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Guidelines on Developing a Communication Strategy

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Introduction

The general objectives of the Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations (TACSO) Project are to strengthen the overall capacities and accountability of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) within the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) beneficiaries and to guarantee the quality of services of CSOs and a sustainable role of the CSOs in the democratic process. The main purposes of the project are:

- To increase and improve the capacity and actions of CSOs.
- To improve the democratic role of CSOs.

In order to assist CSOs in the region in communication and visibility, an area that CSOs often overlook, TACSO has implemented a number of activities including the organisation of communication trainings and conferences on the national and regional level. TACSO has conducted research on the relationship between CSOs and the media and research on public perception surveys. TACSO has published the Media Relations Manual for CSOs and a number of videos on how to use social media for CSOs. Each publication is available on the Web site.

Through TACSO's work and based on feedback, it has been noted that many CSOs struggle with setting a strategy in the communication area of their work. With the intent to simplify the process to the greatest extent possible, TACSO has created the Guidelines on Developing a Communication Strategy. These guidelines contain more detailed information about the process of strategy creation, definition of goals, setting of deadlines and evaluation.

Drawing up a communication strategy is an art not a science and there are many different ways to approach the task. Opportunities for making an impact and having an organisation's voice heard may arise unexpectedly. Thus, it is important to have a strategy in place so that one can increase the chances of such opportunities occurring and can take advantage of them when they do.

This step-by-step guide should be used as a reference. The template provided at the end will assist in actualising an organisations' communication strategy.

Regardless of whether the strategy is being developed for a certain period or for the same time period as an organisational strategy or for a specific project, it should contain the following:

1. Purpose statement
2. Situation analyses
3. Objectives and communication goals
4. Audiences
5. Messages
6. Tools and activities
7. Resources
8. Timescales
9. Evaluation

The following text will review the key elements of a communication strategy and discuss in depth what needs to be developed and included in the document.

Challenges of the Communication Strategy Process

A communication strategy is designed to help you and your organisation communicate effectively and meet core organisational objectives.

In most CSOs no one is assigned to communication planning. In some cases it is given as a “pet-project” to a junior staff member or to a volunteer. This set up leaves the communication planning process in a place where it often loses momentum and institutional knowledge. Another problem that most CSOs face when they consider developing a communication plan is lack of experience in this specific area.

The process of communication planning requires that one person assumes the role of Communication Plan Manager. A good part of the Communication Plan Manager’s work will be spent engaging others in the process.

It is important to engage as many people as possible in the planning process because staff and supporter acceptance and willingness to actively support the communication strategy is critical to the success of the plan, especially if the communication planning process identifies success as being dependent on changes to the status quo. Without full support from the staff and volunteers who need to implement the strategies and tactics identified in the communication plan, the plan will likely never be put into practice. Without full support from the donors and funders who financially support CSOs’ activities, the plan may never be implemented.

Experience has shown that there are several basic approaches that will help any group maximise its communication impact. The key is to focus your organisation’s resources on just a few specific, carefully selected communication opportunities.

In the simplest terms, effective communication has three overarching rules:

1. Define success.
2. Know the context.
3. Deliver the right message to the right audience at the right time, many times.

Ultimately it is really that simple. But, dig a little deeper and the questions can become almost overwhelming... Which audiences are the “right” audiences? What are the “right” messages for those audiences? Do we really know what the messages are or do we just think we know because we really like the messages we have come up with? What are we asking those audiences to do? Are we inviting them to action? How shall we know they have done it? What is in it for them? What are the most effective communication channels for delivering messages to your priority audiences? Is it the media? Face-to-face meetings? E-mails? Social media? What should the strategies be for guiding that delivery?

And before you start setting your sights too low (or too high); what can you afford to do as an organisation? What are your strengths and challenges, both internally and externally? What obstacles and opportunities will you face in the complex communication environment when you try to “spread the word” about your good work and the urgency of the issues you address?

The answers to these questions are critical to your communication success, and to ensuring that your organisation is on-track in meeting its broader goals and objectives in a timely, effective way.

Without a plan to guide your communication activities, your organisation runs the risk of focusing on the wrong audiences, of using messages that simply do not work outside of your own inner circle, or of getting lost in a flurry of activity that does not move you any closer to your goals. In other words, without a thorough, well-thought out plan, your organisation runs the risk of wasting time and money, losing credibility, becoming irrelevant with key audiences, even of failing to meet your mission. In short, investing time and resources into a strategic communication planning process will help your organisation:

- Proactively focus the activities of your organisation where there is the greatest potential for success.
- Ensure your limited resources (time, financial, and human) are most effectively applied.
- Impose discipline and clear thinking about why it is in the best interest for your organisation to pursue certain communication initiatives.
- Integrate all of your public relations (PR) efforts: media, government, donor, corporate, etc.
- Ensure that everyone in your organisation (staff, board, volunteers) is “on the same page” and telling the same stories about your organisation.
- Achieve results that move you towards realising your organisation’s goals.
- Encourage creative thinking about new ways to address old challenges.¹

¹ “Plan the Work – Strategic Communication Planning for Non-for-Profit Organisations”

What is a Strategic Communication Plan?

A communication plan is simply a written statement that outlines communication goals, provides some situational analysis, and proposes approaches and activities to achieve the identified goals given the current situation.

A communication plan sets out the **timeframe** for carrying out these activities, details the **resources** and support that will be necessary to achieve your goals, and identifies how results will be measured.

There is no prescribed length of the document – it can be a short summary of only few pages, or a much more elaborate document of over 50 pages. However, the length and depth of a plan depends on whether it is a five-year organisational plan or a plan designed to support a particular campaign or strategic goal. In the private and government sectors, communication plans are typically developed in support of very detailed organisational strategic plans. In CSOs, it is more common to see strategic communication plans as a hybrid of both the organisational and communication planning processes.

A word of caution: While communication plans are written documents, they also need to be thought of as living documents. The reality is, the communication landscape is always changing, and new opportunities will continually arise for delivering your organisation's messages to internal and external audiences. And, as your understanding of the communication landscape, and your skills at manoeuvring through it, improve; your opportunities to get the message out will only increase. For these reasons, written communication plans should be revised regularly, at least quarterly, and be based on on-going evaluation. They should constantly be referenced.

Beyond Media Relations

During your planning, you will certainly find out that for some messages and audiences, media might not be the appropriate channel.

The essence of strategic and effective communication planning is to focus on many different ways to reach all of the external and internal audiences you will need to hear your message.

Unfortunately, in practice communication efforts are focused solely on media relations. While in the region, public relations are equalised with media relations. The fact is that media are the major communication channels to the audiences CSOs wants to communicate with. But, it is not the only way to reach all the audiences.

Additionally, the communication planning process considers not only your actual and current messages to those selected audiences, but your overall positioning, reputation and relationships in the broader community. A good communication plan also has to consider CSO's brand identity.

A thoughtful, creative communication plan for a CSO will improve a CSO's:

Ability to create a strong and positive reputation for your organisation	As related to the organisation's...	Public relations
Profile in the community and your ability to attract the best staff, supporters and volunteers		Community relations
Relationship and reputation with the media		Media relations
Reputation with government at all levels		Government relations
Relationship with employees and volunteers		Internal communication
Ability to attract and maintain strong donor support, sponsorship and funding opportunities with private sector		Donor relations
Organisation's policies and organisational direction		Internal governance relations
Outreach about programmes and services you offer		Constituency and client relations ²

² "Plan the Work – Strategic Communication Planning for Non-for-Profit Organisations"

Developing the Communication Strategy

Within the CSO, one person should be responsible for developing the concept and coordinating the communication strategy planning process. The process will be most effective if the key staff is involved.

The final success of the plan will be determined by the level of “in-house” acceptance and understanding. This can be achieved by involving the key staff in the development of the plan so they have some sense of ownership of the concepts and ideas within the plan. This kind of process will:

- Build the team spirit.
- Establish evaluation criteria.
- Simplify the process of setting priorities.

The following text details different areas that should be developed within the communication strategy. Although the whole process can be conducted by one person, it is advisable to engage as many staff members as possible. The information is laid out in logical order from the Organisational Goals to the Situation Analyses to Audience and Messages, which will allow for the strategy to be developed gradually and naturally from the most general to most specific issues of concern. Following these steps will help organisations produce the necessary elements for the communication strategy as outlined on page two.

Step One:

- Defining success
- Situation analyses (Organisational Background and External Environment)
- Purpose statement
- Goals, objectives, strategies and tactics

Step Two:

- Audiences
- Messages

Note: the audiences must be determined before you move to messages

Step Three:

- Development of the work plan

Step Four:

- Evaluation of the results

Step One – How to Define Success?

Before even considering what your **communication goals** and objectives might be, you need to have a clear idea of what your **organisational vision and goals** are. If your organisation has not clearly defined your overall vision, that is, how the world will look different once you accomplish your goals, then developing a communication strategy will be **extremely difficult**. For your communication work to be effective, you need to know exactly what your organisation hopes to achieve and why.

Since this guide is focused on communication planning, the assumption is your CSO has already done the work of clarifying your vision and setting organisational level goals. If this is not the case, it is highly recommended that you take a step back to build a solid foundation for your communication work by identifying the broad goals your CSO hopes to achieve.

Your current situation – situation analyses

Your “current situation” or “situation analyses” refers to setting and understanding the context and environment into which you will be delivering your message. Knowing your current situation will help you better define your success and thereby set your goals and objectives.

The introductory part of the communication strategy should briefly outline what your organisation does, what its main functions are, and where it operates. It should also look at your organisation’s communication strengths – what has been successful and what has not worked well over the last five years or so. Much of this work involves research and fact gathering. In principle, the “current situation” or “situation analyses” should focus on:

- Organisational background
 - Try to understand why things have been done the way they have. This will alert you to potential obstacles within the organisation as you create the communication strategy and plan.
- Internal communication strengths and challenges
 - Resources, systems and skills available currently in the CSO should be known.
- External landscape: media, policy, public landscapes
 - It is important to be aware of the external threats and opportunities that potentially affect your CSO, including those groups or individuals who might be supportive or opposed to the work you do, or the way you do your work. Additionally it is important to be aware of the communication environment³ you are operating in and the one in which you will deliver your messages.

³ Communication environment means exchange of ideas, news, views, messages, information or emotions, due to influence of various elements that encompass us.

- Allies and competitors or opponents
 - This should not be a simple list of your allies and opponents. Here you should consider their “communication imprint”. What are their capacities to communicate to the same audiences?

Research into past media coverage and public opinion about the issues

When analysing the external environment, in particular the media, it is important to not only analyse the media in itself, but to also research the organisation’s media coverage, public opinion and facts. How do target audiences perceive the organisation and its issues?

With the Internet, it is not difficult to develop a profile of how the organisation's issues are covered in the media, how often the organisation is quoted or described, and what public opinion polls have been done on relevant topics. A short and simple media analysis can be an instructive tool and will indicate the amount of resources necessary to increase name recognition.

Good data can be a gold mine in outreach to the media. A good communication strategy should collect data on the important issues in formats that can answer the questions, “who, what, when, where, why and how.”

For example you can set up Google alerts for key words and when you want to receive the alerts. This could help an organisation keep up with any mentions of their organisation and/or issues that the organisation is focused on.

Tools for analysis

The tools below can also be used when analysing an organisation’s current situation as a whole in order to create an organisational strategy. These tools are described in the context of the communication strategy and should focus on the communication aspect of your analysis.

a) PEST Analysis

This involves listing the **Political, Economic, Social and Technological** factors that could affect your organisation’s work. These could be positive or negative factors and should include issues that are likely to have an impact on how your organisation operates. You should indicate why each factor will have an effect. For instance, the PEST analysis could be used when analysing the external landscape, the media, policy and public landscapes or other external factors that could potentially affect your organisation.

For example, if you look into technological factors, if the majority of your audience does not own a computer or does not have access to the Internet, then this will influence which channels you will use to communicate your messages.

b) SWOT Analysis

A SWOT Analysis involves listing your organisation’s **strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats**. Think about what this means in terms of your communication priorities. How can threats be turned into opportunities? How can you play on your strengths through effective communication? This analysis could be used when analysing your organisation’s background, i.e., why things have

been done the way they have been; and the internal communication, resources and skills available in the organisation.

c) Competitor Analysis

Another useful tool when assessing your current situation is to look at what your competitors or opponents or allies are doing. This can be a relatively simple exercise where you identify your main competitors and rank them against certain criteria. Try to be objective when assessing current strengths and weaknesses. Here you will be basically identifying your competition in the communication area, i.e., who can take over your message; whose messages might be stronger; who might take your media space?

Purpose statement

When defining success as a first step in the process, it is a good exercise to say up front why you have developed a communication strategy and what you hope to achieve with it, i.e., a basic purpose statement. This does not need to be very detailed and it acts as a **reference and reminder** for those using it in their work. The purpose statement serves as a framework for a detailed strategy. For example:

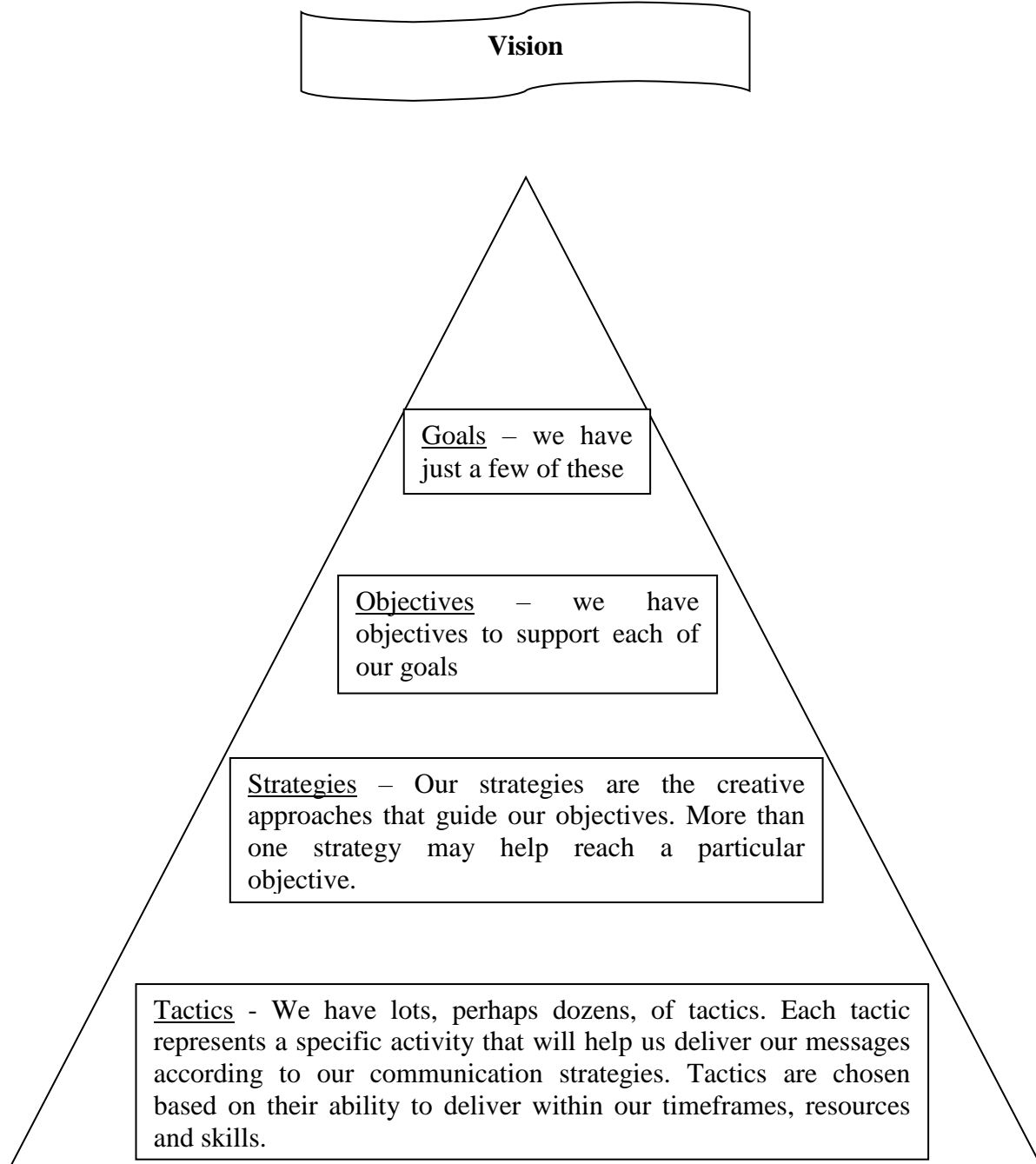
This communication strategy shows how effective communication can:

- Help us achieve our overall organisational objectives.
- Engage effectively with stakeholders.
- Demonstrate the success of our work.
- Ensure people understand what we do.
- Change behaviour and perceptions where necessary.

Goals, objectives, strategies and tactics in the communication strategy

Having finished the analysis and defined success, you are now ready to set communication goals. The communication strategy should be aligned with the organisational strategy, and should support the implementation of the organisational strategy. One of the major challenges, when developing a communication or even an organisational strategy, is creating a clear and understandable differentiation between goals, objectives, strategies and tactics. “Goal” and “objective” are words that are used interchangeably, as are “strategies” and “tactics.” In some cases, even “objectives” and “strategies” can be interchangeable, depending on the scope of your thinking.

A visual distinction of how these four tools work together may be the best place to start⁴:



⁴ “Plan the Work – Strategic Communication Planning for Non-for-Profit Organisations”

Another way to visualise the relationship between goals, objectives, strategies and tactics is like this: Keep in mind that goals support your vision, your objectives support your goals, your strategies support your objectives and your tactics support your strategies.⁵

GOAL(S)

What are your long-term communication achievements?
What do you want to achieve to move your CSO closer to fulfilling its vision?

OBJECTIVE 1

For what concrete, measurable, specific and achievable (within a certain timeframe) “targets“ are you aiming? These are shorter-term than your goals.

OBJECTIVE 2

For what concrete, measurable, specific and achievable (within a certain timeframe) “targets“ are you aiming? These are shorter-term than your goals.

STRATEGY 1A

What is one general approach to achieving Objective 1?

STRATEGY 1B

What is one general approach to achieving Objective 1?

STRATEGY 2A

What is one general approach to achieving Objective 2?

STRATEGY 2B

What is one general approach to achieving Objective 2?

Tactic 1A-1

What specific tools will we use?

Tactic 1A-3

What specific tools will we use?

Tactic 1B-2

What specific tools will we use?

Tactic 2A-1

What specific tools will we use?

Tactic 2B-1

What specific tools will we use?

Tactic 1A-2

What specific tools will we use?

Tactic 1B-1

What specific tools will we use?

Tactic 1B-3

What specific tools will we use?

Tactic 2A-2

What specific tools will we use?

Tactic 2B-2

What specific tools will we use?

⁵ “Plan the Work – Strategic Communication Planning for Non-for-Profit Organisations”

For example, the organisation, ABC, works in the area of human rights. The organisations' **vision** is to live in a society in which each citizen's rights are respected and protected. Their **mission**, as a civil society organisation, is to support and ensure that human rights are promoted, understood and protected in accordance with the rule of law. One of the **organisational goals** could be to become one of the major advocates of human rights in the community. The **communication goal** would be to increase the awareness of the local community of the importance of human rights for all citizens.

One of their **communication objectives** would be to increase the understanding of the youth population (individuals between the ages of 15 and 24) of what the organisation does for human rights by having five additional youth attend their information sessions during the next three months.

Further, in terms of efforts for this particular communication objective, and having in mind the above, the strategic approach for this objective would be to collaborate with youth organisations in the community in which human rights would be a common issue. Youth organisations not only have greater knowledge and access to youth, but also can promote the organisation and the information sessions as well as human rights in general through their work.

Some of the **communication tactics** would include: making a list of youth organisations in the community, especially those focusing on human rights; setting up meetings with the organisations; creating partnerships with the interested organisations; sharing the organisation's fact sheet and brochure with the partner organisations as well as the dates of the information sessions; announcing the information session dates on social media and on the organisation's calendar and asking the partner organisations to share this information with their contacts.

Overall communication goals

A communication goal is the desired result a communication strategy commits to achieve. This overarching goal can be defined in more specific details and divided into different subordinate objectives. As communication can be expensive (in resources and time), the more precisely the reasons and objectives behind communicating are defined the better the resources can be allocated.

Communication goals can include motivating, educating, raising awareness amongst, and influencing decision-making in target audiences. Below are some examples of communication goals:

- Building awareness of a project or programme among a tightly defined audience.
- Securing the commitment of a defined group of stakeholders to the project's aims.
- Influencing specific policies or policymakers on key and defined aspects.
- Encouraging increased stakeholder participation on specific issues.

Communication objectives

As goals are like an organisations' vision, the objectives are like the mission, meaning they are the attainable aspect, i.e. they are SMART⁶ (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-focused, Time-bound).

⁶ Human Resources, University of Virginia. "Writing S.M.A.R.T. Goals."

The objectives answer the question of how we will fulfil our goal. For example, if the goal is to encourage financial contributions the objective would be the HOW you would encourage financial contributions. What steps should be taken in order for this to happen.

It is important that your communication objectives contribute to the achievement of the overall objectives of the organisation. In this way they will be recognised not as an “add-on”, but something as fundamental as operational or policy objectives to achieving the organisation’s overall mission.

Focus on Effects

Objectives focus on effects, and they should tell us what we are aiming for. They should envision the impact we want to make on our public, giving a glimpse of the end result.

Some of the typical objectives for public relations are usually phrased as:

- We want to promote public health.
- We want to teach people about eating disorders.

These objectives fail to focus on the desired impact on a particular public. Objectives should focus not on the tools but rather on what we want to accomplish with those tools. With focus on the effects we hope to achieve, the above objectives should be phrased:

- We are trying to educate people about the public health system.
- We want people to learn about eating disorders.

Clarity and Specificity

Objectives are clear and specific. The effects oriented objectives above are better than the first set because they focus on a key group, but they are still too broad. In establishing objectives, avoid words and phrases that are vague. Avoid verbs such as educate, inform, enhance and publicise, and adjectives such as appropriate, reasonable and highest possible. Consider these objectives that are both effects-oriented and clear:

- We want to increase awareness about the benefits of the public health system.
- We want to generate e-mail inquiries and social media interactions on our eating disorders information e-mail and Facebook page.

Measurement

A major component that remains missing in the previous set of objectives is the matter of measurement. We need to know what success will look like as it was defined in step one – knowing what your organisation hopes to achieve and why; now, we also need to be able to measure that success. The measurement should be challenging but not so ambitious as to be unachievable.

- We want to increase awareness of 50 percent of the youth population in our community about the benefits of the public health system.
- We want to generate 100 e-mails a week and achieve a three percent weekly increase in social media interactions on our eating disorders information e-mail and Facebook page.

Time Frame

The final characteristic of objectives is that they have an element of time. They establish a period of time for achieving success. Consider the following objectives:

- Throughout the next semester, we want to increase awareness of 50 percent of the youth population in our community about the benefits of the public health system.
- We want to generate 100 e-mails a week and achieve a three percent weekly increase in social media interactions on our eating disorders information e-mail and Facebook page during the first six weeks of the e-mail address and Facebook account promotions.

Usually, effect is achieved by degrees. Awareness increases gradually; interest builds in stages; behaviours modify by steps. Objectives should reflect this.

Progression of Objectives

In public relations communication, we want to make sure that our message will reach our key public who will become aware of the messages and then who will agree with the message and act accordingly. Note the three progressive levels of this process:

1. We want our message to reach our public (awareness).
2. Who will agree with it (acceptance).
3. Act or interact accordingly (action).

Awareness Objectives

The first level of objectives, the awareness objective, focuses on information providing the cognitive component of the message.

Acceptance Objective

The acceptance objective deals with the affective, or “feeling” part of the message – how people respond emotionally to information they have received.

Action Objective

When awareness and acceptance have been achieved, the next step deals with ways in which the receiver acts on the information. Specifically, this behavioural component of the communication process offers two general types of action. One is opinion or behavioural intention – verbal action expressing acceptance of the message. The second type is behaviour – physical action expressing that acceptance.

HOW TO WRITE COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

Use this form as a guide for writing objectives.

Writing Communication Objectives⁷

Public	Objective for			
Category	To have an effect on <input type="checkbox"/> Awareness <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptance <input type="checkbox"/> Action			
Direction	Specifically, to <input type="checkbox"/> Create, Generate <input type="checkbox"/> Increase, Maximise <input type="checkbox"/> Maintain, Reinforce <input type="checkbox"/> Decrease, Minimise			
Effect	(w/awareness category) (w/acceptance category) (w/action category)	<input type="checkbox"/> Attention <input type="checkbox"/> Interest <input type="checkbox"/> Opinion	or or or	<input type="checkbox"/> Comprehension <input type="checkbox"/> +/- Attitude <input type="checkbox"/> Behaviour <input type="checkbox"/>
Focus	About			
Performance Measure				
Time period				

For example:

Objective for youth (ages 15 to 24) in the community: To have an effect on awareness by increasing their comprehension of what organisation ABC does for human rights (five more youth per event in attending the organisation's information sessions in the next three months).

It is important to set measurable goals in order to know when they have been achieved and to be able to gauge the progress along the way. A communication strategy is a living document, so once the objectives are achieved, change them or further adjust them.

⁷ Becoming a Public Relations Writer – A Writing Process Workbook for the Profession; Ronald D. Smith; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, New Jersey/London, 2003, pg. 71

Strategies and Tactics

With both the goals and objectives defined, the strategy (ies) and tactics can be set. A strategy helps to answer the question why, why that particular strategy will be used in order to accomplish that specific objective. As in the example given above about organisation ABC, the collaboration with youth organisations is the chosen strategy [why] because these organisations have greater knowledge and access to the specific target audience.

Defining the tactics or the needed tools for this strategy will help ensure that the organisation takes the necessary actions so as to achieve its objectives and move closer to meeting its goals.

It should be noted that the strategies should first be set before moving on to the tactics.

Below are more examples of strategies and tactics.

Strategic initiatives

- Communication initiative for behaviour change.
 - Example: Encouraging communities to recycle.
- Communication initiative for policy change.
 - Example: Securing policymakers' support for safer landfills.
- Repositioning effort (organisation decides to change focus or add a major programme area).
 - Example: Growing from an organisation that focuses only on reducing water pollution to one that focuses on reducing air pollution as well.
- Brand awareness (how key audiences perceive your organisation).
 - Example: Earning the reputation of being the premier global warming think tank

Tactical efforts

- Message dissemination (how well your messages are spread by the media or adopted by key audiences).
 - Example: Get your strategies for cleaner energy sources discussed on public radio
- Media relations.
 - Examples: Interaction with journalists, effectiveness of spokespeople, coverage in print and on television.
- Quality of communication exchanges with your audience.
 - Example: Audience's satisfaction with direct communication with staff members.
- Print, video, online and new media communication.
 - Examples: Newsletters, short documentaries, blogs, webinars.

Step Two – Audience and Messages

In addition to the goals and objectives (Step one) that form the cornerstone of an organisation's communication strategy, the following are critical elements that organisations need in order to construct a strategy:

- An understanding of the target audience and how to reach it.
- Messages to be delivered.
- Materials to be produced.

It is important to identify these elements and put them in place before implementing day-to-day activities. Successful implementation of a communication strategy depends on pulling these elements together.

Identification of a target audience

Communication is all about knowing your audiences: who are the key audiences you must reach in order to achieve your objective; where they are; and what kinds of messages will be of interest to them?

The first task is to identify who the target audience is and how to reach it. Make a list of categories of people who are important to the success of the organisation and identify ways to reach them. Audiences may include donors, potential members, elected officials, judges and the legal community, business leaders, minority communities, trade associations, teens, senior citizens, and the general public. In addition to these important outside audiences, it is important for an organisation not to forget its internal audiences, such as staff, board members and volunteers. Many organisations will find that they have several audiences they need to interact with. Further on once you start developing your messages you will have to tailor them for each audience.

One part of the strategy might look at which audiences will be interested in which parts of your organisation or activities. Understanding this may make it easier to prioritise your communication work. Another way of prioritising your audiences might be to “map” them. This involves criteria, which are important to your organisation and then ranking your different audiences against those criteria.

Stakeholder or audience mapping is a specialised form of identifying and ‘mapping out’ key audiences and their relationships with each other in order to use these inter-connections for spreading your message. Stakeholder mapping recognises that audiences exist in a dynamic ecosystem where individuals and organisations communicate among themselves, and may belong to different audience groups at different times. Effective stakeholder communication rests on a sophisticated understanding of these interrelationships and how they can be leveraged to reach your target audience.

For example, if you are working in health promotion you may find that getting a message to parents via their kids’ school or paediatrician’s office adds a level of credibility and relevance that would be lacking if you sent the same message directly to the parents. Or if you want to promote the

importance of protecting intellectual property among entrepreneurs, you may get more added value by targeting business intermediaries such as lawyers and accountants rather than trying to reach such a large, unstructured target audience of entrepreneurs directly.

The audiences should also be profiled, so you can understand where your issue or organisation fits their landscape. Is their engagement high, moderate or low? Are they supportive? Opposed to? Indifferent? Persuadable? If you were to conduct a public opinion poll on some issue, the results would show the attitude breakdown as in the following example:

Three out of ten people may be completely opposed to your issue, approach or work. Another two might be too busy, distracted or apathetic to get involved at all. The next two might be absolutely supportive of what you are trying to do, these supporters are critical – they include your constituencies (i.e. volunteers, members), and will most likely publicly support your action. Finally, the last three out of ten might be persuadable, which means that they have not decided what their position is, but they are open to be persuaded to support your action. So in essence, your attention should be concentrated on these three people– not the ones who definitely support or do not support you – but the ones in the middle.

Another thing you should understand are the motives or, what might motivate each target audience in the first place. What are their fundamental values? What are their positions or attitudes towards your actions, ideas or the CSO? Each audience can be diversified based on the values the majority of its members share.

Message development

Communication is all about storytelling: use of interesting narrative, human interest stories and arresting imagery. Audiences should be determined before messages are developed. The messages should be relevant and appropriate to the audience. You might want to speak to your supporters and donors in much more straightforward language than you would use for local authorities or other funders. But, it is very important that there is continuity across the messages. It is important that all of your audiences understand what kind of organisation you are, so your messaging needs to always link back to your key organisational objectives and values.

To have clear and simple messages is harder than it seems. You have to make sure to avoid acronyms, abbreviations, phrases, or very specific CSO project language. Use of jargon may come natural to you, but it might be a foreign language to your target audience. Use language that is easily understandable. Before using the message in the broader public or with your targeted audience, do a test-run in front of peers or friends to check if the message will be understood.

When writing clearly and simply, another principle that is also valid is “less is more”. The shorter a message is, the more brief it is, the easier it is for both the speaker and audiences to remember. The message also can be communicated through visuals that reflect the values of the target audience. These visuals can include infographics, symbols, and photographs that all help to convey the audience’s core values.

For example, with organisation ABC and their objective to reach the youth population, if during their research they found that one of the core values for their audience was equality, they could create a poster with the words, “Are you entitled to these rights?” With a list of different rights (possibly those particularly aimed at youth), include symbols (if appropriate) to go with the rights. The bottom of the poster could ask another question, “If you think you are entitled, should not he/she be entitled as well” There could be a picture of a girl or boy of a different race, ethnicity, etc. There could be a series of these posters all featuring different individuals. The poster could also include information about the organisation’s information sessions and how to learn more about human rights.

One of the most challenging parts of the message is that the message be empathetic and evoke an emotional response from the audience. In addition, messages will not be effective if they are not believable, making it very important that whoever is delivering the message believes in it. Because, when one believes in the message, it is conveyed with conviction and passion to which audiences are more likely to respond.

The right messenger is the critical part of the message delivery. The fact is, who delivers an effective message is as important as the message itself. This is a key challenge for many CSOs where the person with the greatest prestige or seniority is routinely assigned the role of spokesperson for the group regardless of their skill, aptitude or training. When selecting key spokespeople, consider who can best reflect the kind of tone and positioning your organisation seeks with the broader community or with specific target audiences. For example, women tend to respond better to messages on health care when they are delivered by mature female messengers. Men – and usually women – respond best to authoritative male messengers when they are delivering messages about the economy.

However, when developing more specific messages, you have to take into account characteristics of your narrowly defined audiences and the communication channels they prefer to use (i.e. young population uses social media, so the messages need to be developed for the social media format, with lots of visuals).

As in the example given above for organisation ABC, these posters could be primarily shared on Facebook and Twitter with each week featuring a new individual. The posters could also be made into leaflets and passed out in high schools and universities. The partner youth organisations of organisation ABC could also have the leaflets available in their offices or display the posters in their offices.

Developing messages for the Media

When developing messages for the media, consider developing a phrase of four to ten words to describe the CSO that can be used every time a reporter does a story about the organisation. It is important to be able to tell reporters how the group wants to be described; otherwise, journalists will come up with descriptions that may not be accurate.

The next step is to develop message points for the organisation's spokespeople to use when they talk with reporters. One might consist of the basic facts about the organisation, but should be limited to three or four points to communicate in each interview.

Answer the following questions in-house before every media event or interview: What should the headline be? What should the article include? Answers given in the interview or at the media event should always deliver the key points.

Keep in mind that when developing message for media, you are at the same time developing messages for the wider public. However, when you are meeting with other stakeholders, your messages should be simple, short and delivered without ambiguities.

The messages can be thought of as short, simple statements that are repeated in all communication – Web pages, brochures, social media, interviews, articles and so on. In principle, the messages need to be:

- Clear and simple.
- Brief.
- Believable.
- Compelling.
- Delivered by the right messenger.

Tools and Activities

After identifying your target audience and developing messages, the next step is to determine which tools and activities are the most appropriate to communicating the key messages to the audience. Each audience has its own preferred channels and tools of communication. The tools and activities need to be tailored to the level of time and to the human and financial resources available. The variety of communication channels and tools available is vast.

Some of the most commonly used are:

Web site
Newsletters
Brochures
Press Releases
Interviews
Conferences

Social Media
Seminars
Trainings
Other events
Reports
Infographics

Step three –Development of a work plan

Organisations should develop work plans for each major activity or event and try to review overall plans at least quarterly. Elements of a communication work plan should spell out assignments and important tasks:

- Develop timelines, calendars of events and priorities.
- Assign responsibilities to lead and support staff, giving each a list of specific tasks.
- Review progress and enforce or revise deadlines.

The most common format is given in Annex I: Communication Strategy Template that includes the key communication activities, budget and resources allocated to delivering the strategy. This will allow you to measure clear steps towards your ultimate goals. In practice you should have one general communication strategy, but you can also develop specific ones for big events, campaigns, etc.

Resources and Time Scale

The work plan needs to spell out how resources will be allocated, including staff time, budgets, computers, software, equipment, databases, in-house and contract services and volunteer help. For mid-sized to large organisations, it is prudent to hire a communication expert/officer. In organisations with fewer than ten employees, everyone from the executive director to the person who answers the phone should be a part of the communication team.

A resource review for the organisation should do the following:

- Assess staff time, in-house services and existing media technologies.
- Recommend and arrange for training and technology updates as needed.
- Designate or decide to hire a communication expert/officer.
- Develop a budget that includes provisions for outside contracts and services, such as freelance writing, video production, database management, graphic design and Web site management, printing, translation.
- Access funding and build programmes for expanded activities that include executive loan programmes, internships, pro bono support from commercial media firms, donations from local and regional corporations and grants from foundations.

The key rules to observe are always to deliver what you promise and never over promise. Use your resources and timescales to set legitimate levels of expectations and outline the case for more dedicated sources.

Production of high-quality public relations materials

When developing your work plan and budget, do make sure to include materials as well and the development should include the costs of writing, editing, design and printing.

Public relations materials are important tools for reaching reporters, donors, policy makers, and others in the target audience. These should include:

- A consistent and easy-to-recognise logo and stationery design.
- An easy-to-understand, one page fact sheet about the organisation.
- At least one press kit on the issues and activities to be highlighted in the media.
- Hard copy brochures.
- Consistent Web site content.
- Videos and computer presentations.
- Reports and studies for public release as news items.
- One-paragraph and one-page biographies on spokespeople and organisation management.
- Copies of the current newsletter, if there is one.
- Copies of newspaper articles about the organisation.

Depending on the resources, you can decide to leave space for specific materials to be produced for events/campaigns, etc.

Crisis control

Another area that should be included in the overall strategy should be a crisis control plan. This should be thought of as a fire drill, and regardless how non-controversial the organisation. There should be a plan in place to deal with possible negative stories in the media. This plan should include the identification of a crisis coordination team, a plan to ensure timely and appropriate responses to negative press and regular internal briefings about the procedures for implementing a damage control plan.

Step Four – Evaluation

No one wants to travel a long distance, spend lot of money and somehow end up in the wrong place. Evaluating your communication along the way can help you to stay on course and reach your destination. Evaluation improves the effectiveness of your communication, and will let you know if your communication strategy is working or not, and if it should be adjusted.

All strategies, if they are to be accountable, must be controlled, monitored and their effects, impact and results analysed and evaluated. Central to this process is some measurement, either qualitative or quantitative, of whether an objective was attained and the timing and cost involved. Financial and budgetary accountability are essential in PR and communication in general. Thus, no strategic communication strategy is complete without a built-in evaluation component as a way to check accountability and make improvements over time.

Major evaluation activities might include analysing media content and monitoring certain developments, such as shifts in public opinion, policy changes, increased membership and organisational participation, and improved institutional capacity.

One simple way to do a communication audit is to use open questions with your internal and external audiences to find out what can be adjusted, improved or changed.

Example audiences to consider are your staff, donors, media and partners. Questions you should consider asking are:

- What did you read/see/hear?
- What works/does not work?
- What do you want to see more of?
- What information do you need that you are not currently supplied with?
- How often do you want us to communicate with you?

This communication audit will assist you to assess the effectiveness of your strategy with both your internal and external audiences. The evaluation should also be used to amend your strategy.

Summary

While working on your strategy, you should involve your team, and on a smaller scale, the entire organisation. The communication strategy should feed into the organisational strategy to ensure maximum alignment and efficiency. A written communication strategy should be easy to read. Most organisations have been through a strategic planning process at some point; this effort is no different. Remember, the elements of a communication strategy are basically the same whether the organisation has thousands, hundreds, dozens, or a handful of employees. At the same time it is important to revisit the strategy in regular intervals to make sure that it is up to date and achieving its purpose.

Annex I: Communication Strategy Template

This template covers all the elements necessary for crafting your communication strategy. It will assist you to set the organisation's key messages and to identify the key audiences that you want to reach. In accordance with this template you can consider the risks that can appear during your organisations' life and work and, subsequently, plan further activities.

1. Executive Summary

Maximum of two pages, used to outline key strategy recommendations - purpose statement.

2. Introduction

Brief outline of what your organisation does, background of an issue, purpose and or limitations of this plan.

3. Organisational and Communication objectives

A clear detailed statement of the objectives in communicating, the principles underpinning this strategy and your key messages. These should be aligned with the objectives of the organisation or the specific activity.

3.a Situational analyses

Each section would briefly describe and outline internal strengths, internal weaknesses, external threats, external opportunities

- Political environment.
- Public environment (public attitudes, awareness of issue, core values most relevant to issue, demography).
- Media environment (quality and quantity of coverage to date).
- Allies (who; their agendas/motivators; leverage they offer).
- Competitors/Opponents (who; their agendas/motivators; their messages).
- Organisational capacity (i.e. capacity; resources; positioning on issue; profile)⁸.

⁸ "Plan the Work – Strategic Communication Planning for Non-for-Profit Organisations"

3.b Target Audiences
Who are you communicating with? Include a detailed description of your key target audiences. What are your priorities? Include what they already may know about you – people, research, and subject. What do you think they should know? And do break down the users into sub categories and add contacts already made.

3.c. Target audiences ranked by importance	Preferred/Appropriate channel of communication
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How are you going to communicate? What is the most appropriate channel – a newsletter, a large conference, networking lunch, workshop, an evening reception, email alerts, press release, website, promotional literature, regional seminars, etc.? You will probably have several channels that are appropriate.

3.d. Message development
Develop phrases, short sentences that describe your organisation and your work. Develop messages for specific audiences.

4. Communication Strategy Work Plan

Full details of all the relevant communication activities developed into a working project plan with deadlines and responsibilities. Remember to include key milestones and review dates. Think carefully about cost; include staff and consultants. How will you evaluate success? Below are some suggested groupings, led by the communication activity. Communication plans are living documents and will need regular reviewing and updating.

Activity	Budget/Resources	Deadline/Timeframe	Success Criteria
Media Relations			
	Subtotal:		
Internal Communication			
	Subtotal:		
Public Relations Materials/Print Materials/Products			
	Subtotal:		
Web site			
	Subtotal:		
Social Media			

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Activity	Budget/Resources	Deadline/Timeframe	Success Criteria
	Subtotal:		
Events			
	Subtotal:		
Consultant for any of the above activities			
	Subtotal:		
Grand Total:			

5. Evaluating Success

How will you know if you have succeeded and met your objectives? How are you going to evaluate your success? What performance indicators and evaluating measures will you use?

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* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



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