

Section

1

Developing a communications strategy: a template

# Introduction

A communications strategy sets out your objectives and provides a thoughtful focus for your communications work. This makes sure you can make an impact within the time invested. The strategy sits alongside your [communications plan](http://www.health.org.uk/sites/health/files/Communications-planning-template-dl.docx). (The plan sets out the activities that you will undertake to deliver your strategy – the what, when and how.)

This template has been created to help you follow the principles of strategic research communications and summarise the overarching approach to your research communications. By using it you are building a simple communications strategy that can be shared with potential funders, colleagues and stakeholders.

You can type directly into this document.

The template will help you to:

* take account of the political, economic, social and technological environment into which you are launching your findings
* identify the strengths of your research project so that you can communicate them clearly to potential funders, participants, stakeholders, etc
* be clear about what you are trying to achieve with your communications so that you can appropriately focus your activity and resources
* know who your priority audiences are
* use the communications channels that your audiences already use and trust
* assess the resources you will need to deliver your communications so that you can plan and cost accordingly.

Try to complete all sections as they will help bring focus to your communications approach. Where relevant, the sections have a link that takes you through to more in-depth guidance.

Once complete, this template can be used to focus your communications work on the areas that will deliver most impact. It can be shared within and across teams to ensure a common understanding of priorities. Elements of it can be shared with funders or research partners to demonstrate your direction and commitment to the communication of findings.

# The environment for your surroundings

The social, political or economic trends at play can affect how your research findings are viewed by certain audiences. Take a short amount of time to agree and record the most significant political, economic, social and technological factors that relate to your research. You can then tailor your communications approach to the particular opportunities or risks they present.

Record your conclusions in the strategy template below, as well as what you will do to realise the opportunities and manage the challenges. Only complete the boxes that feel relevant – there is no need to populate the whole table.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Significant factor #1** | **Significant factor #2** | **Significant factor #3** | **Opportunities to be realised** | **Risks to be managed** |
| Political |  |  |  |  |  |
| Economic |  |  |  |  |  |
| Social |  |  |  |  |  |
| Technological |  |  |  |  |  |

# Projecting your study’s strengths: top-line messaging

Detailed messaging is not possible at the outset of a research study. What is possible and helpful is to identify the potential strengths of the research and describe these clearly in funding applications, communications with research stakeholders, etc.

Record what you feel are the strongest three answers to each question in this table.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **What is different or new about this research?** | **What insights might it contribute?** | **Who could this benefit and why?** | **What positive change could this help bring about?** |
| 1. |  |  |  |  |
| 2. |  |  |  |  |
| 3. |  |  |  |  |

Summarise the strongest top-line messages around your research below. They may differ between audiences: [find out how](http://www.health.org.uk/sites/health/files/Creating-messages-template-dl.docx).

# Strategic communications objectives

By working through the [guidance](http://www.health.org.uk/sites/health/files/Setting-communications-objectives-template-dl.docx) you will be able to set your strategic communications objectives. Record them below.

**Objective one**

**Objective two**

**Objective three**

**Objective four**

**Objective five**

# Priority audiences

By working through the [guidance](http://www.health.org.uk/sites/health/files/Identifying-prioritising-audiences-dl.pdf) you will be able to set your priority audiences at the outset of the study. Record them below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Priority audience** | **Notes** |
| 1. |  |  |
| 2. |  |  |
| 3. |  |  |
| 4. |  |  |

# Communications channels

By working through the [guidance](http://www.health.org.uk/sites/health/files/Communications-channels-dl.pdf) you will be able to set out the channels that your [priority audiences](http://www.health.org.uk/sites/health/files/Identifying%20and%20prioritising%20audiences.pdf) use and trust, to identify where you need to focus your communications resource. Record the most likely channels that you will be using below.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **The main channels we will use** | **Notes** | **Estimated time required** | **Estimated cost** |
| 1. |  |  |  |
| 2. |  |  |  |
| 3. |  |  |  |
| 4. |  |  |  |

# Identifying resources

Record below the staff resources you’ll draw on for your communications work, and how much time you will be asking of them.

**In-house communications team**

**Other communications expertise within your organisation**

**Research team members who will undertake communications tasks**

**Any external, additional, or specialist expertise you will need to access**

**Summarise the budget you will require for communications channels and staff resource (do not forget to budget for staff time)**