

Agency Roadmap: Building Strategic, Evidence-Based Communications Plans

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1. How does it work? Understanding your communications infrastructure

Is there a team in your institution dedicated to communications? What capabilities do they have? Consider staff, time, and budget.

What is the procedure for obtaining approval for a public-facing communications effort? Who is your point of contact?

How do your goals, timelines, and resources align with those of the communications team? How do they differ?

What concrete steps can you take to improve your understanding of your institution's communications, and build a long-term partnership?

- In 2 weeks?
- In 1 month?
- In 3 months?

What additional assistance do you need to reach your institution's communications and policy goals?

2. What are your communications goals? Identifying your vision of success

What are the evaluation findings or evidence-related stories you want to share in 2019?

You may consider:

- Government policy priorities, including evidence that led to their prioritization
- Facts and statistics that reveal the scope of a problem or the need to act
- Budget or resources committed to a cause
- Design or implementation plan of a new policy or program
- Opportunities for citizens to share feedback or get involved
- Updates on implementation, including evidence of progress
- Results of a program evaluation - either positive or negative

Why do you need to share the information? What are your goals?

These may include:

- Convey information to stakeholders
- Influence opinions or shape dialogue
- Mobilize supporters to take action
- Seek input from citizens or partners

What does success look like? What do you want your target audience to:

- Think?
- Feel?
- Do?

3. Who do you need to communicate with? Specifying target audiences and stakeholder groups

Who is your target audience for the evaluation findings? Think through targeted policy audiences in addition to key influencers on this issue – both potential champions and detractors of your approach. Who will support vs oppose you, and how much power do they have?

Your audience may include:

- The target population, or groups whose behavior needs to change
- Other stakeholders who will benefit from the change (the winners)
- Supporters and advocates of the change
- Leaders and implementers of the change
- Those who will be harmed by the change (the losers)
- Other stakeholders who will oppose the change

What are the priorities of your target audience? What will they find most convincing? What do they need to know?

Are these target audiences internal to your institution (e.g. leadership, civil servants, budget officers) or external (e.g. the media and other public influencers, a specific community or demographic, businesses or international partners)? How does that affect your strategy to engage with them?

What additional information do you need to collect about your target audiences?

4. What's the story? Creating compelling messages and engaging allies and message carriers

Make sure your message is clear and consistent – what are the top three talking points that should be stressed and repeated?

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Can you convey the message in a compelling way? Think about the essential elements of a story and how they relate to your message. Who / what is the:

- Hero:
- Villain:
- Problem or conflict:
- Mission and journey:
- Twist / element of surprise:
- Killer statistics or emotional anecdote:
- Resolution and what comes next:

What's new about this story, and how is it relevant and urgent to your target audience? Why should they care? Why should the media publish the story?

Who can help you tell your story and get the message out? For example, who are your best champions, spokespeople, and surrogates to reach out to the media or policymakers – including senior leaders, program participants, local or national allies, and high-profile political or community leaders who can effectively advocate or amplify your message?

Who can help you make your message credible, and how can you add their voices to yours?

5. How can you communicate with the right audience at the right time? Selecting tools and channels

Where do your target audiences and stakeholder groups get their information? Which channels do they find credible and easy to access and understand?

Examples include:

- Official policy memos, press releases, or information on your website
- Newspaper articles and blogs: written by you, other policymakers, or professional journalists
- Charts and graphs, or eye-catching infographics
- Radio or TV announcements and interviews
- Posters, fliers, billboards, and other physical products
- Mid-size or large events, such as town hall meetings, conferences, speeches, parades, or festivals
- Small events, such as meetings with key stakeholders
- Social media posts and online videos
- Digital tools such as mobile apps and SMS surveys

Consider the relevance of the communications tools and channels above, the timing, resources required, and pros and cons of each one, including their reach, depth, and credibility. Then use the matrix below to match your target audiences and stakeholder groups with the most appropriate tools and channels. For example, health professionals and providers may be best reached with articles in credible online health journals, such as *The Lancet* or PLOS.

Target audiences → Tools & approaches ↓			

What are some strategies and upcoming opportunities for your institution to communicate evidence using:

- Social media:
- A public event or presentation:
- A small meeting with stakeholders:
- Media that you create, such as a public newsletter, infographic, or radio or TV clip:
- Media that another organization creates about your work:

Tips for writing clear policy briefs:

- Length: focus on a single topic in 2-4 pages
- Audience: what are their priorities? What will they find most convincing? What do they need to know?
- Goal: what do you want the audience to think, feel, and do?
- Evidence: focus on relevance, credibility, utility, with a few memorable statistics
- Language: clear, compelling, and urgent, free of technical jargon
- Organization: executive summary, introduction to the problem, study or policy approach and results, policy implications and recommendations
- Format: use underlined or bold text to help your audience easily find the main points
- Title: include main point or recommendation, pique audience curiosity

For additional guidance, see: <https://www.idrc.ca/sites/default/files/idrcpolicybrieftoolkit.pdf>

Tips for making compelling oral presentations:

- Hook: urgent and compelling story or argument that captures audience attention
- Introduction and purpose: include main message upfront; should be immediately clear to the intended audience what they should think, feel, and do
- Content: no more than 2-3 main points with clear, simple language and a few memorable statistics or emotional anecdotes
- If relevant, frame using storytelling elements: hero vs villain, conflict and mission, element of surprise, resolution, what comes next
- Recommendations: should follow logically from content and ask audience to take a specific action
- Delivery: speak loudly and clearly, maintain good posture and eye contact with audience, use simple visuals (props or slides) sparingly

6. How will you know whether your communications efforts are successful? Measuring results

Strategic communications should be focused on results / outcomes, not activities / inputs. Revisit your vision of success – what you want your target audience to think, feel, and do. What are your intended results, and how will you know if you achieved them?

Think beyond the number of views on social media or clicks on a website. What indicators can tell you whether your messages got the specific audiences you desired, and influenced them to change their opinions or behavior?

How will you get feedback from your target audiences?

How will you know whether they, or others, are using your work to inform decisions and take action?

More Strategic Communications Planning Resources:

- Caroline Cassidy and Louise Ball, “Communications monitoring, evaluating and learning toolkit.” ODI, January 2018. https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/long-form-downloads/odi_rapid_mel_toolkit_201801.pdf
- Strategic Communications Plan Template. The Rasmuson Foundation and the SPIN Project, 2006. [https://www.rasmuson.org/ attachments/SCptemplate_Oct_06_3-07.pdf](https://www.rasmuson.org/attachments/SCptemplate_Oct_06_3-07.pdf)

Please contact info@results4all.org to learn more about our work to advance evidence-informed policymaking in government.