

## Communications Plan

The first important thing to remember is that communications plans aren't complicated – in fact they should be really simple.

The next is that, to keep it simple, you should work your way through each section of your plan before making any decisions about the tools and channels you will use.

On the first page of your plan we recommend you include:

### **Communications plan overview:**

In most cases communication will not be the end result, but part of a wider activity. In a few brief sentences it is helpful to describe the overall context of the communications. This includes why communications are needed and what aspects of an overall activity they will support. Think of it as an overview for a busy executive – just to be sure that everyone agrees your communications will contribute.

### **Communications objectives:**

Three to five specific communications objectives should be at the forefront of your mind when you start to develop your communications plan.

These are not your strategic or business objectives, but the specific things your communications will deliver to support overall success.

You should be able to measure whether you have achieved your objectives. For example, measurements can focus on how many people are aware of your message (see below), whether your key audiences responded to a 'call to action', or perhaps whether something identified as a risk didn't happen – such as negative media coverage.

<complete your communications objectives here:>

- objective 1
- objective 2
- objective 3.

### **Key actions and dates**

This is not your complete plan, but gives a quick overview of the key milestones. It reassures colleagues that all essentials are covered and is linked to the objectives above. Don't try and complete this until you have worked through the rest of your plan.

To build your communications plan, work through the following stages then return and check your first page:

### **Summary**

This is the 'what' part of your plan. It should include the key areas where communications will have a role to play, and why. This might include opportunities or risks (see [Appendix 1](#)). It provides the overall purpose of the communication plan.

### **Key messages**

From the summary you can define the key messages. These will explain clearly:

- what is happening
- why it is happening
- what the benefits will be
- what will change as a result.

It is important to establish the key messages at the beginning. While the messages might need to be adjusted – or even be different – for each audience, you will always check back to these key messages to be sure that communications are consistent and clear.

Ideally you will also have a strategic communications plan and you will also refer to this to be sure that your key messages support the wider story you are telling.

### **Audiences**

The whole world doesn't need to know what's happening, so this section defines who the most important people are and why (see [Appendix 2](#)). For example, for a change communications plan, the key people could be employees who will be affected and/or will need to make the change happen. Key information for them will be what is happening internally, when, how it will affect them and how it should be explained to others.

There are likely to be several different audiences included in any communications plan. Their needs will be different so consider carefully what they should and will want to know.

You will find that a some people will be in several audience groups and you will need to think about how best to meet their needs without overloading them with communications.

### **Schedule**

Timing is really important. We recommend working backwards from what you need to achieve with each audience. Don't forget that people talk, so be careful about letting people know in the right order. You want them to hear from you before the grapevine gets to work. Don't forget about your follow-up communications too.

### **Budget**

There are likely to be costs involved. Regard your communication costs as part of the costs of delivering your project or campaign successfully. Get quotes in advance for services such as printing so that there aren't any surprises. Don't forget the cost of delivering your communications as well as materials. For example, if you need to write to all your customers (clients or service users) then include the cost of postage and stationery.

### **Measurements**

Make sure you are clear about how you will measure the success of your communications and when you will make these measurements. Ideally you will be able to tell everyone how well it went with a short update of progress. Build measurement and reporting into your communications plan.

## Appendix 1 – risk assessment

We recommend you spend some time thinking about the things that will affect your success. Even if something is unlikely to happen, include it in your risk overview.

Risks could include:

- negative comment
- key people not understanding their role
- people jumping to conclusions
- circumstances out of your control which could affect people's responses to your communications.

Communications can often help to minimise risks. At least you can be prepared about what to say in advance, if one of your identified risks does arise.

Keep your risk assessment under review and update it as often as you need to.

Your risk assessment could look something like the table below:

Risk ref no.	Date identified	Nature of risk	Level of risk (H/M/L)	Audiences	Mitigation	Commentary

## Appendix 2 – audiences

Audiences include people who can help or hinder your success. They should include essential decision-makers, people who are influential enough to affect outcomes and people who might be negative. In addition you should think about your partners and colleagues who might not be directly involved in your latest project or campaign, but who would expect to be kept informed.

The model below can help to identify who they are and their relative priority.

Remember, people might well appear in several places, because they have multiple roles. You will need to think carefully about how to meet their needs.

