are:

- **Accountability:** Without evaluation, you do not know (and cannot prove) what you have achieved. You cannot justify your expenditure of time, energy and funds.
- **Improvement:** If you do not evaluate the communication effort, you will not know what worked and what did not. Evaluation is important for finding mistakes and improving the communication effort.

Evaluating the Communication Effort

- Evaluation involves assessing whether the plan's objectives have been met as a result of the communication activity. Therefore, evaluations will be valuable only if the objectives are clear and appropriate.
- Evaluation is an integral part of all communications projects, not an optional activity.
- Evaluation needs to be planned for at the beginning of a communication effort, not left until the end.
- Evaluation requires adequate funding. As a rule of thumb, ten percent of a communication project's budget should be allocated to evaluation.
- Sometimes simple things, like having a good press list or establishing ongoing professional relationships with key reporters, are the most significant measures of success, especially for location-specific or small-budget efforts.
- Questions an evaluation plan might ask include:
 - How will we know if the communication effort is having an impact?
 - Are there different indicators for short-term and long-term impacts?
 - What specific actions/beliefs/outcomes will we monitor as indicators of success?
 - Have we set our goals too high for the communication effort's budget?
- The evaluation should be both quantitative and qualitative. Numbers give an idea of long-term trends and a way to gauge the effectiveness of various approaches. Qualitative feedback from people about how your message impacted them will help you craft more successful messages.

Resources for developing a communication plan evaluation

Victoria Department of Premier and Cabinet: Communication Toolkit--Evaluation Checklist
[http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/CA256D800027B102/Lookup/CommsToolsEvaluationGuidelines/\\$file/R74_Evaluation_Guidelines.doc](http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/CA256D800027B102/Lookup/CommsToolsEvaluationGuidelines/$file/R74_Evaluation_Guidelines.doc)

W.K. Kellogg Foundation—Communications Toolkit: Evaluation
<http://www.wkkf.org/Default.aspx?tabid=90&CID=385&ItemID=5000077&NID=5010077&LanguageID=0>

Green Media Toolshed—Response and Evaluation

<http://www.greenmediatoolshed.org/training/ResponseandEvaluationIndex.adp>

Developing a Communication Plan—Budget

Budget

A communication budget is important to help you distinguish between needs and wants. You can see clearly how much money you need to spend to reach your goals. As you track your project results, you can get a sense of what strategies work best to achieve your goals.

Developing a budget

- Sometimes you are given a budget to work with. Other times you have to provide an estimate of how much money is needed for the communication effort. It is important to ensure that the budget is adequate for achieving the desired objectives, and if it is not, to communicate that.
- If the budget is inadequate, you need to increase it or reduce the project objectives to a more realistic level.
- Establish a detailed communications budget prior to the start of each fiscal year. The budget should be integrated into your annual marketing and communications plan, with a cost attached to each strategy and program or project, each of which should be broken out by its various components (e.g., consulting, evaluation, printing, postage, etc.).
- Budgeting is not limited only to the cost of various communications tools. Look carefully at the resources and staff time available to commit to different communication strategies.
- Track the costs and results as you go so that you can analyze costs vs. benefits quickly.
- Adjust your budget each year to reflect increasing costs and changes in your organization. For example, launching a new communication program requires an increased budget for the first year or two.
- Consider hiring a consultant for certain communication efforts. Using consultants can help organizations keep their costs manageable while benefiting from the expertise that a good consultant can offer.
- You can budget a flat dollar amount or a percentage of the organization's budget for communication. The advantage to choosing a percentage approach is that your communication budget grows as your organization grows.

Resources for developing a communication budget:

Nancy Schwartz & Company: How to Design an Effective Marketing and Communications Budget

http://www.nancyschwartz.com/marketing_budget.html

W.K. Kellogg Foundation—Communication Toolkit: Budget, Staff Skills and Hiring Consultants

<http://www.wkkf.org/Default.aspx?tabid=90&CID=385&ItemID=5000047&NID=5010047&LanguageID=0>