



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

FROM PRODUCTS TO IMPACTS

A guide to enhance the value and impact of communications


MALIASILI INITIATIVES
INVESTING IN PEOPLE FOR NATURE

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ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

When done with purpose, strategy, and planning, communications can be a valuable asset for any organization. This module presents Maliasili Initiatives' approach to strategic communications and shares insights on, and methods for, the process. It may be of interest to organizations that want to strengthen their communications capacity in order to enhance their overall performance, and it was designed specifically for African civil society organizations working in the natural resources, land rights, and conservation sectors.

HOW MALIASILI SUPPORTS COMMUNICATIONS DEVELOPMENT

From fundraising to advocacy, communications has the potential to enhance the growth and performance of an organization. Yet, as is explained in this document, communications is a chronically underinvested feature within an organization, especially with small to medium sized organizations working in the natural resource sector in Africa. Therefore, it's not surprising that many of the organizations we work with identify communications as one of their weakest areas and one where they see Maliasili Initiatives' support as having the potential to lead to significant change for them as an organization.

In our experience we have also found that communications offers a unique entry point to working with an organization, and for this reason we often begin our communications support by helping an organization develop a flagship communications tool, such as revising their website, developing an organizational profile, or creating an annual report. This type of work allows us to quickly learn a lot about an organization while also helping us build trust with an organization by delivering a sound and often very useful product that the organizations can use for other purposes, such as fundraising or advocacy.

However, as this document sets out, we believe that for communications to be truly effective for an organization, they must shift their thinking and approach from simply creating one-off products to instead achieving clear goals and objectives. In turn, we encourage our partners to think more strategically about their communications and we offer support to them in doing this. From carrying out a communications audit, to facilitating the development of a communications strategy and plan, Maliasili Initiatives offers support to our partners to carry out all steps in this process (most of which are laid out in this document).

Finally, we offer communications coaching to partners who are interested and express a need for this type of support. Coaching is designed specifically based on the need of the partner, but often involves working closely with an organization's communication's lead to help build their capacity and implement their communications plans.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

AN OVERVIEW

Strategic communications align an organization's communications activities with its overall organizational goals, priorities and targets. It's the difference between seeing a product, such as a brochure, as your end result, rather than seeing such products as a component of achieving an outcome, such as a new and improved law or a more engaged and informed sector of society.

Strategic communication advances an organization's mission, engaging audiences with clear purpose and appropriate tools to achieve tangible impact.



VS



Organizational Strategic Plan

OPERATIONAL OR PROGRAMMATIC GOALS

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY & PLAN

FUNDING STRATEGY & PLAN

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY & PLAN

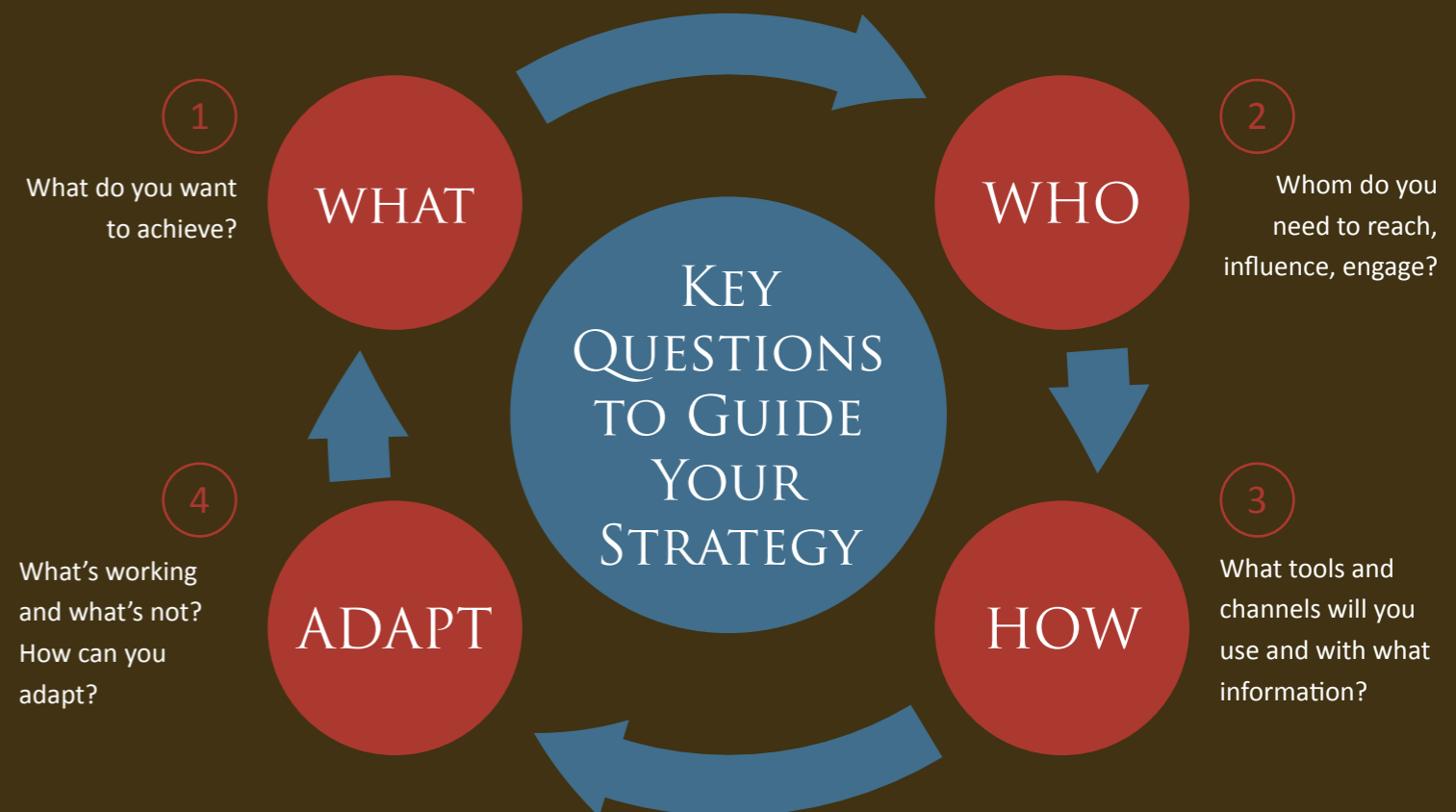
SUPPORTING STRATEGIES & PLAN BASED ON NEED

ANNUAL ORGANIZATIONAL WORKPLAN

Communications must add value to an organization, helping it achieve its mission, goals and targets. An organization's strategic or business plan is the foundation of a communications strategy as it sets out exactly what your organization is trying to achieve.

Above: The way an organization's strategic plan - its mission, goals, and targets - should inform all other supporting plans and actions across an organization.

The essence of strategy, whether for organization-wide purposes or more specific to communications, is making informed choices about how to best deploy one's resources to achieve a clear set of targets. To use those limited resources to achieve the maximum impact, you must consider your skills, assets, and the context in which you are working. Then you need to make difficult choices about where to invest your time and resources to achieve your goals.



In communications, this often means knowing what you are trying to achieve (your goals, objectives and targets); identifying the most important people (your target audiences) to engage/influence/educate in order to achieve those targets; understanding those audiences so you can effectively reach them (your tools and tactics) at the right time (your plan); and reviewing your progress (monitoring).

While aimed at organizational leaders and managers, communications officers, and fundraisers, this document may also be useful for project managers, board members and other staff members – and even to third-party funders and collaborators – all of whom can benefit from understanding the potential value of communications as this can enhance the overall performance and impact of an organization or initiative. This document represents our current thinking and codifies our approach to strengthening communications with our partners. It will evolve as we continue to learn and update our methods and tools.

FINDING THE VALUE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

Effective communications links to all aspects of organizational growth, impact and sustainability. Yet, communications is one of the most chronically underinvested areas for many organizations, particularly small field-based organizations facing numerous external and internal challenges.

There are a number of reasons for this lack of investment. First, many organizations don't make the connection between communications and other aspects of their work, such as fundraising, networking, and even programs, yet communications is vital to all of these organizational functions. Funders, clients, target beneficiaries, collaborators, and other relevant actors all need to understand an organization's value, impact, and influence so that they feel confident in their investment of time or resources. Partners and collaborators want to know why they should work with an organization – what it offers and what it can help them achieve. And constituents want to know that an organization is listening to them, that there is a platform for their voices to be heard, or that an organization has the connections or influence – something they don't necessarily have themselves – to bring about change. None of this can happen if an organization isn't effectively communicating with its target audiences.

Another reason communications is often overlooked in this field is that organizations assume people – e.g. donors, community members, politicians, journalists, NGOs, etc. – already do or should care about their work. The trouble with this assumption is two-fold. First of all, people may not know that they need to care about an issue if an organization isn't communicating what the problem – or what the solution – is. Secondly, even if people are aware of the issues, they are also aware of numerous other important issues and social causes. Effective communications can

Beyond technologies, organizations can get the most out of their communications in other ways, such as through collaborations, focusing on just one or two key issues, and by using what's available to them

help an organization connect with their target audiences, bring their issues to the forefront, and help people realize why they should care and take action.

Related to this is a general misconception about communications – that communications is a one-way flow of information. Certainly, there are times when an organization will want to use strategies to “push” information out to key audiences. For example, a land rights organization may produce a policy brief meant to inform key decision makers about contradictory land laws that are contributing to conflicts or land grabbing. The decision-makers may not have asked for this information, but for the organization to have an influence over land policies they need to make a strong case for change and they need to get that information into the right hands.

But organizations increasingly need to also focus on “pulling” target audiences in, meaning finding ways to engage with them, listen to them, build relationships with them, and respond to their needs. This type of communication may take the shape of a community forum where participants shape the agenda and dialogue; a radio program where listeners call in and share their stories; or an online crowdfunding campaign. When organizations start to see communications in this way, it also helps it feel less like marketing and sales and more like a necessary tool for achieving results and impact.

COMMUNICATIONS TO ENGAGE, LISTEN, AND LEARN

The Mwambao Coastal Community Network in Tanzania often uses participatory video (PV) as an entry point for engaging with a community. When they first begin working with a community, they train community members in film-making and production, and then let the community take the lead in producing a film about coastal issues that affect their community. It's an insightful learning experience, which also helps build trust between Mwambao and the community by allowing the community to tell its own story. The community-produced film can be used for awareness raising, capacity building, and advocacy.

Finally, for small-to-medium sized organizations operating with limited human and financial resources, communications can seem out-of-reach due to the perceived time and expense required. In Africa, language and infrastructure can also represent a significant barrier. But today new technologies have revolutionized the way we communicate and have leveled the playing field. For example, now even the smallest of organizations can have an international presence and voice thanks to the internet and social media. While these technologies are often free or low cost, they generally require considerable time to use effectively. However, if planned well and targeted, the pay-off can be great. Beyond technologies, organizations can get the most out of their communications in other ways, such as through collaborations, focusing on just one or two key issues, and by using what is available to them. This last point is particularly important for CSOs working in the natural resource, land rights, and conservation fields in Africa as they often have access to powerful stories, photos, people and data.

If an organization can see beyond the barriers, recognize the value in communications, and is willing to invest the time and resources to developing a strategic approach, then communications can play an integral role in a wide range of organizational priorities, including: Securing funding, Expanding networks and partnerships, Recruiting talented staff and board members, Influencing policies and decision making, Educating and mobilizing stakeholders, Engaging with key constituents, and Building collaborations.



Key points: strategic communications is...

- One of your most important organizational assets
- Essential for growth, impact and sustainability
- Possible and affordable for all organizations

CASE STUDIES: WHAT WE MEAN BY 'IMPACT'

RAISING PROFILES AND FUNDS:

After developing a communications strategy, which included clear objectives, target audiences, and messages, Lion Guardians began implementing an annual communications work plan. In just one year, Lion Guardians made considerable progress in achieving two of its objectives: raising funds and its profile: they increased revenue generation by 28%, quadrupled their individual donor base, saw a 39% increase in donations from repeat donors, and received more inquiries for trainings and partnerships than in the past.

MOBILIZING COMMUNITIES:

Pastoralist women in northern Tanzania are leading a movement to protect their communities' land. Over the past several years, they've used a number of different platforms, such as meetings, interviews with journalists, and film, to share their opinions and voices, sparking a national – and global – dialogue that has brought attention to these issues. At the same time, none of this would have been possible without some key organizations helping these women make critical links to media and other networks, which have enabled the women to share their messages, recruit supporters and, ultimately, defend their land.

INFLUENCING POLICY CHANGE:

Tanzania's 2012-2014 constitutional review process recognized the rights of hunter-gatherer minorities for the first time. The Ujamaa Community Resource Team and its partners engaged with the media to advocate for the inclusion of minority rights, published a policy brief targeted at policy makers outlining their recommendations, and held a number of in-person meetings to share their opinions and proposals.

HOW DO WE GET THERE? THE PROCESS

Key to this process is the support and involvement of senior management and leadership. Just as these organizational leaders set the wider strategic compass for where the organization is headed and how it will get there, they also need to drive the process for communications – identifying strategic objectives, allocating appropriate resources, defining and embracing their organizational identity, and often playing an important role as the messenger. When this happens, communications shifts from being a mere product to instead being one of an organization’s most strategic assets.

There are five elements to developing a strategic communications platform, which this guide will review in detail:

AUDIT

An audit helps you understand where you are with your communications, where you want to go, and recommendations for getting there. The audit is a useful starting point by helping an organization identify what’s working, what’s not and where it needs to focus its attention and resources.

STRATEGY

A communications strategy defines the direction and focus of an organization’s communications efforts so that they best support an organization’s goals and they help it advance its mission.

AUDIT

STRATEGY

PLAN

MEASUREMENT

BRAND

MONITORING:

Identifying key metrics to measure and monitor over time will help you determine what works and what doesn’t

PLAN

A communications plan, shaped by your strategy, compiles your various activities into one plan and timetable, showing the person responsible for each action and the steps required to achieve an outcome. It puts the strategy into action.

BRAND

A brand is how others perceive an organization. It conveys certain information and emotions. It represents an organization’s promise, mission and values. A clear, consistent and compelling brand will help to shape an organization’s relationships, decisions, and ultimately, its reach and impact.

Some guiding principles

KNOW YOURSELF:

Uncover and embrace the attributes that make your organization unique and special. Know your values and let these help guide your decisions and actions.

HAVE A PURPOSE:

Be clear about what you are trying to achieve, first as an organization and then in your communications. Your organization’s overarching mission and goals should be your starting point, which then helps you to determine what you want achieve through your communications.

BE STRATEGIC AND PRIORITIZE:

To achieve your communications goals and targets you must understand who it is you need to reach, influence and engage with. You can’t reach everyone, so be very specific and understand their needs, from what type of information they want to how they want to receive it. Recognize your limits and prioritize your efforts to get the most value from your investments.

LEARN WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN’T, AND ADAPT:

Identify ways to measure and learn from your successes and your failures so you can maximize your resources and efforts. When efforts don’t materialize in the results you had hoped (sometimes considered failures), you should learn from that experience, adapt your approach, and use it to inform future plans.



AUDIT

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

A communications audit helps you understand where you are with your communications, where you want to go, and sets out some recommendations for getting there. The audit is a useful starting point by helping an organization identify what's working, what's not and where it needs to focus its attention and resources.

PURPOSE:

To understand where you are with your communication, to identify your strengths and weaknesses, and to establish the direction you want to go with your communications.

WHAT'S INVOLVED:

An audit is most effective when both internal and external actors are involved in answering questions about an organization. Here you can learn about how you are perceived, what communications are effective, what's not effective, what information is useful to your key audiences and constituencies, and what's not. An audit helps you identify what you need in order for your communications to serve your organizational mission.

Taking stock

Interviews, surveys and/or focus groups should be carried out with key staff and board members, as well as key partners, constituents, and stakeholders in order to 'take stock' of where you are as an organization with your communications. During this process you want to try to understand the following:

WHERE IS THE ORGANIZATION NOW WITH ITS COMMUNICATIONS?

- How do you communicate?
- Why do you communicate?
- Who do you communicate with?
- What are you communicating about?
- Who is responsible for coordinating communications?
- What are the results?

WHAT IS YOUR THEORY OF CHANGE?

- Do you have a clear idea about how different types of communication can encourage different audiences to make the changes you want to see in the world?

WHAT IS YOUR REPUTATION?

- What do people say when they talk about your organization?
- What do you want people to say when they talk about your organization?
- What makes your organization unique?

WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS? (SWOT)

- Strengths (internal): What are you good at? What are your assets?
- Weaknesses (internal): What do you find challenging? What isn't working? What are you lacking?
- Opportunities (external): What is happening now (outside of your organization) that offers an opportunity for your organization? What's needed?
- Threats (external): What's happening now (outside of your organization) that could undermine your organization's ability to work? What obstacles do you face?

WHAT DO YOU WANT COMMUNICATIONS TO DO FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

- What do you want it to help you achieve?
- How do you think you can accomplish this?

Materials audit

It's useful to review your existing communications products to see how you are communicating – is your brand consistent? What tone of voice and/or personality do you convey? What messages are you getting across? How do you share information? Specifically, you want to look at the following:

PRESENTATION: WHAT DO YOUR COMMUNICATIONS LOOK LIKE VISUALLY?

- What colors are you using? Are they consistent?
- What fonts?
- What graphics and photographs?
- Are visuals different from one publication to the next or consistent?

OUTPUT ANALYSIS: WHAT DO YOU PRODUCE?

- How many different types of communication product do you use? The list may include reports, films, press releases, events, emails, letters, briefing papers, social media accounts, speeches, opinion articles.
- Are these the right products for the audiences you want to influence?
- How do you know these products are working? How do you measure success?
- Can you streamline your range of products?
- Can you find ways to repurpose content for use in different communication products?

CONTENT ANALYSIS: WHAT ARE YOU SAYING AND HOW?

- What are your main messages? Are these clear?
- Who are the communications targeted at? Is this clear?
- How is content presented – facts, stories, explanations, images, etc.? Is it compelling?

The questions above should help you develop your audit questionnaires. Keep in mind that you will want to develop different questions for different audiences. For example, when talking to external audiences you will want to find out how they perceive your organization or how they like to get their information, whereas with staff members while you may also want to know how they perceive your organization, you will also want to ask them about the day-to-day operations and roles and responsibilities related to communications.

The next section of this guide focuses on an organization's brand. Information derived from the audit can be very useful when defining a brand as it will help you understand how you are perceived by others. This perception may be something you want to reinforce or something you'll want to alter depending on your own perception of your organization's identity and brand.

Key points: an audit...

- Is your starting point
- Helps you understand what's working and what's not
- Is an opportunity to learn from key stakeholders

BRAND

HOW DO YOU: PERCEIVE YOURSELF? WANT OTHERS TO PERCEIVE YOU?

A brand is how others perceive an organization. It conveys certain information and emotions. It represents an organization's promise, and is the embodiment of its mission and values. A clear, consistent and compelling brand will help to shape an organization's relationships, the decisions it makes, and ultimately, its reach and impact.

PURPOSE:

To define a clear and compelling brand that embodies an organization's mission and values and helps it advance its organizational goals.

WHAT'S INVOLVED:

Defining your brand should be a participatory process, led by an organization's leadership (including possibly even board members) since your brand ultimately depends on the way you – the entire organization – perceives yourself. It is also an ongoing process that gets reinforced in all aspects of what you do: the decisions you make, the partnerships and relationships you develop, the conversations you have, etc. Therefore, your brand and what it stands for should be constantly discussed and promoted so that it is well understood internally, and, in turn, it will be clear, strong and compelling externally.

1. START YOUR BRAND DISCUSSIONS BY FOCUSING ON YOUR MISSION

- What are you trying to achieve?
- Why?

2. IDENTIFY YOUR VALUES

Values guide an organization's thinking, actions and decisions. When talking about your values, don't get hung up on grammar, just identify what is important to you. There are probably a lot of values that you consider important, but try to make hard decisions and really hone in on the values that are absolutely essential to your organization. Remember, branding is about differentiating yourself, finding your niche, and highlighting what makes you unique, so by making these hard choices, you are helping to shape a well defined brand.

- What are the top 5 values that (you want to) guide your organization's actions, behaviors and decisions?
- Why are these important?

3. DEVELOP YOUR POSITIONING

- What makes you unique? Especially in comparison to your competitors/similar organizations?
- What evidence can substantiate this claim (list them, know them)?
- What do you want to be known for?
- When people think about your organization, what are the first three things you want them to think?

Positioning brings clarity and focus to defining who you are in relation to others in your field and what makes you unique. It is what you want to be known for. It will promote effective collaboration by attracting partners with shared goals and visions.

4. IDENTIFY YOUR PERSONALITY

- If your organization was a person, who would it be?
- How would you describe it? (Give specific personality traits)
- Who are you not? – sometimes in identifying who you are it's also helpful to be clear about what and who you are not/don't want to be. List these out.

Personality is a set of human attributes associated with your organization's brand. It guides your organization's interactions, communications, tone and behavior.

5. ESTABLISH YOUR VISUAL IDENTITY

When you develop your visual identity you want to think about how it aligns to your internal identity. For example, are you a serious, science-focused conservation organization? If so, you might want muted colors, an academic-looking font, your photos may have sharp edges, and your designs may be orderly. If you're a community-driven organization that wants to be seen as cutting edge or an advocacy organization that frequently uses social media, you might want flashier, brighter colors, bold fonts and you may play with the focus and colors of your photographs.

- What is your outward facing image?
- What do you want to look like?
- How is your visual identity tied to your identity, values and mission?

A worthy investment...

Hiring a designer to help you select and define your colors, fonts, and style is often a valuable and worthwhile investment, especially since this rarely changes over time.

A BRAND IS NOT JUST FOR MARKETING AND PR

The word 'brand' often conjures up images, such as logos (e.g. the globally known WWF panda bear), or slogans (e.g. Nike's 'Just do it' tagline). But a brand goes far beyond just its face value. For example, when you see the WWF panda bear, what does it make you think about? Perhaps the environment, conservation, or even a high-profile international organization. However, what you're probably not thinking about is the panda itself, and instead what the panda represents.

It is this association or this perception that makes branding so critical to the success of an organization. And it is everything and everyone associated with your organization that helps to shape that perception. For example, when your Executive Director walks into a meeting, people in the room will have pre-conceived ideas about what this person – and your organization – will contribute to the meeting. The way they perceive your organization – as a collaborator, as an information source, as an expert in a certain field – will not only influence their interactions, dialogue and negotiations with the Executive Director, but also will likely influence the overall outcome of the meeting. At the same time, the way the Executive Director acts at the meeting - what they say and do – will also reflect on your organization's brand.

Your brand is one of your most valuable assets as an organization, and it is worth investing time in making sure it is adequately understood and embraced across the organization.

Key points: a brand...

- Is a valuable asset for any organization
- Should embody an organization's values and mission
- Must be understood and embraced across the entire organization



COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

A communications strategy defines the direction and focus of an organization's communications efforts so that they best support an organization's goals and help it advance its mission.

PURPOSE:

To guide an organization's communications decisions and actions, as well as its allocation of resources and investments, in a way that will best support an organization to achieve its goals.

WHAT'S INVOLVED:

The most important first step in developing a communications strategy is to review and fully understand the organization's strategic or business plan. This is the foundation of a communications strategy as it sets out exactly what your organization is trying to achieve. Another key tool is a communications audit, which should give you direction as to where you should invest most of your resources.

1. IDENTIFY COMMUNICATIONS GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.

- What is your organization trying to achieve?
- How can communications support your organization to achieve its goals?
- For each of your organizational goals, ask the question: how can communications help you achieve this goal?

GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

Goals, objectives, and targets share very similar meanings, but they are differentiated based on their level of specificity. Goals are higher-level, longer-term aims, whereas objectives are more tangible, specific and shorter-term, and targets are even more specific and measurable.



A useful way to develop strong objectives and targets is to make sure they are SMART:



EXAMPLE:

GOAL: To raise the profile of our organization so we are recognized as a key source of information in our field.

SMART objectives and targets:

- We receive twenty requests for our services from new contacts by the end of 2015.
- We see a 25% increase in the number of materials downloaded from our website by the end of 2015.

Goals may stay the same over a longer period of time, whereas objectives and targets should change and be altered based on your progress.

2. IDENTIFY YOUR KEY TARGET AUDIENCES.

- Who matters to you? Who do you need to reach, engage with and/or influence in order to achieve your goals?
- Do you have a strong sense of how each audience can create the change you want to see?
- How well do you know your audiences?
 - How do they get (and/or give) information?
 - Who do they trust? Who will they listen to? Who will they talk to?
 - What type of message/information will resonate? What won't?

HOW KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE CAN SHAPE YOUR COMMUNICATIONS CHOICES:

Finding the right messenger: A 2014 study carried out by Twaweza found that Tanzanian citizens have more trust in their relatives, neighbors and religious leaders than they do in the President or in politicians. So if you are trying to engage or mobilize local communities in Tanzania, then your best messenger – the people local community members will trust and listen to the most – will be other community members, friends, and religious leaders. Make sure all of your communications targeting this audience includes local voices, and even work with community members from the beginning to create effective messages that will resonate.

Finding the right channel: A UNESCO study reports that radio remains the main medium for which people in African countries receive their information, with on average of 145 radios per 1,000 people. At the same time, with the increased liberalization of media occurring across the continent (at a general level), community radio stations are cropping up around sub-Saharan Africa, usually serving a more niche role for a targeted audience at an affordable rate. Thus, if you want to engage and mobilize communities, then you might consider community radio as one key communication channel. And coupled with the information above, you might involve community members in the design and production of the program itself.

3. IDENTIFY YOUR MESSAGES. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SAY?

With your different audiences and goals in mind, craft simple key messages that will both resonate and advance your goals.

- What type of information do you need to communicate?
- How should you say it?
- When should you say it?

4. IDENTIFY APPROPRIATE TOOLS AND TACTICS THAT WILL BEST REACH YOUR AUDIENCES AND ALLOW THEM TO REACH YOU.

- How can you most effectively engage with your audiences and/or deliver your messages and information?
- What are your resources?

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE RIGHT TOOLS AND TACTICS?

Here is a (not exhaustive) list of communications tools and tactics that can help you share your information, engage in discussions with others, influence policies, raise awareness, and increase your profile. Some tools will reach very specific audiences (e.g. community radio) whereas others, such as websites, may have a much broader reach. In all cases, however, each tool or tactic should only be selected and deployed once it's clear what the purpose, audience(s), and message(s) are.

 ONLINE / DIGITAL	 PUBLICATIONS	 EVENTS	 MASS MEDIA	 OTHER
Website and blogs	Reports (annual reports, program reports)	Community forums and meetings	Newspapers, journals, magazines	Phone calls
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Instagram)	Organizational materials (brochures, postcards)	One-on-One meetings	Broadcast media (TV, radio)	Emails, personalized letters
Videos (YouTube, Vine, Vimeo, Instagram)	Fact sheets, case studies, policy briefs, info briefs	Conferences, workshops	Blogs	Community theater groups
Photos (Tumblr, Instagram, Pinterest, photo stories)	Newsletters	Field visits and exchanges	Press kits, media trainings, field trips	Comic books
Newsletters	Infographics	Community cinema		Presentations
SMS		Campaigns		Building networks and partnerships

5. WHAT RESOURCES DO YOU NEED?

Communications takes both time and money, but if done right, these are worthy investments. While the communications plan will set out the activities you will carry out, you first want to have an understanding of what resources are available, and needed.

- Human Resources – who will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the communications strategy and plan? Who else in your organization will have an important role to play (and what is that) and how much time will they need to dedicate to communications? Do your existing personnel have the right skills to exercise key communications functions? Do you need to use external service providers, such as designers? Sometimes an organization's communications activities can be managed by existing team members; however, if communications continually overburdens staff and gets pushed down the priority list, it's probably time to think about bringing on a dedicated person to lead on communications.
- Budget – how much money do you have to dedicate to communications activities each year?

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO COMMUNICATE AND HOW?

Whenever possible your communications should be creative and compelling. They also shouldn't be entirely focused on your organization, but instead feature the people you are trying to reach. It's increasingly recognized that people take action when they feel an emotional connection to something, and often that connection is stronger when they feel a personal link to your cause. So when you're developing your communications materials, put yourself in your audiences' shoes, and seek ways to put them at the center of your product.

- ☑ Make the emotional connection: Use stories, quotes and photographs to evoke emotion and 'humanize' your stats and impact.
- ☑ Back it up: Use facts and figures to demonstrate your impact (infographics, charts, etc.)

What you communicate depends on your objectives, but generally your communications will center around your goals and mission (the why) and your achievements and results (the impact and change).

Examples:

COMMUNICATING "THE WHY"

In the Pastoral Women's Council 2014 annual report they wanted to make the connection between women's land rights and economic security. Instead of writing a long narrative explaining why the connection between the two is so important, they shared this quote from one of their members:

"I have my own plot and I use it to support my family. I grow maize and beans and get extra money, which I've used to buy more livestock. My goal is to send my girl children to secondary school. When women get money they send their girls to school."

This quote clearly illustrates how women's land rights can improve their livelihood, while at the same time showcasing the change that's occurring and the important role PWC plays in this process without mentioning PWC at all.

COMMUNICATING "IMPACT"

Lion Guardians 2014 annual report is filled with facts and figures. While these stats are impressive, they wouldn't be as powerful if they weren't accompanied with the beautiful and carefully selected photos Lion Guardians uses throughout the report. For example, one figure they share is "100% of the 21 lost children reported to the Guardians were found." By picturing one of the found children being cared for they are able to ground this stat in a real-life individual making it all the more powerful.

WHEN AN ORGANIZATION LACKS STRATEGY...

CHALLENGE:

It is common to see an organization with some basic communications platforms in place, such as a website, a Facebook page, or even a newsletter. But if this isn't connected to a greater purpose than these tools can almost be rendered meaningless for an organization. Yet sometimes this lack of strategy is actually an organization-wide problem. If an organization doesn't have a clear strategy or focus, then it's nearly impossible for its communications to identify objectives, audiences, and plans.

SOLUTION:

A temporary solution to this challenge is to narrow your focus. Gather the leadership team and ask them what are the three most important goals they want to achieve over the upcoming 12 – 18 months. From there, you can begin to shape your communications efforts in a more meaningful and focused way.

Key Points: Your communications strategy should:

- Guide all actions, decisions and investments you make related to communications
- Identify clear objectives, target audiences and key messages
- Remain flexible and be reviewed regularly

Remember – communications is a two-way process

Effective communications isn't just about how an organization reaches out to key audiences. Instead, communications should go two-ways – where those audiences are able to respond and interact with an organization and help inform the dialogue. Thus when developing a communications strategy and plan it's important to not only think about how to reach your audiences with key information and messages, but also to think about how people can interact with your organization. How can they engage with you? What systems do you have in place? Who is responsible for managing this dialogue?



THE PLAN

IMPLEMENTING YOUR COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Planning is usually considered part and parcel of a communications strategy. While it certainly is deeply connected to the strategy – it is the implementation plan for the strategy – it requires a bit more granular thinking and ongoing adaptation.

PURPOSE:

The plan compiles your various activities into one place with a timetable. It shows the person responsible for each action, the budget, the deadlines and the steps required to achieve an outcome.

WHAT'S INVOLVED:

Just like the communications strategy begins with reviewing the organizational strategy, the development of your communications plan should begin with a review of your overall organizational work plans. The two plans should complement each other, and activities should be strategically planned for times that best coincide with your organization's calendar. For example, if your organization is hosting a series of workshops or community meetings, if you're holding an annual membership meeting, etc. At the same time, communications planning needs to be very much connected to what's going on externally, such as major events like elections or conferences or certain seasonal conditions.

One of the greatest challenges for communications in this field is balancing a set of fixed, planned out activities with the ability to also remain flexible and responsive to unplanned events and news that are related (and often critical) to your work. Key to doing this is having both a strategy and plan in place so that you can remain responsive but also strategic by focusing on your target audiences, using appropriate channels and messages, and reviewing your plan to see what resources (time and funds) you have available. Also key to this is not over planning – be realistic and give yourself some space to react when needed.

1. REVIEW

Your organization's work plan

- Are there any major events or activities taking place?

2. IDENTIFY

Important external events relevant to your organization and to your communications objectives

3. ESTABLISH

Key themes and develop a 'big picture' content calendar for the year based around the above dates

- A content or editorial calendar is a tool to help you organize and visualize all of your content (information) across different media, for example, website, blog, policy briefs, videos, newsletters, and social media outlets. By creating a calendar that looks at the entire year, you can see what's going on both internally and externally, and you can connect your content to those times. Identifying themes or topics (2-3 over the course of a year is more than enough) will help you focus your content development, ensuring your messages around a single topic get heard as they are packaged in a variety of products.

4. SLOT IN

All other activities to coincide with these events

- But don't overload your calendar if you also need to be responsive to events as they happen. Also include time in your plans for learning and reflection.

5. IDENTIFY

Who is responsible for what

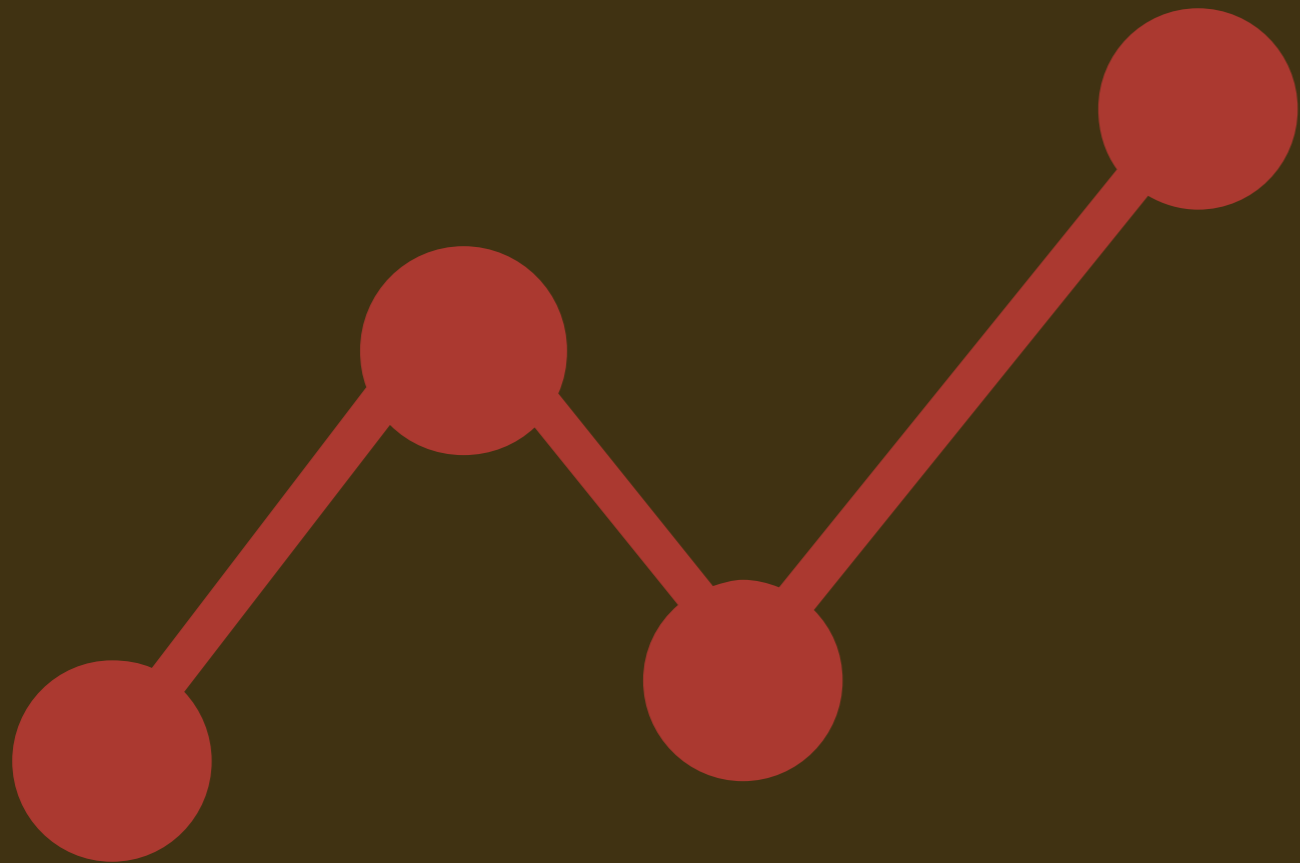
6. CHART OUT

A budget for each activity

Objective	Activity	Details	Lead	Deadline	Budget
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Key points: your plan is:

- Closely linked to your organization's work plans
- Shaped by your communications strategy
- Realistic



MONITORING

MEASURE YOUR PROGRESS

Monitoring allows you to track your progress over time so that you can understand what works and what doesn't.

PURPOSE:

To monitor your activities to identify what's working, what isn't and to inform the development of plans and strategies.

WHAT'S INVOLVED:

To effectively monitor your progress, you first need to know what progress means. Thus, your objectives should guide the design of your monitoring system.

The 'M' in SMART stands for measurable. Each objective will show you exactly what you need to measure. A common mistake is for organizations to spend a lot of time and effort measuring things that do not help them answer the question: "Have we made progress?"

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?

- What information do you need to collect for you to understand your progress?
- This will vary among objectives.

HOW CAN YOU COLLECT THAT INFORMATION?

- Qualitative: stories, anecdotes, quotes
 - Surveys
 - Interviews
 - Emails, phone calls, conversations
 - Noticed behavioral changes (through actions, policy developments, etc.)
 - Quantitative: stats, data
 - Number of news stories
- Digital metrics – website traffic (page views, unique and returning visits, bounce rates), social media stats (likes, followers, engagement), newsletter sign ups
- Income generation
- Number of members, constituents, partners, supporters, etc.

HOW WILL YOU COLLECT, MONITOR AND EVALUATE YOUR RESULTS?

- What tools will you use to collect this information? (e.g. Excel spreadsheet, Google Analytics, etc.).
- At what frequency will you collect this information and review it?
- What are you learning?
- What's working? (and what proof do you have that it is working?)
- What's not working (and what proof do you have that it's not working?)

Remember that numbers aren't everything. Instead, numbers are a good starting point for trying to understand something better. For example, you may have a lot of new Facebook "Likes" but if the people "liking" your Facebook page are only doing that and nothing more, than you aren't actually achieving much. Instead, you also want to look for connections and build on those. For example, what information do people "like"? What do "likes" actually mean to your organization? Can you give them more of that? Are they starting to engage?

WHAT SHOULD CHANGE?

Based on this information where should you invest more of your resources? What activities should you prioritize? What activities should you stop doing? Do you need to rethink your strategies?

Key points: monitoring will:

- Help you learn where to invest more of your time and resources
- Prove the value of communications

Final tips for effective communications



- ☑ **Being effective means committing:** When work piles up, it can be tempting to push communications aside to focus on other activities. But remember that communications plays a key role in helping your organization achieve its goals. Prioritizing communications will enhance your fundraising, networking, and programmatic outcomes. If your organization has committed to strengthening its communications platform, then you need to prioritize it.
- ☑ **Don't get too bogged down in details:** You certainly want to have visual and quality standards, but don't lose sight of your overall purpose and get caught up in trying to achieve perfection. Just like project implementation often requires tweaking, learning, and adaptation, so does communications. Sometimes it's better to say something than nothing at all.
- ☑ **Make wise investments:** A lot of your communications work can be done in-house, but there are some activities, such as developing a website or designing an annual report, where it may be worthwhile to contract outside support.
- ☑ **Plan for flexibility:** You can't plan out everything in advance as you simply don't know what's going to happen with your projects or with politics or even with the weather. But good communications is often about being responsive, so when planning give yourself space to be flexible and responsive to an always changing environment.
- ☑ **Don't try to do everything:** Stick to your plan, adapt when needed, but don't try to respond to every opportunity or crisis – you simply won't have time and you will water down your other planned out activities.
- ☑ **Learn from others:** Share information and best practices, ask questions, collaborate.

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