Section

2

Communications planning: a template

# Introduction

A communications plan sets out the actions that you will take to achieve your [**communications objectives**](http://www.health.org.uk/sites/health/files/Setting-communications-objectives-template-dl.docx), as well as the key activities that you will use to engage the audiences identified in your [**communications strategy**](http://www.health.org.uk/sites/health/files/Developing-communications-strategy-template-dl.docx). It ensures that everyone involved in the communication of the research understands what will happen when, and that sufficient time is allowed for tasks with longer lead times (eg design, publishing, printing, etc).

You may need to tailor your communications to specific audience groups by developing different [**messages**](http://www.health.org.uk/sites/health/files/Creating-messages-template-dl.docx) for each and using specific channels to reach them. Suitable planning can help you identify when this may be the case.

# Principles for good communications activity planning

* Plan communications from the outset of a research study and allow enough time to source suppliers and external support, if relevant.
* Where possible, plan to engage your audiences over a period of time. Build a community of interest and make your audiences aware of the study and its potential interest to them before findings are available.
* Be aware of external factors. Much of your communications can be planned in advance, but some will be a matter of seizing opportunities as they arise. Consider the following questions.
	+ Is there a time of year that communications about your study might seem particularly relevant?
	+ Are there any significant conferences, events or political developments that will lend your study extra relevance?
* When you have findings and/or conclusions, and wish to capitalise on the awareness that you have built among your audiences, use a variety of different communications channels simultaneously to increase impact and reinforce your messages. Such a process could look a bit like this:
	+ a journal article is published
	+ a link to the article is shared on Twitter
	+ publication coincides with a more accessible summary or musings on potential implications in a blog
	+ media coverage is generated
	+ the link to the media outlet is redistributed via an e-news bulletin or highlighted on your organisation’s website.
* If you have different priority audiences, they may have different needs and levels of knowledge around your research subject.

# Communications plan template

Use the template overleaf to summarise your main decisions on the audiences you will be targeting in each phase, what actions you will take to communicate with them, the message(s) you aim to get across, what channel(s) you will use and when you will do it.

You can type directly into the boxes.

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| Communications plan for: |
| Overall communications objectives (from your [**communications strategy**](http://www.health.org.uk/sites/health/files/Developing-communications-strategy-template-dl.docx)): |
| 1. |
| 2. |
| 3. |
| 4. |
| 5. |

**Set-up phase**

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| This is where you may wish to identify your key audiences and raise awareness of the study, its objectives and its potential relevance to them. You can also set up new channels(eg blogging site, website, Twitter feeds) and look at resources needed for any significant communications activity (eg film, infographic design or conferences). The set-up phase is also where you may wish to raise awareness of the research team’s knowledge and expertise in the area of study, to build their reputation as a ‘go to’ source of information on the subject. |
| **Audience** | **Activity** | **Messages** | **Channels** | **Timing** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

**Sustain phase**

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| Once you have identified and engaged with your audiences you will need to maintain their interest. The aim is to keep your study front of mind without overburdening them with information. Some audiences may welcome the opportunity to hear any initial findings via engagement events. Others may not have the level of commitment required to attend engagement events, but may still wish to keep up to date with the latest thinking to emerge from your study via Twitter, blogs or face-to-face networking at related events and conferences. |
| **Audience** | **Activity** | **Messages** | **Channels** | **Timing** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

**Post-peer review dissemination phase**

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| Findings are now available. Tailor the communication of findings to your target audiences. Take care to use the channels they engage with and the language and level of detail that will enable them to quickly and easily understand the implications of your study’s findings for them. Think about how to use different channels simultaneously to reinforce messages and awareness. |
| **Audience** | **Activity** | **Messages** | **Channels** | **Timing** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

**Spread phase**

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| After you have communicated your findings, are there ways that you can amplify awareness and spread insights from your research? Are you able to demonstrate impact or influence? Are there other audiences who may benefit or learn from any aspect of the study? What news or events are coming up in the future where the findings may be relevant? |
| **Audience** | **Activity** | **Messages** | **Channels** | **Timing** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |