



COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Raise your organisation's voice on issues that matter

THE BIG PICTURE

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MAKE SURE IT IS CLEAR

- > Know your internal context
- > Know your external context
- > Articulate your communication objectives

MAKE SURE IT IS TARGETED

- > Identify your audience
- > Identify your key messages
- > Identify your communication tools/channels and appropriate content mix

MAKE SURE IT IS ACHIEVABLE

- > Articulate what success looks like
- > Consider factors that might affect, constrain or amplify your messages
- > And do it again



COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Raise your organisation's voice on issues that matter

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1. The Big Picture

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This step-by-step guide is geared to helping you create a clear communications strategy for your organisation or campaign. Use it to:

- Give you an overview and roadmap for creating a communications strategy from scratch
- Double-check or update your existing communications strategy to ensure it is as effective and complete as possible

WHY A CLEAR COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY IS IMPORTANT

How can you improve your organisation's ability to be heard on the issues that matter? Effective communications planning can make the difference between a message that resonates and one that is lost in the noise. Follow these steps to create a communications strategy that is:

1. Clear
2. Targeted
3. Achievable

It takes time to create a strategy document, so you might ask why bother? A communications strategy helps ensure:

- That your communications efforts are aligned with your organisation's vision and mission, so that your communications support and reinforce that vision and mission rather than fight against it.

The Big Picture

- That your communications are consistent and clear.
- That the time your team spends on communications activities is well-planned and directed.
- That you have a mechanism in place to measure the effectiveness of your communications activities and can adjust them if they are ineffective.
- All of these factors contribute to ensuring that your organisation's messages are heard by the audiences you are targeting.



2. Make Sure It Is Clear

You can't communicate a message clearly if you're not clear on why and what you're communicating. Follow these steps to clearly articulate your communication objectives.

KNOW YOUR INTERNAL CONTEXT

WHAT? What your organisation does, its vision and mission.

WHY? Your communication efforts should emerge logically from your organisation's vision and mission. In articulating your communication goals and messages, it is helpful to restate your organisational vision and mission as the foundation upon which your communication efforts are built.



TIP

If there is a disconnect between your organisation's vision and mission and your communication goals, it may suggest that your communication efforts are off-target—or that your organisation's vision and mission are out of date or do not align with your current activities. Having an up-to-date organisational vision and mission is critical to keeping all of your communication efforts focused and on target.

HOW?

1. Refer to your organisation's vision and mission, and ensure that they are aligned with your communication goals.

Make Sure It Is Clear

2. Reference your organisation's SWOT analysis. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Refer to this as you consider your communication goals and messages. How could your communication efforts have a positive impact on that SWOT analysis? Can you use communication efforts to turn threats into opportunities, or to play up strengths or compensate for weaknesses?
3. If you do not have an existing organisational SWOT analysis, do a basic analysis for your own reference. What are your organisation's strengths and opportunities? What are its weaknesses and what threats does it face? As mentioned above, consider how your communication efforts could have a positive impact on that analysis—how can your efforts help build strengths and diminish weaknesses?

CASE STUDY: MEDIA RIGHTS AGENDA

When Nigeria's Media Rights Agenda (MRA) saw the need to improve its use of information and communication technologies, the group recognised the need to revisit and sharpen its organisational mission and objectives. As MRA put it in its description of its plans: "MRA clearly needs to rethink its overall communication strategy and formulate a well-thought out strategy which takes into account its messages, the various audiences it wants to target with these messages and the most effective tools for communicating with them in light of new communication tools available. This process will include refining its organisational mission and objectives." With financial assistance from an IFEX grant, MRA worked with an external communications consultant, and in a two-day meeting with staff and the consultant, "was able to create a vision statement for the organisation, ascertain that all staff understood MRA communication direction, identify various communication platforms that will be tailored to meet our goals and noted the key elements of the communication plan format." Following that meeting, the consultant and staff continued to work together to refine the plan, resulting in a relaunch of MRA's website and enhanced MRA social media activity.

MRA's vision statement: Achieving good governance through the promotion of Freedom of Expression.

KNOW YOUR EXTERNAL CONTEXT

Make Sure It Is Clear

WHAT? The external context involves understanding the societal issues and influences affecting both your organisation and the issues about which you are concerned. What is the external context within which your organisation operates? Who are your main competitors? What are their key activities, campaigns and messages? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

WHY? Reviewing your external context on paper, especially when placed beside your organisation's mission and vision, can be useful in organising your thoughts, seeing connections and challenges you may otherwise be ignoring or dismissing, and spotting opportunities you might otherwise miss.

HOW? If your organisation has not already done so, consider completing a PEST analysis—an analysis of the Political, Economic, Social and Technological context within which your organisation functions and which may affect your activities and key messages. Note that neither the SWOT nor the PEST analysis needs to be exhaustive or complicated. While they may require additional research, often, you can develop a topline SWOT or PEST analysis based on what you already know about your organisation, issue and environment.

ARTICULATE YOUR COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

WHAT? What are your organisation's current strategic objectives? List them.

WHY? Considering how your communication efforts can be tailored to help your organisation meet its strategic objectives will help you to create communications objectives that fit clearly with your overall strategic objectives.

HOW? As you articulate your communication objectives, ask yourself if they hit the **MARC**:

M: Are our objectives **measurable**? What will success look like? What metrics will we use to measure success?

Make Sure It Is Clear

A: Are our objectives **aligned** with our organisational strategic objectives?

R: Are our communication objectives **realistic**, given available time, budget and resources?

C: Are our communication objectives **clear**?

And finally, ask yourself, are there key events or external deadlines that will affect our objectives and our ability to meet them?

But what if your communication objectives have already been defined—perhaps by your board or senior staff—and they do not neatly align with your organisation’s strategic objectives? Again, the problem may be either that your overall strategic objectives are out of date—or that your communication efforts are off target. In either situation, you should seek clarity on how the communication efforts and overall strategic objectives fit together: a misalignment signals a lack of consistency in what your organisation says it should be doing, and what you are actually doing.



TIP

If your organisation does not have a clear set of strategic objectives, revisit your organisation’s vision and mission, and develop your communication objectives based on how communication can be effectively utilised to help move your organisation forward on the path to realising its vision and mission.

CASE STUDY: MEDIA RIGHTS AGENDA

Nigeria’s Media Rights Agenda (MRA) has a stated organisational vision of “Achieving good governance through the promotion of Freedom of Expression.” Nigeria signed into law a Freedom of Information Act (FOI) in May 2011, but few citizens were aware of or understood the law, and organisations that had obligations under the law weren’t necessarily

Make Sure It Is Clear

being monitored. In line with its organisational vision, MRA determined that one of its communication objectives would be to create awareness of the FOI law, increase the number of people using the law and monitor compliance and usage of the law. This objective was clear and aligned with the organisational vision. While the campaign was large and touched on many sectors, measurable communication engagement goals on social media and other platforms were set and monitored.



3. Make Sure It Is Targeted

If you don't know what you're aiming at, you're unlikely to hit it. Targeting your communication efforts involves understanding:

- Who your audience is
- What your key messages are
- How you're going to get the message out

IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE

WHAT? Every organisation has both internal and external audiences.

INTERNAL: Internal audiences are often more likely to be stakeholders than audiences in the true sense of the word, but it is important to recognise that these stakeholders will be affected by—and can affect—your message. Who within your organisation will be affected by, have an opinion about or have influence over your message? What concerns and issues do they bring to the table? While you may not necessarily list them in your communications documents, it is important to be aware of their concerns and potential influence, and to seek their support where feasible and necessary.

EXTERNAL: As you consider who your primary audience is, ask yourself whose knowledge, attitudes or behaviour must be changed to meet your goals. Your primary audiences are those you are seeking to inform, transform or motivate to act in order to achieve your communication objectives. If you achieve your objectives, your primary audiences will be changed: they will be more knowledgeable about your issue, they will have changed their attitudes or behaviours and/or they will have taken some specific action at your direction.

Make Sure It Is Targeted

Your secondary audience will be those who may also be affected by your goals, but who are not the primary targets of change. So, for instance, if you are lobbying for improved access to information legislation, one of your primary audiences may be the general public, who you want to be better informed about the need for access to information and who you want to join an email campaign to target legislators. Another primary audience may be legislators, who you want to vote for a particular piece of legislation. Your secondary audience may be journalists, who are already informed about the legislation but whose work could be positively affected should improved legislation be passed. While you may not explicitly direct messages to your secondary audiences, you should be aware of them and their concerns so that your messages to your primary audience do not strike a negative chord with secondary audiences or erode your credibility with secondary audiences.

WHY? Your audience is made up of the people you want to **inform, transform or motivate to act.**

HOW? Identify the characteristics of your primary (and to a lesser degree, secondary) audiences. What is their gender, ethnicity, income level, education level, language? What kinds of professions/jobs do they have? Who influences them? What makes new information credible to them?

What do they think and do now? What are their current knowledge, attitudes and behaviours regarding your issue?

What would motivate them to learn, change or act? What's in it for them? Why would they support—or oppose—your goal? How can you align your objectives or messages to resonate with what matters to them?



TOOL

See the **Audience Worksheet** in the Appendix for assistance in defining and understanding your audiences.

Make Sure It Is Targeted

CASE STUDY: IFEX

When IFEX embarked on a re-examination of its communication platforms and efforts in 2011, it worked with a communications consultant who, among other efforts, pushed the team to clearly describe its key audiences. During this discussion, it became clear that IFEX had for some time considered its key audience to be IFEX members, when in fact IFEX members were a secondary audience and/or stakeholders in IFEX communication efforts. Further discussion led to an understanding that IFEX's key audiences are:

1. Media. Desired Action: To amplify IFEX's message through publication or social media.
2. Concerned citizens and organisations. Desired Action: To act on specific calls to action (petitions, letters) and to share and amplify IFEX's message (primarily through social media)
3. Influencers (legislators, bureaucrats, diplomats, etc). Desired Action: To initiate policy and legislative change, to exert pressure on other parties and to prompt action through that pressure
4. Academics. Desired Action: To synthesize and build knowledge base

In determining how best to communicate with its audiences, the IFEX team asked itself the question "What do IFEX's audience want from IFEX?" This led to the following articulation of audience needs:

1. Prioritisation: Tell me what's important
2. Crystallisation: Help me get a snapshot of the most important facts and figures
3. Contextualisation: Tell me what it means
4. Access: Help me find what I'm looking for quickly and easily, organised based on my needs rather than your internal structures
5. Voice: Tell me who you are—communicate IFEX's values through the way you present information

This refined understanding of audience and needs enabled the team to redesign and relaunch the IFEX website and e-newsletters with a clarity of purpose and desired outcome that had been lacking until then. As the

Make Sure It Is Targeted

team articulated it, at each step, they asked themselves: What is the goal for each tool?

1. Who is the audience for each tool?
2. How does the tool equip and prompt the audience to IFEX's desired action?
3. How do we embed IFEX's communication values within each tool?
4. How do we use staff time and technology appropriately to deliver these tools effectively?
5. How do we evaluate the effectiveness of these tools?

The result was a communications plan focused on creating a “smart hub,” with IFEX's website at the centre of the hub, drawing traffic in with the strategic deployment of information (rather than firehosing email); targeting audiences with communication tools and strategies built to meet their needs; and a focus on continually creating context.

IDENTIFY YOUR KEY MESSAGES

WHAT? If your audience is made up of the people who you want to **inform, transform or motivate to act**, then your key messages need to push your audiences to **think, feel or act**.

WHY? Key messages can:

- Show the importance, urgency or magnitude of an issue
- Show the relevance of an issue
- Put a human face on or attach a human story to an issue

Key messages should:

- Be targeted to specific audience
- Resonate with audience values, beliefs or interests
- Reflect an understanding of what would motivate that specific audience to think, feel or act

Make Sure It Is Targeted

- Be culturally relevant and sensitive
- Be memorable

HOW? Outline your key messages by specific primary audience. Don't worry about developing slogans or catch-phrases. At this stage, you simply want to develop clear underlying themes that can be used as the foundation for talking points, slogans and campaigns.

With each key message, ask yourself:

- Is this message geared to increasing my audience's knowledge (informing/thinking)?
- Is this key message changing attitudes (transforming/feeling)?
- Is this key message changing behaviour (motivating/acting)?

Some messages may do all three.

Make your messages more effective by following these guidelines:

- Be clear: Avoid jargon, insider or bureaucratic language.
- Be consistent: Make sure your message is consistent across your organisation's efforts. Also, if your message is one that audiences are hearing from more than one source, it will be more resonant. Can you amplify your message by having partners echo it?
- Be focused: Stress your main points and where possible, repeat them.
- Use an appropriate tone: Do you want your message to alarm? Challenge? Enrage? Reassure? Choose the tone that is appropriate to the message, audience and desired outcome.
- Be truthful and as complete as possible: Lying to or misleading your audience erodes your relationship with your audience, and makes it unlikely they will respond to your message the next time.
- Be credible and transparent: The source and spokesperson should be trustworthy. Be clear about what you know—and be just as clear about what you don't know or areas where information is incomplete. Be transparent about relationships between your organisation and any other key players on the issue.

Make Sure It Is Targeted

- Understand your audience: Why does your audience need or want to know what you're telling them? Take their needs and wants into consideration as you craft your message.
- Test your messages: How do your internal audiences respond to your messages? Are you able to pretest messages with primary external audiences on a small scale before launch? Both will help you ensure that you are communicating what you intend to communicate and that you are provoking the response you intend to provoke.



TIP

It can be useful to develop a background file for each key message, where you can slot background statistics, studies, case studies, qualitative examples and more that may be used in fleshing out your messages as you develop fact sheets, articles, opinion pieces, multimedia content, PSAs, etc.



TOOL

See the **Key Message Worksheet** in the Appendix for assistance in articulating your key messages.

IDENTIFY YOUR COMMUNICATION TOOLS/CHANNELS AND APPROPRIATE CONTENT MIX

WHAT? Your communication tools or channels may include:

- Your website
- E-newsletters
- PSAs in print, on radio, television or online
- Articles in mass or specialised media

Make Sure It Is Targeted

- Transit advertising
- Public events
- Social media channels
- Conferences
- Press conferences

WHY? Some channels are better suited to particular audiences or to delivering particular types of content. You want to select channels that match both who you want to reach and the type of content you will use to convey that information. For instance, some channels are better at delivering contextual information—long-form articles, background information—than others. Some channels require the production of multimedia content. For others, infographics will deliver more value than articles, or photographs may be essential to getting your message noticed.

HOW? Identify what channels match the audiences you are trying to reach. Do you need to develop additional channels beyond the ones you already have?

Consider the type of content you will deploy on those channels. Conduct a PAC analysis:

- **Platform:** Is there data available that can tell me what type of information is most effective on this platform? What have others had success with on this platform? If I plan to share this content on multiple platforms, is there value in adjusting the way it is packaged from one platform to the next?
- **Audience:** What do I know about my audience that can help me determine how best to package this information?
- **Capacity:** What skills and tools do my content creators have at their disposal? What time, resource and other barriers do we face?

TOOL: See the **Content Mix Worksheet** and **Social Media Platform, Audience and Capacity Worksheet** in the Appendix for assistance in defining your content mix.

Make Sure It Is Targeted

CASE STUDY:

CENTER FOR MEDIA FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

When the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) in the Philippines reviewed the effectiveness of its website, it determined that new types of content were required to effectively share its information and to increase its website traffic and use. Specifically, CMFR determined that better use of multimedia content, including interactive maps and infographics would assist it in gaining traction with its desired audiences. With the assistance of an IFEX grant, CMFR embarked on staff training to review the content options and tools available, and improved its capacity through the purchase of appropriate hardware and software. Following this, CMFR increased its development of data visualisations, including maps of killings of journalists, a timeline of FOI legislation, the development of a World Press Freedom Day page and a Freedom of Information page. As a result of these efforts, CMFR saw its web hits and visits more than double year over year from July 2011 to July 2012.



4. Make Sure It Is Achievable

In order to determine whether your communication goals are achievable, you need to:

- Articulate what “achievement” or “success” looks like: What specific metrics are you trying to achieve?
- Consider the factors that could affect whether you can meet those goals. Influencing factors are:
 - External: Audiences, stakeholders, partners, competitors, opponents
 - Internal: Resources, budget, timelines
- Do it Again

ARTICULATE WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

WHAT? Each communication objective should have specific measurable metrics of success. Are you trying to get 1,000 emails sent to a legislator? A 10% increase in your Twitter followers? An increase in specific kinds of followers (for instance, key influencers)? To get a new piece of legislation on the agenda?

Each goal should also have a timeline attached to it—by what date do you hope to achieve each goal?

WHY? Specific goals will allow you to determine whether your efforts have been successful or not.

Make Sure It Is Achievable

HOW? Consider what measurable outcomes you can expect based on your efforts. Research to see what kind of success others have had with similar efforts. It is likely that your goal will be an educated guess at what it is possible to achieve, and you may need to adjust that goal as you move ahead and learn more. While your initial goals should not be too easy to achieve, remember the saying that it is better to under-promise and over-deliver. Set goals that are, based on your best knowledge, realistic and likely to be achievable.

CONSIDER WHAT FACTORS MIGHT AFFECT, CONSTRAIN OR AMPLIFY YOUR MESSAGES

WHAT? No organisation exists in isolation. Asking yourself what factors might affect your plans is a key step to minimizing the likelihood of barriers and traps along the way.

WHY? Considering these factors in advance will help you to assess what communication challenges and opportunities you may face as you seek to achieve your goals. They may also point you to potential partners who can assist in amplifying your message. And they will indicate whether you have the internal resources and capacity to carry out your plans, or whether you need to develop additional resources and capacity before you attempt your plan.

Assess these factors objectively, and it will help you to avoid setting yourself up for failure by committing to unrealistic goals. While every team should seek to stretch itself to achieve goals, it is never a good idea to set goals that are impossible given your internal resources and external influences.

HOW? Ask yourself the following questions:

EXTERNAL: What are your audiences' and stakeholders' existing positions on the issue? What are their expectations of you? What are their likely responses to your messages?

How might your competitors and opponents respond to your efforts? What challenges and opportunities will their responses create for you?

Make Sure It Is Achievable

Are there potential partners who can assist you in amplifying your message? What steps do you need to take to inform them of your efforts or, in some cases, recruit them to actively partner in amplifying your message?

INTERNAL: Given the timelines, human and financial resources available to you, are your goals feasible? Do you need to secure additional funds to make them achievable? Do you need to scale back your goals to reflect a realistic assessment of your resources?



TOOL

See the **Communications Strategy Template** and the **Communications Workplan Worksheets** in the Appendix for assistance in capturing your goals and plans.

AND DO IT AGAIN

A communications plan is not a one-time activity. While in the past, such plans were typically created on a five-year cycle, the speed of change in both available platforms and external contexts means that most organisations must live with the challenge of constantly revisiting and revising their communication strategies and plans. As Nigeria's Media Rights Agenda put it in their report on their communication efforts:

“The major lesson learnt is that the organisation should have an evolving communication strategy that can be adapted as events unfold and circumstances warrant. Also, the staff capacities/skills/knowledge related to ICT tools have to be strengthened because they are the key players in ensuring the smooth running of project activities and its respective communication arm. Furthermore, it is essential to set realistic but challenging communication goals.”

Make Sure It Is Achievable

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. IFEX Campaign Toolkit online at IFEX.org
2. Elements of a Strategic Communications Plan, WK Kellogg Foundation, www.wkkf.org/knowledge-center/resources/2006/01/template-for-strategic-communications-plan.aspx



5. Appendices

1. Audience Worksheet
2. Key Message Worksheet
3. Content Mix Worksheet
4. Social Media Platform, Audience and Capacity Worksheet
5. Communications Strategy Template Worksheet
6. Communications Workplan Worksheet

Appendices

AUDIENCE WORKSHEET

Communications Objective:

A. Whose knowledge, attitudes or behaviour must be changed to meet your goals? Who are you trying to inform, transform or motivate to act?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

B. Who on your list is your primary audience—the people you hope to change? Who is your secondary audience—those who may be affected by what you do but who are not the ones you are trying to inform, transform or motivate to act?

Primary audiences:

Secondary audiences:

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- C. What are the characteristics of your primary audiences?
1. Gender, ethnicity, income level, education level, language, profession/jobs
 2. Who influences them?
 3. What makes new information credible to them?
 4. What are their current knowledge, attitudes and behaviours regarding your issue?
 5. What would motivate them to act or change?

Appendices

KEY MESSAGE WORKSHEET

Communications Objective:

1. Which audience is this message aimed at?
2. What motivates this audience? What kinds of messages resonate with this audience? Why will they care about this message?
3. Is this message geared to increasing my audience's knowledge (informing/thinking), changing attitudes (transforming/feeling) or changing behaviour (motivating/acting)? (some messages may do more than one)
4. What barriers might prevent this audience from being informed, transformed or motivated to act?
5. What specific change in attitude or behaviour are we trying to achieve?

Appendices

CONTENT MIX WORKSHEET

METRICS				
CAPACITY (INTERNAL, EXTERNAL)				
CONTENT TYPE				
PLATFORM				
ACTION (INFORM, TRANSFORM, ACT)				
AUDIENCE				

Appendices

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM, AUDIENCE AND CAPACITY WORKSHEET

METRICS				
CAPACITY (INTERNAL, EXTERNAL)				
CONTENT TYPE				
ACTION (INFORM, TRANSFORM, ACT)				
AUDIENCE				
PLATFORM				

Appendices

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY TEMPLATE

Project Title:

Prepared by:

Date:

Organisational Mission and Vision:

ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	1	2	3	4
Communication Objectives (Measurable, Aligned, Realistic, Clear)				
Key Messages (Clear, Focused, Correct Tone)				
Target Audience (P=Primary, S=Secondary); Inform, Transform or Act?				
Channel (E=Existing, TBD=To be developed)				
Content Type/Mix				
Success Metrics				
Check-in Date				
Deadline				
Comments (Critical factors, risks, other concerns)				

Appendices

COMMUNICATIONS WORKPLAN TEMPLATE

Prepared by:

Date:

Communication Objective:

ACTIVITY	1	2	3	4
Team lead and members				
Hours/HR budget				
Other Budget Items				
External Contributions				
Target Audience				
Key Messages				
Success Metrics				
Deadline				
Comments				

Appendices
