CIUDAD
Cooperation in Urban Development and Dialogue

INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION & KNOWLEDGE SHARING
HOW TO GET STRAIGHT As

CSM Communication Training, May 2011

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INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared for the twenty-one projects funded under the EU-funded programme, Cooperation for Urban Development & Dialogue (CIUDAD). It is designed to support the communication workshops held with the projects with additional background reading.

The approach suggested here and the guidelines themselves apply equally well to any sort of project, and indeed largely to any sort of communication/information activity. Although firmly grounded in 'traditional' communication theory, and borrowing heavily from it, the "Straight A" methodology is an attempt to simplify and demystify the theory and to render it applicable to the development arena. The views expressed in these guidelines are those of the CSM Communication Expert, at times provocatively, in order to call into question firmly entrenched beliefs commonly found in projects which are not conducive to good communication, information and knowledge sharing.

The "Straight As" guide provides a simple process for defining and managing a communication/information strategy for a project or initiative as a whole. The same process can be applied to plan and manage individual activities.

Communication? Nothing new

We tend to think of Communication as a new thing. Some see it as interchangeable with television advertising, a very recent phenomenon, somehow a dishonest attempt to make us buy things we don't need. However, even two thousand years ago at least one philosopher, Epictetus, had already discovered the importance of perception: "What concerns me is not the way things are, but rather the way people think things are."

It is likely that what we are SEEN to do can be as important as what we actually DO. Communication helps us get the right message across and can have a direct, positive impact on achieving our aims.

Often those involved in projects on the ground do not have access to marketing and communication expertise. A potentially effective tool is missing from their box. However, by understanding an applying a few basic principles it is possible to achieve significant improvements in project outcomes.

When we talk about communication in the context of projects, we are not just talking about brochures and websites – essentially marketing materials: communication also means establishing relationships, starting dialogues, simply talking. And in projects workshops and seminars, for example, are often much more widely used vehicles for communication than brochures.

Communication works best when it is viewed, planned and managed holistically, when there is an overall plan in which individual activities are designed to complement each other and contribute each in its own way to improving project outcomes.

Why have we called the guide “How to get Straight A’s”?

Straight A’s means you perform well across a number of activities (you get an A grade for all the subjects you are studying). It is also the first letter for the key steps in the communication management process:

- AIMS: what it is you want to achieve
- AUDIENCE: who it is you want to communicate with
- AVENUE: what vehicles you will use
- ALLOCATION: human and financial resources available
- ACTIONS: individual activities you will undertake
- APPRAISAL: reviewing the results of actions and feeding back into the plan

Disclaimer

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VNG International, in consortium with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GTZ), JCP Srl, and the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS) has been selected to implement the project.

THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Why bother?

"If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there"

(Lewis Carroll, British children's author, born 1832)

Often in development projects the tendency is to focus on individual actions that are obviously associated with advertising or PR – getting a brochure together, sending out press releases – possibly because we're all familiar with these outputs. These are the different roads people think they should take, without sitting down to think about where it is they want to go. They are things that 'have to be done', but no one is quite sure why.

A Communication Strategy is essentially a roadmap with a starting point (the situation now) and a destination (the ideal situation at some defined point in the future). Working through the steps to define a Strategy enables the project to state clearly where it wants to go, the paths to take to get there, and who to take along. Like any other 'live' plan, there may be detours along the way - circumstances and priorities may change - but having a roadmap gives the project a much greater chance of reaching its destination and achieving its goals.

The Strategy also provides a coherent framework for individual communication activities, to ensure that each of them addresses a specific need and/or target and together they work to address the overall needs of the project.

Why is Communication important for development initiatives?

Development, in order to be successful, must be inclusive: almost by definition, it involves a lot of people and each must feel personally implicated. Each must change how he thinks and how he acts. We often talk about a 'participatory approach' and this boils down to creating awareness among interested parties (commonly called stakeholders), engaging them actively in the process and providing a forum in which their ideas and interests can be expressed and confronted with those of other stakeholders. Communication is key to participation.

Let's remind ourselves what the term 'stakeholder' means: "a person or organization with a legitimate interest in a given situation, action or enterprise" according to the Wiktionary. In the corporate world, this equates to someone owning shares or a 'stake' in a company, who stands to gain or lose depending on the performance of that company. In projects designed to promote sustainable urban development, arguably there is much more at stake, a lot of shared goals, but equally many diverging interests. The challenge is to find and build on common ground, and communication tools and techniques can help with this.

There is also significant interest on the part of the public at large for many development themes, such as local socio-economic development, and environmental issues like global warming and alternative sources of energy. CIUDAD projects that make the effort to communicate, in a reasoned and understandable fashion, what they are doing and the issues they are addressing will find a willing audience, and a growing one.

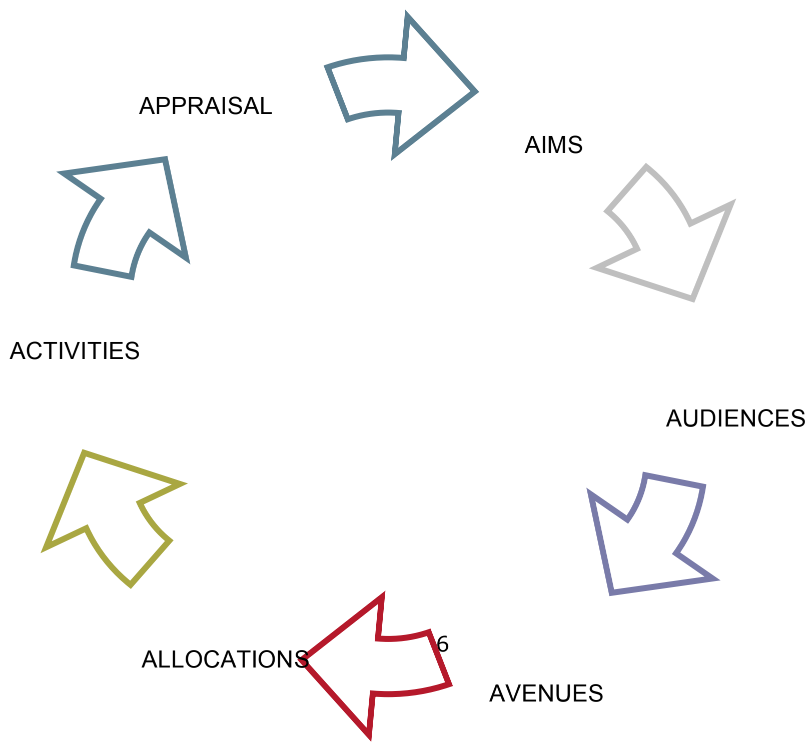
Who should work on a Communication Strategy?

Communication can make a major impact on project outcomes. As such, it is a strategic management function and should not be relegated to 'nice to have' status, something you think about when all the 'important' work has been done. Developing a strategy (and then implementing it) must be a group effort – the whole team must be able to contribute to it and feel ownership of it - but one person should take the lead and bear the responsibility of actually writing up the plan and monitoring performance against it. We shall call this person the Comms Coordinator. This individual may be part of the core management team or not: what is essential is that he or she:

- knows what's going on especially at top levels of the organization/project, so that any significant changes in project direction can be adequately reflected in the communication strategy
- has some budget (financial and human resources) for the activities
- is credible and able to influence decision makers, if necessary, in order to get things done

The Straight A Steps to building a Communication Strategy

The diagram below shows the steps involved in creating a strategy. The starting point should always be APPRAISAL of the current situation. If you are developing a strategy from zero, you will not have any results to appraise, but you should nonetheless consider the operating environment, identifying external opportunities and threats that will impact on your communication activities. Once this short context analysis is completed, you may begin defining the AIMS of your communication strategy.



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AIMS

Communication does not exist in a vacuum: your communication AIMS are closely related to the objectives of the project itself, and communication tools and techniques are used to help you meet your overall objectives. The participation of key project personnel is vital for defining AIMS and, with all present, a half-day discussion/brainstorming session should be more than adequate to come with a written list of three or four key communication objectives and their relative priorities.

Defining project objectives

Before thinking about communication objectives, start with the overall project aims and their priorities. Answer the question: *what is this project trying to achieve*? This need not necessarily be exactly what was written in the project proposal. Be concise and concrete: “Get people to install intelligent water meters” is much better than “To enhance environmental sustainability through the empowerment of householders and engaging with the private sector”. Narrow it down to a few key objectives since this will enable you to focus on just those and to judge your performance against them. Long lists and obscure missions and vision statements are not conducive to critical appraisal later.

From Project Objectives to Communication Objectives

Once this has been answered, with three or four key objectives, ask the question: *how can I use communication to achieve these objectives*? Often, the project objectives already reference communication-type goals, such as “raise awareness about…” and “build a network of…”. These can be the basis of defining communication objectives. Otherwise, broad categories may include:

- Project image: a sort of ‘corporate’ image, promoting the project itself (but also consider what image you want to project)
- Linked to the point above, enhancing the visibility of donors and/or project sponsors
- Awareness-raising: educating groups of people about the issues at stake
- Information exchange: disseminating information to groups of people and becoming an information ‘hub’ for exchange between the groups

Key messages

Consider also the (two or three) **key messages** you want to get across in all activities and materials, for example, the innovative nature of the project, or that the ultimate aim is to improve quality of life for town- and city-dwellers.

Your communication aims should be detailed enough to be specific to the project, and – in an ideal world – to permit quantitative measurement. In practice, it is easier to set quantifiable objectives for individual activities, rather than the overall communication strategy. If you can set measurable objectives, do. Even if they are unrealistic the first time round (i.e. when you are defining the initial strategy) they can be fine-tuned once you’ve been through the whole Aims – Appraisal cycle.

AUDIENCE

Once you have defined your AIMS, the next step is to decide who you need to communicate with in order to achieve them. This is your target AUDIENCE, or rather your target audiences, since there will likely be different groups of people you need to consider.

Forget Stakeholders!

The main hurdle you are likely to encounter here can be summed up in one word: “stakeholders”. People are always talking about their stakeholders - talking to them, engaging them, meeting them, taking into account their needs… - without actually saying, or perhaps even knowing, who exactly they are. In order to work on the AUDIENCE step, you need to banish this word from your head. It’s not enough, so it’s not useful. “Beneficiaries” is another such word: forget it!

Defining target AUDIENCES can usefully be a group activity or one that the Comms Coordinator can work on and then share/discuss with the rest of the team to get their feedback and buy-in. The question to ask is: *given my project and communication AIMS, who do I need to be in contact with in order to achieve them*?

Look up, look down, look sideways

One approach you might find useful is to:

- **look up** : your project sponsor/donor is a key target, firstly because that’s who pays the bills and wants to see some results, and secondly because they may be useful facilitators in getting your message to an even broader audience. If your project involves government or other authorities, they might also be a target. If they project foresees a ‘next step’ after your activity finishes (e.g. if your part is planning and the next step is implementation) it may be a good idea to identify potential sponsors/donors and get them in the loop sooner rather than later
- **look down** : direct and indirect beneficiaries of your services, local partners you may use for project activities, the public at large, their representatives (civil society, associations, NGOs), the media (as recipients of information and as channels to reach others)
- **look sideways** : project partners, other organizations and projects working in the same area geographically or thematically. All of these may be target audiences, both for ‘push’ communication (informing them of your activities) and for ‘pull’ (encouraging participation, building networks of like-minded people for information exchange etc.)

Your task here is to produce a list of all of the groups of people you should be talking to in order to meet your communication - and indirectly, your project – objectives. For each group, identify whether your aim is to simply provide them with materials and information: ‘push’, whether you want to engage them in information exchange, networking or collaborating: ‘pull’.

Recipients, Influencers and Partners

Another approach is to divide these groups into three categories: **Recipients**, who will simply receive whatever you messages send them; **Influencers**, who can also help your message get through to

Recipients; and **Partners**, organizations who share one or more of your objectives and target groups, and who could potentially work with you to mutually reinforce each other's messages.

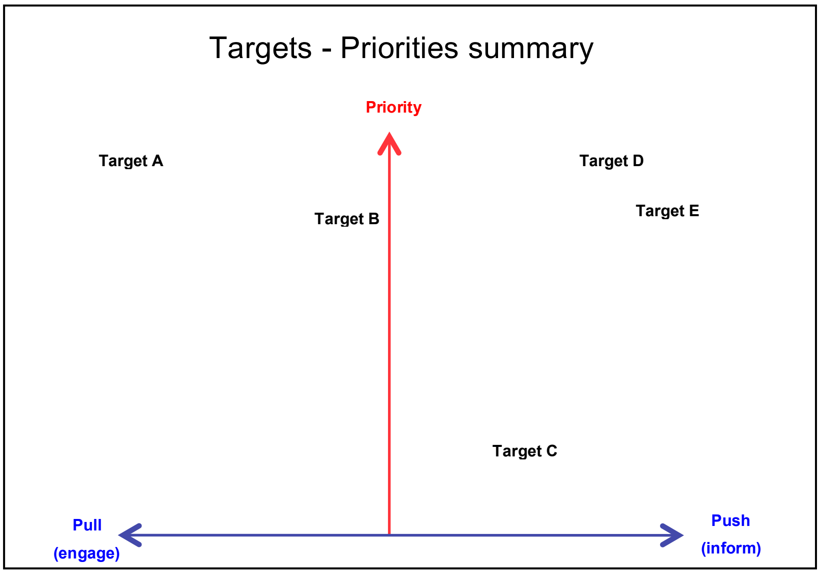
Audiences should be prioritized. The question to ask is: *how important are these people to meeting my objectives*? Remember, your communication resources, in terms of budgets but also in terms of basic human effort, are finite and you will have to direct your energies to those audiences who will provide most payback.

Be ruthless and if necessary politically incorrect: institutions may play a role in your project and they may be influential generally but in your particular case their role might be marginal. If so, they are not a key audience for the project. They are still on your horizon, just not at the centre of the picture.

You have probably identified certain target groups that are very similar to others, in terms of their role and the priority you have assigned them. If they also have similar 'media habits' – we'll see more of this below, but for now just consider questions such as 'do they read the same types of newspapers? use the internet and email? attend workshops and conferences?' – if they have similar characteristics in these areas, you can group them together. In order to be able to focus our attention on them, it is best to avoid having too many different target groups, ideally no more than 5.

Visualizing your target groups

You might like to plot your target groups against priority and the type of communication you want to engage with them – push or pull. The diagram below gives an example of this type of visualization. Again, this is an easy tool to help you focus your efforts. When you come to defining your actions, you will be able to see, at a glance, whether or not all of your target groups are considered and whether or not your actions reflect your priorities and the type of relationship you need to have with your target groups.



Be creative about visualizing this and other outputs of your communication strategy: it will make it much easier to share these outputs with your colleagues.

AVENUE

Once you have defined your target audiences, the next step is to decide what the best way to get in contact with them. These are your channels, the 'avenues' open to you to reach your audience, which may include traditional media (the press, television) and 'marketing' mechanisms (direct mail, emailing, flyers) as well as direct person-to-person channels (seminars, workshops, conferences).

Your Communication Strategy will include a variety of 'avenues'. The ones you choose will depend largely on your budget (ALLOCATION) and the habits of your primary target audiences. Your objective will be to determine the most effective, and the most cost-effective, ways of contacting your target audiences. For example, seminars and workshops are a very effective tool for building and consolidating relationships with key targets. They are often used as the method of choice in Development projects, especially where high-level and influential figures are involved. However, they are very expensive, when you take into account event organization, travel, accommodation, venues, per diems etc. Moreover, in order to maximize the value of this investment, the momentum created at an event must be maintained after it, using other forms of communication. In many cases this is not done and the lasting impact is nowhere near as strong as it could - and should - be.

You will need to find the best mix of *avenues* for your particular target *audiences* in order to meet the communication *aims* you have, and this is one reason why an overall strategy is particularly important, rather than focusing simply on individual activities. Let's look now at a range of avenues that can be used for communicating project messages, starting with the most direct contact (at the 'pull' end of the spectrum) and ending with purely 'push' channels.

Workshops, seminars and conferences

These are useful for establishing and nurturing relationships with small numbers of high priority targets. They are a 'pull' tool, used to engage your targets, rather than just pass a message on to them. Because of their cost, they should be impeccably organized to maximize returns.

Workshops provide a great 'sales opportunity' for you and your project. You probably don't have any products to sell, but you can use this opportunity to 'sell' ideas: the very positive things your project is doing; the relevance of the issues you address; your openness to partnership… in short, the key messages you have defined as central to your Communication efforts and strategy (see *From Project Objectives to Communication Objectives, page 8*).

It stands to reason that if there is something to sell, there should also be a sales force. All of the team present at the event, including administrative staff involved in registration and the like, are potential sales representatives. All should be familiar with your key messages and fully able to represent your project and to present it in a positive light.

Workshops and seminars should, as far as possible, be interactive occasions, with active participation from the attendees. “Break-out” sessions where smaller groups gather to focus on specific areas will improve their engagement, reinforce the impression of achievement and make the occasion more memorable. Forward planning will help you achieve this, notably by:

- Having a focused and/or themed agenda and circulating it well in advance
- Inviting – as far as possible - only relevant people to attend
- Asking attendees to present something – not necessary a formal presentation, perhaps examples or case studies from their own environments
- Having separate working sessions. Break-out rooms and the like will help engage the participants, enabling them to form closer relations with your organization and other attendees in a more intimate setting than a plenary session

During workshops and seminars, try to ensure that each attendee has at least a brief conversation with at least one person from your project who knows who they are. This means ensuring your entire team is familiar with the participant list, knows who the key players are and why, and is able to strike up some sort of conversation with them. You might like to ‘distribute’ attendees between the team in a more targeted fashion, based on common interests and/or perceived importance (hierarchy). Remember, informal settings (coffee breaks, lunches etc.) are great for face-to-face communication.

Workshops are ideal networking opportunities and much of the perceived value of such an event for the attendees will stem from the people they were able to meet (other attendees as well as your team) and the exchanges they were able to take part in.

In areas where the postal system functions poorly, events might be the only chance you have to distribute written materials (brochures, flyers, publications) and gadgets. Remember to have an ample supply of all such materials with you. Always follow EU visibility guidelines, with relevant logos on all invitations, presentation materials etc. and may suggest displaying a flag at the event itself (normally in conjunction with the national flag of the country in which the event is being held).

Virtual networking

Used carefully, new technologies enable you to achieve high levels of engagement in your target audiences over a long period of time at a relatively low cost. One pre-requisite is, naturally, use of email and the Internet. Not all of your targets may be assiduous users or have a reliable connection to the Internet. The situation is improving, however, and these are tools that you may find very useful.

By virtual networking, we mean enabling people to communicate in a group without actually being face to face. This needn’t mean having expensive software or systems. A simple mailing list on specific themes can be highly effective and its running cost is negligible.

The key to this, and really all targeted communication activities, is a decent contact list. Your project probably has a wealth of contacts, but all too often these are in people's heads, in their private address books, on their individual PCs or in piles of business cards in their top drawers. Now is the time to get them all together in one place in a standard, useful format that everyone can access and everyone should be encouraged to maintain. A spreadsheet is perfectly adequate for most needs.
Minimally, you need to track:

- Name
- Position/Responsibility
- Organization
- Email address
- Telephone
- Role for your project (receiver/influencer/partner/key decision maker…)

Use this list to manage regular contact, whether by phone or email, with your audiences, on themes that are of specific interest to them. Try to identify 'inclusive' themes, based on specific issues (e.g. energy technologies, sustainable construction) or on more project matters. For example, you can involve 'partners' in the preparation of materials or in planning a conference, emailing them with updates at each stage and asking for their feedback. Demonstrate their importance by taking their feedback into account (if it is reasonable, of course).

Internet forums are a very difficult instrument. Don't be fooled by how easy it is technically to create a forum – you can do it in about 10 minutes - they require a massive effort to promote and manage. Consider using forums only if:

- you have dedicated resources who will moderate the forum, create content and, most importantly, stimulate others to create content
- your targets are in countries where internet use is very widespread (not the developing world)
- they spend very large amounts of their working days on the internet (not most people)
- the topic is related to IT, music or cult movies

… which pretty well rules out forums as a useful tool.

Electronic Newsletters

Electronic newsletters are relatively cheap and easy to prepare. In their simplest form, a simple e-mail can give interested parties a regular update of your activities. More complex forms, a document with articles and pictures formatted in an aesthetically pleasing layout (normally converted to pdf format for distribution), should be well within the reach of most Communication and Outreach departments. Microsoft Office provides some newsletter templates, although you might need to download these from the Microsoft website.

You can distribute your newsletter either as an email attachment or make it available for download on your website (in which case you should send an email telling your contacts that it is now available and including a link to the download page). Both methods have advantages and disadvantages: in the first case users don't have to do anything – they receive it in their inboxes without the effort of going to a website, but if it's a big file and they have a small mailbox, that might not be a good thing. In the second case, you will be driving more traffic to your website, and possibly encouraging users to visit other areas of the site, but perhaps not everyone will make the effort to go.

Websites

Websites are normally used as a 'push-only' instrument, a sort of online brochure. Even in such a limited capacity, they are useful: people can access information about you and your project without having your brochure to hand and the information can be updated as frequently as you like much more easily than printed material. Here are a few basic rules for websites:

- The website name (URL) should be as short, memorable and descriptive as possible. If your pages are inside a larger website, try to ensure your pages are clearly "sign-posted" from the home page and easy to get to.
- Ensure all printed materials, email signatures etc. include the website link (direct to your pages)
- If you are developing a new website (and therefore responsible for the design) make 'usability' your prime objective:
  - Avoid using a lot of images and anything that will make the pages slow to load. This is particularly important in regions of the world where internet access is slow
  - Ensure the information is organized a logical way that makes it easy for users to find what they want in as few 'clicks' as possible
  - Make sure the graphic design of the site is consistent with your other materials and follows any applicable visibility guidelines
  - Use readable fonts and easy-to-read colours (e.g. black or dark blue on white)
  - Avoid wallpaper backgrounds, preferring plain white, which aids reading
  - Keep sentences and paragraphs short for anything which is meant to be read on-screen (not the case for documents to be downloaded and printed)
- If a specialist agency to build your website, you will have to instruct them clearly on content and its organization. When choosing an agency, ask for a list of sites they have developed and visit each one to get an idea of the 'user experience'.

If you are hoping to have visitors return to your website, you must give them good reasons to do so, such as frequent (and obvious) updates, and the availability of reports and other relevant content.

Use emails to inform your targets of significant updates (such as a new section or an important report that is now available for download), including a link to send them straight to the new item.

Remember that it is unlikely that all of your target groups will be assiduous users of the Internet. This is a useful tool, but only if used in conjunction with other more traditional communication channels.

Brochures, flyers and other 'marketing materials'

There is an expectation that all projects should have some sort of a brochure or flyer. Almost all projects produce one that normally ends up in a little-used filing cabinet or in a bin, without being read.

The most common mistake when putting together a brochure is to disregard the audiences the material is supposed to address, the sort of information they are likely to be interested in and the visual forms that are likely to catch their eye. Very often, project flyers or brochures simply reproduce what is written down in project proposals, with headings like "Vision", "Objectives" and content that is overly formal, theoretical and institutional. Typically inward-looking, often apparently more keen on pleasing the boss, rather than actually imparting any real messages, these materials are a waste of time, money and paper.

Brochures and flyers have a limited appeal. While some target audiences – partners especially – may expect to receive a brochure at introductory meetings, workshops and conferences, few of them will read them, also because people tend not to read very much generally. If you are targeting the general public it is not with a brochure, flyer or other written material that you will reach them.

When planning a flyer or brochure, consider exactly who you will give it to, and when. This will help you define the numbers required, how many in which languages (another common error is to produce an inordinate amount of materials in English, when the target population is overwhelmingly local) as well as the content (information and messages) to include.

Your flyer must differentiate itself clearly from the hundreds of other flyers they have been given. It must attract their attention for some reason. There is no such thing as the perfect brochure, and appreciation is a matter of taste, but here are a few pointers you might find useful:

- Avoid very standard leaflet formats. The A4 folded in three is particularly closely associated with low cost and poor quality.
- Use clear, unambiguous language. Avoid buzzwords, acronyms, consultant-speak and bureaucratese.
- Use pictures, especially of people. These can be people in a work context, but should not be limited to "men in suits". Photos of real people lend warmth to any paper materials.
- Use colours, but also plenty of white space. This makes reading easier as well as being more pleasing to the eye.
- When presenting numbers, use charts and graphs to illustrate what you are saying.
- Include an "institutional" part (who we are) but don't make it the focus of the entire flyer.
- Focus on activities, what you really do and the value of you work (to ordinary people) rather than obscure statements like "missions" and "visions". Be concrete.
- Use real examples, cases and quotes to illustrate your activities.

- Try telling a story. This can be very simple (In the beginning there was this problem. We came up with a possible solution, which is… We've been working with…. This has changed the lives of … In the future we hope to …) The beginning and the end of the story have to be good.
- Always "test-run" brochure or flyer text by getting at least four people who do not work with you to read it.
- Use a good agency or professional to work on the layout.

Posters

Posters that use strong visuals to get across simple messages can be very effective, as long as intelligent ways are found to ensure they are distributed widely enough to ensure reasonable returns on the design and printing investment. This can be quite a hefty sum, since they need to be carefully and professionally designed.

Mugs, key-rings, plaques, T shirts and other gadgets

While there may be an expectation on the part of certain institutional partners to receive some token present from the project, in our view gadgets such as these have little or no communication value.

Publications

Project publications are a useful way of giving certain target groups – especially peer projects, international organizations and researchers – more in-depth knowledge about your project's activities. Unless the publication has proven widespread appeal, generally it is not cost-effective to produce and distribute bound paper copies of reports, research papers and publications. The internet allows us to distribute these more effectively with much better use of resources. One exception to this can be a final publication which documents the results and lessons learned of the project and is distributed in person to key project partners, perhaps at a closing event.

Publications are often boring, but there is no need for this to be the case. The use of clear language, due care in the layout, and an intelligent use of colour, photos and illustrations can turn a good report into an excellent one.

Documentaries

Project documentaries tend to be very boring, full of "men in suits", overly focused on "who we are" and not "what we do". In theory, project documentaries should "document" projects and occasionally they do this and are appreciated by the entities that sponsored the activities. However, rarely is a project documentary watched by anyone except in a situation of force, such as a conference or a workshop, where the viewer could not get up and go out even if he or she wanted to.

If the aim is to have a product someone would choose to watch, have the documentary made by top-notch professionals. You will provide the base input, including analysis of the target groups you wish to address, and contribute to the creative effort. The pointers given for brochure preparation, especially those related to "humanizing" the products, may also be useful for documentaries.

Choose the agency very carefully, after viewing similar products they have made for other organizations. Good agencies normally charge large amounts of money. If you want to make the most of that money, take the advice the agency offers. They will steer you towards something that has wider general appeal and away from an excessively institutional feel. Unless you have a very large budget to work with, documentaries should rarely be contemplated.

Newspapers and magazines

If people read anything, it is normally the printed media. Developing and nurturing a good relationship with correspondents of important national and sometimes local press outlets is a very good investment of time. Despite claims to the contrary, our experience is that monetary investments are never an issue in good communication (as distinct from propaganda).

There should never be any need to pay a journalist to write the truth. If you have an interesting and compelling story to tell about an issue that is of interest to the newspaper's readers, it is in the newspaper's interest to publish it. First and foremost, a newspaper cannot get to the newsstand if it is not full of words. People will not buy newspapers that are not full of content they find interesting. And newspapers cannot sell advertising space if the paper has no readers.

The first step to building a relationship with key journalists is finding out who they are, and how they can be contacted. Press databases need not be more complex than a simple spreadsheet, but they should be reviewed regularly for changes. Many journalists are freelancers and change publication quite frequently. The journalists you choose to keep in touch with will depend on the newspapers read by your target audiences. Some will be more influential than others and priority should be given to those that most closely reflect the audiences and the subject areas you are interested in addressing.

Once you have established contact with journalists, you might like to organize a *press briefing*. This is essentially an introduction to your project, given only to journalists. Materials - both project materials and related background reading, reports etc. - should be prepared beforehand to give the journalists all of the information they need to deepen their knowledge about the project and its area of activity. Key project personnel should be available for questions.

Press briefings can be organized periodically, every 6 months, for example, or when there are particularly important milestones that have been reached, activities completed etc. Otherwise, continuous contact – a monthly telephone call – will be greatly appreciated.

Press releases, although important, are not enough. When issuing a press release, again ensure the language is clear and unambiguous. In general terms, press releases should be no more than one A4 page long and contain:

- A self-explanatory title
- The date of issue, or for publication
- An introductory paragraph summarizing the main points of the release
- Successive paragraphs with more detail
- Specific indication of any action required (e.g. attendance at an event, registration on a website). If announcing an event, include date, time and venue details, and specify whether or not journalists are invited to attend (and if so for the whole event or just part of it)
- Press officer details, including email and cell phone
- A three or four-line 'who we are' of the project and any other organization referenced in the press release. This should be in small print at the bottom of the press release. It should be standardized for use in every single release issued.

A phone call prior to sending a press release will ensure better results. Similarly, a 'thank you' phone call to journalists who published an article based on your press release will be much appreciated and will ensure better results over time.

As far as possible, use the "copy and paste" technique, i.e. write the press release in such as way as to permit the journalist, should he so desire, to publish it as it is, or with only minor wording changes. In some cases, a press release can be supplemented by a more in-depth paper on what ever it is you want to be covered. Again, it will pay you to "write" the article yourself. Do not be afraid to send the piece to more than one journalist. The same article can be "recycled" many times in different publications over a period of time without anyone caring, or even noticing.

Television & Radio

Television is likely to be a medium used by most or all target groups. Although TV News journalists can be treated the same way as press journalists, unless something very major happens, it is unlikely your project will ever end up on the TV news. The exception to this is local TVs that may be interested in a local event and give it coverage. Television is not an easy medium to penetrate for projects. Non-music radio is perhaps slightly easier, with a larger percentage of high quality discussion programmes (that might include discussions on your particular area of interest) than television.

The key to working with television and radio is to work with them. This may sound obvious, but some projects produce documentaries and expect television companies to air them, perhaps after paying a small sum of money. This is not likely to happen and, even if it does, is not useful. It makes more sense to contact TV journalists who make discussion-type programmes on themes close to those you want to address. Make them aware of your activities, the issues involved and how they relate to the people who typically watch his or her television programme. This can lead to invitations to appear on a TV debate about an issue, or even full-length programmes about a particular subject. It is the TV production company that makes the programme, based on the producer's experience and knowledge of his or her audience, and your project can guide him or her as to how to treat the subject matter.

ALLOCATION

Resources are always finite and will always constrain the activities we would like to implement. It is important that these finite resources are allocated in such a way as to maximize their returns. Whatever the budget available to a project, it should be used cost effectively, but intelligently. If something is worth doing, it is worth doing properly. 5000 copies of a useless brochure are worth less than 10 copies of a useful one. Projects are "expected" to produce certain materials (e.g. a flyer or brochure, a website) and to organize workshops and other similar events. Financial resources are required for these and are normally allocated as part of the overall project budget. Many of the most effective communication activities – e.g. press/media relations and one-to-one meetings – require little or no financial support.

While some budget is needed, finances are by no means the most important factor; human resources are a much more crucial factor. Communication, knowledge management and information sharing are strategic management functions that can positively impact project outcomes. They are horizontal services that support all vertical project functions (departments, sectors etc.) in the same way as "Human Resource" or "Finance & Admin" do. It is surprising therefore that few projects have a specific Communication function, or even one person whose responsibility it is to manage these activities.

The person we have called the "Comms Coordinator" should be internal to the project and that he or she should possess three key attributes:

- **Competence**
- **Creativity**
- **Common sense**

Every project should have such as person, dedicated to defining a coherent plan for the project's information, communication and knowledge sharing activities and ensuring the plan is implemented. He or she need not be a very senior figure, although previous experience in marketing/communication is undoubtedly an asset and the capacity to interact meaningfully and on an equal footing with the vertical project functions is essential.

A project with very limited financial resources and competent human resources will perform its communication activities much more effectively than a project with no dedicated human resources and virtually unlimited financial resources. Both human and financial resources will determine the activities that can be planned and implemented. Individual activities should be costed in financial terms and also take into account the human resources required to implement them. The mix of activities chosen will be constrained by the resources available. It is important therefore that whoever is planning communication activities be fully aware of the financial resources available and the willingness of project staff to be involved in these activities.

ACTIVITIES

This is where most projects start, focusing on the perceived need to "do something", whether it be producing brochures, sending press releases or organizing a conference.

Choosing activities creatively

Activities can indeed be divided into broad categories:

- "Image": brochures, templates, headed paper and the like
- Press relations: development and management of press/media contacts and processes for feeding them information
- Workshops, seminars and conferences
- Online activities

However, spontaneous ideas, suited to the specific context and the fruit of the knowledge and experience of the project team, will often give better results. For example, a poster campaign on local buses or the metro, with energy-saving ideas from public transport to light-bulbs. Contacts with the Transport department in the Municipality could ensure free space, meaning the cost to the project would be limited to designing and printing the posters. Such a campaign could reach large numbers of commuters, identified as a priority target group for the project's awareness-raising activities.

Activities with Partners

Partners are organizations that share one or more of your project's objectives and address one or more of the same target populations. It makes sense to design activities that can be carried out together: the messages will be mutually reinforcing and the very fact of doing something together helps the bonding between the two organizations. Make the most of your partners, focusing (as you would with any other target group) on what benefits accrue to them from a joint activity.

AIDA

AIDA is an acronym borrowed from marketing, one of the simplest and most commonly used. It is just as useful to bear it in mind when selling ideas (raising awareness) as when selling washing powder.

- **A – attention** (I want to alert someone to the existence of something, e.g. project, issues)
- **I – interest** (I want that person to want to know more, e.g. this topic is relevant to ME)
- **D – desire** (I want that person to feel personally implicated in some way, e.g. I can do something)
- **A – action** (I want that person to actually do something, e.g. sort waste for recycling)

For each activity, we should be aware of what results we hope to achieve, whether A, I, D or A. This will guide us in terms of applicable messages to use, but will also enable us to better evaluate later whether or not the specific result was achieved.

Activities as the result of analysis

What is most important is that activities are not chosen automatically, following a predetermined order or checklist, but rather the mix chosen is the result of the analysis previously carried out on Aims, Audiences and Avenues, constrained by Allocation.

When identifying potential activities, the proponent should clearly state:

- What he or she is trying to achieve with this activity (Aims)
- What groups the activity addresses (Audience)
- What media will be utilized (Avenue)
- What resources will be required to implement the activity (Allocation)

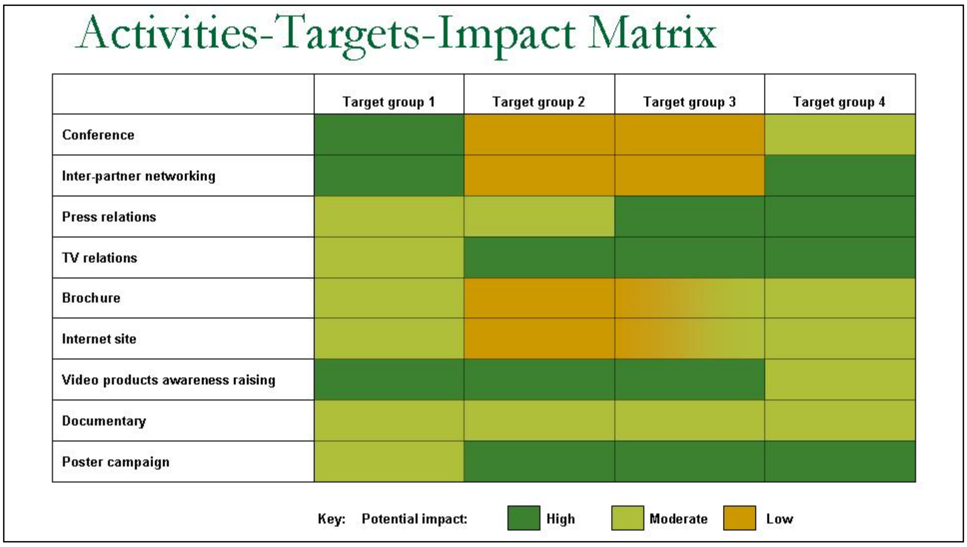
There should be coherence in particular between *Audience* and *Avenue* and this, combined with the extent to which the *Aims* are achieved, will largely determine the probable **impact** of the activity on the target group(s).

Activity selection should be based on these qualitative criteria before verifying the feasibility from a financial perspective. Indeed value-for-money, that is the probable impact compared to the financial resources needed, is often better considered not at the level of individual activities, but when determining the overall activity mix.

The Activity-Audience-Impact matrix

When selecting activities to implement, the overall objective is to choose a mixture of activities that will allow the project to reach its key audiences through whatever avenues are applicable and naturally within the project's financial constraints. Preference should be given to high-impact activities, generally those that are most targeted, but the imperative is to ensure all key groups are covered.

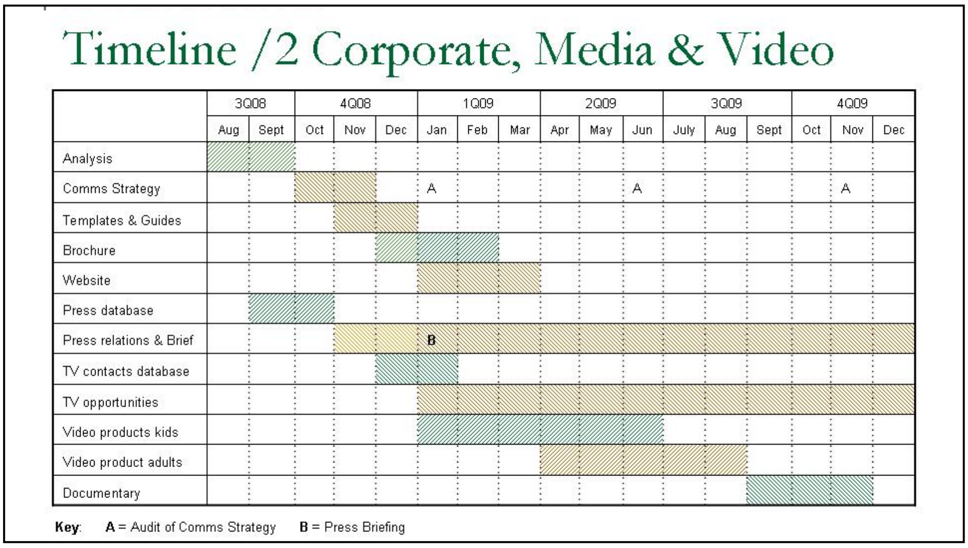
One useful tool for this is the Activity-Audience-Impact Matrix, an example of which is shown below. Individual activities are plotted against the key target groups to be reached and an indication of the expected impact of each activity on each target is colour-coded.



Visualizing the anticipated coverage of activities in this way helps ensure all audiences have been considered and means of reaching them are included in our plan. This is true even if financial constraints mean some activities have to be dropped.

Timelines

Time is another constraint. Some activities will make sense if implemented at a certain stage of the project's lifecycle. For example, there is little use in producing a project brochure or awareness raising materials at the end of the project. Activities should therefore be inserted into a planner. This can be a simple calendar produced with a spreadsheet or a more advanced planning tool such as Microsoft Project. Whatever the tool, a timeline is vital for planning and managing communication activities. A sample timeline is shown below.



Dates can and do shift, so it is important to revisit the plan on a regular basis.

APPRAISAL

It is not always easy to evaluate communication, information and knowledge sharing activities. Who is to say if a brochure is effective or not? It is often a subjective qualitative decision. Feedback can, and should be requested, for even relatively subjective matters. Possibly not brochures, but certainly internet services can benefit from in-depth user feedback.

There are different levels of appraisal to consider. The first is appraisal of individual activities. Very often, measurable goals can be set for activities such as press relations (number of articles published per month) and conferences (number of attendees). Such indicators of success/impact should be set during definition of the activity itself.

Individual activities that are continuous, such as a website or media relations, should be monitored periodically over time, monthly or once every two months. Those that are one-offs, such as conferences and workshops, should be evaluated at the end of each activity. Where a change in attitude is an aim of the activity, this should be measured, normally using a questionnaire, before and after the activity. Where possible, monitoring should include quantitative and qualitative indicators.

The second level of appraisal is for the mix of activities chosen and their contribution to achieving project goals. A review or audit of the strategy itself is a useful activity that should take place every six months roughly. As well as activities that may have been more or less successful than anticipated, conditions may have changed, priorities may also have been altered.

When attempting to set up a monitoring and evaluation process for communication and information activities, it is advisable to work with the M&E expert of the project. He or she will be familiar with developing both quantitative and qualitative indicators.

Quantitative appraisal

Some things are easy to measure, if the tools are in place to measure them.

- Website statistics:
  Website statistics require a special programme, called a web log analyzer, to be installed on the server hosting the site.
  - Number of unique visitors per day
  - Page views per visitor
  - Number of sites linking to your site
  - Geographical origin of visitors (not always very precise)
- Press/media relations:
  Media coverage can be monitored by reviewing the press, which is a time consuming process, but journalists normally contact you to tell you when something is to be published.

- Number of press releases issued
- Number of interviews requested/given
- Number of articles published
- Number of press briefings/conferences held
- Number of participants
- Creation or not of press database
- Number of relevant contacts made

- Workshops, conferences and other events
  Quantitative measurement of events is much less useful than qualitative feedback from the attendees.
  - Number of attendees
  - Number of guest speakers

Qualitative appraisal

Tools for soliciting feedback include questionnaires or surveys and focus groups. Focus groups are not normally used, except informal ones, made up of "friendly" partners. Their value is limited and in most cases the cost associated with setting up true focus groups outweighs their value to a project.

Questionnaires can be used in person (for attendees evaluating an event, for example) by mail, by email or online. Those delivered in person have a higher rate of return and thus are more representative of the target population. However, even when this is not possible, questionnaires can provide useful feedback to evaluate and improve a service.

Surveys or questionnaires should be carefully designed to ensure the right questions are asked in the right way, depending on what it is you want to find out (e.g. levels of satisfaction with a particular service, as opposed to attitudes before and after an awareness-raising event). An M&E expert should be able to provide useful input on questionnaire design, taking care not to make the questionnaire too long and cumbersome and achieving a balance between closed (yes/no, 1/2/3/4/5 etc.) and open questions (e.g. how do you think this event could have been better?) .

After designing a questionnaire, it is always advisable to test it a few times. The professional/social/cultural characteristics of the 'guinea pigs' should be as close as possible to those of the target population.

It gets better!

Identifying indicators and evaluating performance is a complex business, even with the help of a Monitoring & Evaluation expert. It is well worth doing, however, and it is a skill that improves over time, and over successive iterations of the communication strategy process. Specific goals, even those that initially are far from realistic, are better than no goals at all because they force you to consider your performance.

The measured outcomes of the different activities and the overall approach taken feed into new, better defined objectives (Aims), highlight the need for reduced or increased attention to one or more target groups (Audiences), show that one Avenue or another works particularly well and should be used more widely, and remind you that your financial resources are getting ever more scarce and can perhaps be used better.

You are now ready to start the process all over again!