# **How to Create a Communications Plan**

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| Introduction | A Communications Plan identifies people with an interest in the project, the communication needs, and the methods of communication used to disseminate the information. |

## DETERMINE THE INFORMATION TO BE COMMUNICATED

1. **What issue is the most important?**  Determine the main message that needs to be communicated.
2. **What is the overall communication goal?** Determine the effect you want the information to have.

* Are you supplying information only?
* Are you initiating a change that requires action from the recipients?
* What type of information does the recipient need to receive?
* Ongoing status
* Strategy and vision
* Awareness
* Promotional
* Educational
* Informational
* How often does the recipient need to receive the information?
* As needed
* Daily
* Weekly
* Monthly
* Quarterly
* Annually
* If you have more than one type of recipient, do you have different communication goals for each type?

## IDENTIFY THE AUDIENCE

1. **Who is affected by the issue?** Determine who needs to receive the message.

* Are there secondary audiences besides the main message recipients?
* Is the secondary audience influenced by the primary audience?
* Audiences can be customers, users, vendors, managers, and stakeholders, or any combination of these.
* If there are multiple audiences, evaluate each audience separately.

1. **Will others influence your audience?** Determine what organizations or individuals influence the reception of the message; they may have a positive or negative influence.

* Use positive influencers as partners to disseminate the information.
* Target negative influencers and win their support of the message.

1. **What do you know about the audience?** Describe what you know about the intended audience.

* What is the audience’s attitude toward the issue to be communicated?
* What makes new information credible to the audience?
* Where does the audience receive new information from?
* What would motivate the audience to take action or support a change?

1. **Does the audience have resistance to the message?** List the resistance the audience has to the message.
2. **Are there benefits from the message for the audience?** List the benefits gained by the audience.

## COMPOSING THE MESSAGE

1. **Closely tie the message to your goals and objectives:**  The message you convey must deliver important information about the issue and should compel the audience to think, feel, or act.

* The message may be used to convey new facts, alter attitudes, change behavior, or encourage participation.

1. **Make the message clear and concise:**  The message must clearly convey ***only*** the intended information.

* Use as few technical terms as possible.
* Eliminate information that is not pertinent to the issue.
* Convey the message in 3 sentences.

1. **Make the message pertinent and credible to the audience.** The message must be perceived as directly affecting the audience. It must appear important and timely. Delivery must be via a source the audience finds credible or respectable.

* Relate the problem in terms relevant to the audience. State how it affects them.
* Provide a solution that is attractive to the audience. State the benefits of the message to them.
* Call on the audience to take the desired action. Tell them what you want them to do after receiving the message.

1. **Stress and repeat the main points of the message.**

* For communication to be effective, the audience must first receive the information and then understand what information is being presented to them.
* Communication needs to be received two to three times to be effective.

1. **Use a tone appropriate for the message.** The tone can be reassuring, alarming, challenging, or straight forward, depending on the desired impact to the audience.

## SELECTING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

1. **Where does the audience get information?** List the media where the audience receives information from.

* Newsletters
* Email
* Intranet
* Internet
* Postcards
* Briefings/Meetings
* Promotional Items
* Table Toppers
* Blogs/Bulletin Boards
* Events/Parties/Openings
* Fliers/Posters/Banners

1. **Which media does the audience find credible?** List the media the audience finds credible and rank it by perceived credibility by the audience.
2. **What are the costs associated with the media?** List the costs associated with the media used by the audience.
3. **What are the available funds for communication?** List the budgeted amount and any other available funds.
4. **Are there groups, organizations, or businesses that will provide funding for communication?** List any additional funding that may be available to distribute the message.

## CREATE A SCHEDULE

1. **Determine a timeline for the communication.**

* When does the message need to be distributed?
* What is the timeline for completing the communication?
* What are the deadlines for the media selected?
* Do materials or advertisements have to be created?
* Who will be creating the materials or advertisements?
* What is the timeline for completion?
* Does the message have to be reviewed and approved?

1. **Review schedule.**  Review the schedule with the project team and the sponsors.

## EVALUATE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

1. **Monitor and review the communications plan.** Use surveys, word of mouth, message boards, meetings, or other feedback techniques to determine the effectiveness of the plan.

* Is the audience receiving the communication?
* Is the message that is being delivered timely?
* Is the message understood by the audience?
* Is the audience responding to the message as intended?

1. **Alter and append the communications plan as needed.**

* Add or remove communication channels.
* Add or remove members from the audience.
* Change or restructure the message.
* Extend or shorten the timeline for completing the communication.
* Review the altered or appended communications plan with the project team and the sponsors.