

Start Developing a Communication Plan

This worksheet is designed to help you start thinking strategically about communicating your research results to a policy audience. Clearly, you cannot develop a communication action plan in a day or two without input from your colleagues and coalition partners. The goal here is to consider the factors that go into a communication plan, which you can refine when you get back home. On Monday, you will present your preliminary communication plan to the workshop for comments. You will have 10 minutes for your presentation. We have put a possible outline in the form of a PowerPoint presentation on the share drive.

In using this approach to develop a communication plan, it is very important to follow the steps in the order given. Fight the urge to think about specific communication activities in the beginning. Strategic decisions must be made before you choose activities. Remember: In a good communication plan, strategy drives tactics—not the other way around.

Step One: Your Objective

A well-defined, measurable objective is the most important component of a good communication plan. Ask yourself, why do you want to communicate your findings?

Do you want to make a specific policymaker or group of policymakers more aware of a problem? Do you want to encourage a specific policymaker or group of policymakers to consult with your organization in developing a solution? These are **communication** objectives.

Perhaps you are in a position to go a step further and think of **policy or program** objectives such as passing a specific piece of legislation, revising policy within a branch of government, changing behavior in the corporate sector, or obtaining more funding for a particular program.

Whether you are setting a communication or program objective, make sure it is S.M.A.R.T.—specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based.

What do you want the policymaker TO DO? _____

Step Two: Internal Scan

As part of your communication plan, you need to assess your organization's assets and weaknesses. What staff and other resources do you have to help you communicate your research results? Do you need to change internal priorities to give more emphasis to policy communication? Do some of your staff members need training? Do you need to hire a consultant?

What strengths/weaknesses in your organization might affect your communication plan?

Strengths: _____

Weaknesses: _____

What might you do within your organization to make your communication plan more effective? _____

Step Three: External Scan

In addition to the capacity of your own organization, you need to identify current or potential allies—organizations or individuals—who can work within a coalition framework to reach your objective. Your allies may have different assets than your organization or they may be in a better position to promote certain aspects of your objective. For example, if you are working in a government agency, it is likely that a nongovernmental organization can take a stronger advocacy position than you can. But if you are working in a nongovernmental organization, a government research agency with good research findings can add credibility to your cause.

What Individuals (policy champions) and organizations (coalitions) could you work with to make your communication plan more effective?

Individuals: _____

Organizations: _____

Let's look at other individuals and groups in your community. Most organizations start a communication effort as if no one has ever discussed their issue before. This is rarely the case.

Usually, there are known facts, misperceptions, players, opposition, and a debate already set up about any issue.

Who are your current or potential opponents and what are their positions?

Opponent	Position
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Is there anything you can do to win them over? _____

You need to understand what, if any, debate is already going on about your issue so that you can decide what position to take. If there is an ongoing debate and you think your information will convince a policy audience, you should get busy getting your message out. If no one has noticed your issue, you first need to “frame the debate.” Priorities are audience research (which can be quite informal) and message development.

A third possibility is that there is an ongoing debate, but your issue is not “framed” or “positioned” in a way that you can win. Often groups keep thinking that with one more report or one more fact the tide will turn and policymakers will start to embrace their position. But sometimes your current approach just isn’t the way to talk about an issue. You tried it, and it didn’t work. How can you talk about the issue in a fresh, new way and start making progress?

In the Indonesian case study, for example, years of training midwives and mobilizing government workers to focus on maternal health didn’t appear to reduce maternal mortality. The Indonesians then initiated a broad, popular movement under the slogan “Gerakan Sayang Ibu” (Movement to Cherish Mothers), and maternal mortality finally started to go down.

Here’s another example. A number of different strategic approaches have been used in anti-smoking campaigns that target teenagers. Early campaigns emphasized the health consequences of smoking, but teens were not persuaded. One new approach has been to make the big tobacco companies “the bad guy” by showing kids how they are being manipulated by the companies. The “Smoking is Ugly” campaign shows teens that smoking makes them look unattractive and gives them bad breath.

Figuring out how to “reframe a debate” or “reposition your issue” means audience research and developing new, fresh messages. It is particularly important to check with your coalition partners to ensure agreement on a new way to talk about the issue.

Do you need to (circle one):

- 1. Jump into an existing debate**
- 2. Introduce an issue that no one is thinking about?**
- 3. “Reposition” your issue into a discussion that you are more likely to win?**

Step Four: Your Policy Audience

You need to identify as precisely as possible the policymakers who can make the decisions necessary to meet your objective. They could be government officials, elected representatives, private-sector leaders, members of the medical profession, staff of donor organizations—any group or individual who can make a decision that will further your objective.

Your organization may not have immediate or direct access to these key policymakers. But once you have identified who you ultimately need to influence or activate, you can figure out how best to reach them, either directly or through the people they listen to.

Which policymaker(s) can make the decisions necessary to meet your objective?

Can you reach these policymakers directly (yes or no)? _____

If not, who can you reach who has influence with your key policymakers? Can you turn these influential groups or individuals into coalition partners or “policy champions”?

Let’s look at the policymakers more closely, starting with their **hearts**. What values or core concerns would compel them to move toward your objective? How can you appeal to one of their existing beliefs to get them to support your ideas? Do they care about poverty or are they more concerned with economic growth? Do they care about mothers and babies or do they feel strongly about national pride?

Remember: This is about their value system, not yours. You cannot assume that if people know what you know, they will do what you do. If you want to connect with your target audience and make them your ally, you need to understand how **they** think. It is always easier to tap into a value someone already holds than to create a new one. This is perhaps the most important point for you to consider in developing your communication plan.

What are the policymakers’ key values and core concerns that you can tap into to reach their hearts? _____

What do they believe that you will have to overcome? _____

Next, let's look at their **heads**. How much do they already know about your issue, and how much technical information they can handle comfortably? It's hard to know what's worse: Talking down to a policy audience or talking over their heads.

How much do the policymakers' know about your issue? _____

How much technical information can they handle? _____

Once you have identified your target policymakers, their core values and beliefs, and their level of knowledge, then you can develop a strategic approach to communicating with them, getting their attention, and persuading them to make the decision that will reach your policy/program goals. Your strategic approach will be the starting point for your choice of messages and messengers.

What will be your "persuasion points"? What approach will touch the hearts and heads of your target policymakers? Should you compare your country's high infant-mortality rate with the lower rates achieved by your neighbors? Will a sense of competition motivate your policymakers to try harder? Or should you emphasize that infant mortality, while still unacceptably high, has come down considerably since the introduction of your program (which you want them to continue or expand). Two very different approaches. Both might work. But each dictates different messages and possibly different messengers.

What strategic approach will resonate with the policymakers' core concerns and values, motivate them to pay attention to your research, and persuade them to act on your recommendations? What are your "persuasion points"? _____

Step Five: Message

Once you have decided on your objective, your audience, and your strategic approach, you need to decide what to say. Again, it is important to consider your audience's value system, not your own. Review the persuasion points you identified above. Keep in mind these words of wisdom: "It's not what you want to tell them; it's what they can hear."

Can you think of a one-sentence message that will move your target policymakers to action? _____

What three key points will support your message?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Step Six: Messenger

Who delivers the message is just as important as what you choose to say. The right message delivered by a messenger with no credibility with your target audience will likely fall on deaf ears.

A senior, respected researcher in your organization might be an effective messenger. Alternatively, one of your coalition partners might deliver your message more effectively. Or you might identify a young, upcoming Member of Parliament who believes in your cause and also believes that associating with your cause can help his/her career. Such a "policy champion" can become an effective messenger. Then again, you might identify a sports star or a well-known film actor or musician who could deliver your message effectively. Such an outsider who can deliver an effective message is called a "third-party validator." Another alternative might be a strong, articulate individual from the poor community you are trying to help.

Which messenger(s) are most likely to convince your policy audience of the importance of your findings and the need to take action? _____

Step Seven: Communication Actions

How are you going to get your message to your audience using your chosen approach? Select any combination of the following options or—better yet—think of something more innovative:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meet with local community | <input type="checkbox"/> Meet with existing/potential coalition partners |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Set up email network of coalition partners | <input type="checkbox"/> Meet with an individual policymaker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meet with a small group of policymakers | <input type="checkbox"/> Hold a news conference |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Give interviews to print and broadcast media | <input type="checkbox"/> Offer a training workshop (to whom?) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work with an individual journalist to write a feature article | <input type="checkbox"/> Take policymakers and journalists on a field trip |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conduct a dissemination seminar for a policy audience | <input type="checkbox"/> Give a talk to a professional association |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Post material on the Internet | <input type="checkbox"/> Start an E-bulletin for a wide audience |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Others (be creative) _____ | |

What written or audiovisual materials will you produce in support of these actions?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Factsheets | <input type="checkbox"/> News releases |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research reports (with executive summary and list of policy recommendations) | <input type="checkbox"/> Articles in popular or professional magazines |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CDs/DVDs | <input type="checkbox"/> Training materials |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Others _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Briefing kits |

Step Eight: Measure your Success

You can measure your success in terms of outputs and outcomes. Think of **outputs** as services or products delivered, such as factsheets, news releases, meetings with policymakers, field trips to expose policymakers to projects and the community, workshops for journalists, etc. **Outcomes** are the changes that occur because of your outputs—in knowledge, behavior, or policy. For example, one output might be generating more news articles that carry your key messages in the media that reach your target policymakers. A related outcome might be that your target policymakers saw the news coverage and invited your organization to speak at an upcoming government meeting. Your speech at the meeting would be an output, and—who knows?—the outcome might be a significant policy change.

Measurements of outputs and outcomes need to be defined, reviewed, and possibly redefined throughout the communication process. Don't wait until the end.

How will you measure whether you achieve your objective?

Outputs: What you do (try to include dates): _____

Measurable outcomes: What your policy audience does (with dates if possible): _____
