

Research Impact Masterclass Series: No 2

Writing a communications plan for funding success

WORKBOOK

KUDOS 





Course tutor:
Melinda Kenneway,
CEO, KUDOS
www.growkudos.com

Topics:

1. What do we mean by communication?
2. What are the key elements of a communications plan?
3. How to write an effective communications plan.
4. How to evaluate your success.

By the end of this short course you will be able to:

- ✓ Understand different types of communication.
- ✓ Understand the main elements of a communications plan.
- ✓ Be able to write a communications plan.
- ✓ Measure your communications effectiveness.

What is communication?

Definition:

Two-way process of reaching mutual understanding, in which participants not only exchange (encode-decode) information, news, ideas and feelings but also create and share meaning.

Business Dictionary

ONE WAY ("push")	TWO WAY ("pull")
<p>PASSIVE</p> <p>Dissemination Share Distribution</p>	<p>PASSIVE</p> <p>Outreach Exchange Transaction</p>
<p>ACTIVE</p> <p>Transfer Translation Mobilization</p>	<p>ACTIVE</p> <p>Engagement Co-creation Exploitation</p>

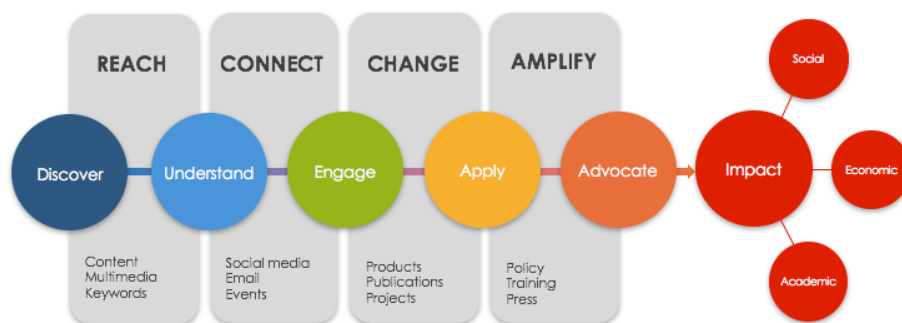
One-way ("push") communications: information that is broadcast with limited direct response or interactions expected.

Two-way ("pull") communications means your information is designed to attract audiences to you for some form of exchange.

Passive communications are limited to basic transfer and exchange of information.

Active communications are intended to accelerate understanding and uptake.

Research Mobilization from awareness to impact



by KUDOS 

Exercise 1: consider the research mobilization model outlined above. With an objective of changing policy (impact), work through each of the four phases outlined above to explain how you would encourage progression through each stage – reach, connect, change, amplify.

**What is
communication?**

What is a communications plan?

An effective communications plan anticipates **what information** will need to be communicated to **specific audience segments**.

The plan should also address who has the authority to communicate and **how information should be disseminated** (email, websites, printed reports, and/or presentations).

The plan should define **what communication channels** will be used both for dissemination and to solicit feedback.

Finally the plan should address how communication will be documented, and **measured**.

A typical structure for a communications plan would be:

1. Strategy
2. Goals (SMART)
3. Target audiences
4. Messaging
5. Activity
6. Channels
7. Timing
8. Evaluation

Your plan may be divided over several phases of your project – set up, building interest, publication, post-publication, post project etc.

Example communications plan template

Communications Plan Template

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY
Summarize your communications strategy here - internal vision, aim and objectives. Consider what success would look like and use that as a tool to plan backwards from that. Also consider the audiences and stakeholders you want to reach and their specific information needs and preferences. Is there an overall 'positioning' you can focus your messaging around - a simple articulation of why your research matters?

COMMUNICATION GOALS (SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely)

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-
-

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Phase	Audience	Activity	Message	Channel	Who?	Schedule	Cost	Measurement
Pre-req	Policy makers	Policy briefing		Webinar		1.1.20		x attendees
Pre-publication	Industry	Industry newsletter		Email		1.6.20		Opened by 5% of sends
Publication	Media	Press release		Eureka Alert		1.8.20		Coverage in X, Y, Z
Post-publication	Academia - UK	Peer reviewed article		Journal of X		24.9.20		x views
Post-project	Educators - USA	Video		Project website		4.3.21		x views

**What is a
communications
plan?**

Exercise 2: what are the benefits of writing a communications plan?



How to write an effective communications plan

Communications strategy

Overall vision, aim and objectives

For example, a vision might be to successfully create change in practices or policy.

See Mark Reed's definitions of impact:
<https://www.fasttrackimpact.com/what-is-impact>

Overall objectives might include:

- Promote awareness of the project
- Create opportunities for engagement/co-development
- Prepare a variety of information products
- Tailor communications for different audience needs
- Ensure information is accessible and credible

Target audiences

Prioritise most influential groups

- Think through the research mobilization model – reach, connect, change and amplify – who do you need to connect with, and at what point in your project?
- Target audiences typically include academics in the same field, academics in allied fields, industry, policy makers, media, educators and the public
- Consider 'internal' audiences too – your funder and university, project partners and so on
- Cover both *need* to know and *want* to know

How to write an effective communications plan

Communications goals

Specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, timely

For example:

- Create project website within 6 months
- Inform 75% of target group of findings by end Q4 2019
- Publish key results in top tier international journal by end Q1 2020
- Engage 20 companies in a discussion about exploitation of findings by end Q2 2020
- Build a circulation list for newsletter of 5,000+ amongst target audiences
- Achieve 100 requests for further information via website

Key messages

“Speak to everyone and you speak to no one”

- Consider stakeholder specific messages
- Does one group need to know something specific or different to others?
- Will the outcomes of your project be particularly important for certain individuals or groups?
- Do you need to adapt your language to assist with understanding?
- Can you condense down complexity into something simple and highly relevant for each group?
- Remember that ‘getting attention’ is the first step in winning an audience – start simply and introduce more complexity later

How to write an effective communications plan

Activities

Huge range of potential communication activities:

- Reports, briefs
- Videos and infographics
- Workshops and meetings
- Exhibition
- Publications and white papers
- Press releases
- Blogs
- Training
- TV, Radio, podcasts
- Newspaper and magazine articles
- Posters
- Apps

Channels

The method by which you undertake the activity:

- Social media
- Websites
- Face to face
- Webinars
- Email
- Events
- Direct mail
- Press and media
- Publications

“Go where your audience is”



How to write an effective communications plan

Exercise 3: think of a current or recent research project or initiative. Work through a high-level communications plan, detailing your overall strategy and objectives, target audiences, key messages, SMART goals and example activities and channels in support of this.

Activities

Individual communication activities

Results

Reach – total and frequency

Quality of relevance/reach (e.g. right audience, level of engagement)

Response/action

Outcomes

Awareness

Behaviour change

Attitude change

Application

Advocacy

How to evaluate your success

Activities/channels	Example Measurement
Email	Number sent, number opened (and open rate: % of sent); number of click-throughs (and click through rate: % of sent and % of open)
Twitter	Followers, likes, retweets and DMs
Project website	Views, unique views, unique visitors, time spent on site, requests for further information etc
Events	Size of audience, number of meetings, number of handouts taken etc
Slideshare	Views, shares, likes and downloads
Webinar	Number of registrations, number of attendees, requests for further information
Publications	Views, downloads, online attention (e.g. altmetric score), citations



Exercise 4: review the example communication activities you detailed in exercise 3 and describe what indicators would be helpful in evaluating the success of each activity and contribution to your overall goals.

**How to evaluate
your success**

Summary

- **Information can be conveyed in many forms** - verbal, written, audio, movement, pictures, data, symbols
- It can be sent and received - across a **multitude of channels** - websites, email, events, social media, publications, meetings, podcasts, broadcasts
- Between sending and receiving, there can be an exchange – often called '**engagement**', which is an important step towards impact
- **Communications lead to impact**, but are not in themselves impact
- To achieve impact it's necessary to **reach** and **connect** with audiences that can benefit from your research, who can then make the necessary **changes** and **advocate** those changes to create scaling impact
- Funders are increasingly expecting their research communities to demonstrate broad impact through effective communications – often recommending that **between 5-10% of a grant** is spent on this
- An effective communications plan anticipates **what information** will need to be communicated to **specific audience segments**
- The plan should define **what communication channels** will be used both for dissemination and to solicit feedback
- Finally the plan should address how communication will be documented, and **measured**
- **A typical structure** for a communications plan would be: strategy, goals (SMART), target audiences, messaging, activity, channels, timing, evaluation
- Your plan may be divided over **several phases** of your project – set up, building interest, publication, post-publication, post project etc.

Links and further reading

Books:

- Reed, M. S. [2018] The Research Impact Handbook
- Wilkinson and Weitkamp (2016) Creative Research Communication: Theory and Practice, Manchester University Press
- Bowater and Yeoman [2012] Science Communication: A Practical Guide for Scientists, Wiley
- Harris [2017] #SciComm – Communicating Science in a Digital Age

Links:

- <https://www.gov.uk/dfid-research-outputs/research-communication-insights-from-practice>
- <https://www.fasttrackimpact.com>
- <https://esrc.ukri.org/research/impact-toolkit/developing-a-communications-and-impact-strategy/>
- <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2018/06/11/the-right-messaging-should-be-the-cornerstone-of-your-research-communications-strategy/>
- www.rsc.org
- https://www.growkudos.com/about/research_groups

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