

Checklist 2: Develop a communication plan and strategy

This checklist builds on the results derived from your assessment of the problem, target groups, and your available resources. A **communication plan** needs to include the following sections:

1. Issue or Problem
2. Goals and Objectives
3. Who's doing the communicating and with what resources (responsibilities)
4. Target groups
5. Main messages
6. The strategy: Products and activities
7. Pre-testing (if relevant)

Do not end up spending too much time developing “the perfect strategy”. Use colleagues and other resource persons to critically reflect upon the different components of the plan. Sometimes it could be good to do some communicative work before even starting according to the plan. It could be to carry out initial awareness raising activities, such as developing brochures and media releases, which sometimes help in the development of a plan/strategy by helping you to think about your target groups and key messages in an early phase, but also to prepare a wider audience for the upcoming activities.

Issue or Problem

Include a brief summary of the situation assessment made as suggested in checklist 1. Also refer to other document you may have produced relating to the situation assessment (e.g. include as an annex). Often there has been a lot of projects or activities going on from which you build your new initiative. This is worth mentioning so that one realizes that the new initiative is part of a broader context and shows that you are aware of what has been done before.

Goals and Objectives

Goals tend to be over-arching while **objectives** break down these larger goals into more manageable parts. Communication goals and objectives need to be linked to the goals and objectives of the overall systems and behavioural goals. There is often a tendency to confuse systems and behavioural goals with your communications goals and objectives.

Communication goals are primarily:

- Informing others about what you want to achieve, especially its expected benefits on a higher system level (f.i., less winter losses)
- Encouraging others to perform certain activities required to achieve system goals

- Raising awareness of issues, problems and potential solutions
- Encouraging people to participate in certain activities (to learn more)
- Persuading or convincing people to accept new laws, ideas or solutions
- Creating necessary pre-conditions for changing certain behaviours among certain people (knowledge, attitude and values)
- Educating or training people in how to apply new management, technologies, etc.

The most basic questions you have to ask yourself is: “Why are you using communications as tools to enable change?” This is related to the fact that communications by itself seldom is enough to achieve changes in behaviour (if more radical).

Goals and objectives should be explained in three bullet points or less. They should be clear, specific and realistic, stating **who** will do or change **what** by **when** and by **how much**. If you can make your objectives clearly measurable then it will be easier for you to identify and communicate your successes with your target groups, affiliates and partners.

One additional goal is how communications can be used **internally** by you or others, for example to improve efficiencies and synergies among involved team members, in future or overlapping activities and avoid duplication. If one of your goals is to try and change behaviour, see >Understanding change > Behavioural change, for a useful model on different “Stages of behaviour change”.

Who’s doing the communicating and with what resources (responsibilities)?

In checklist 1 a partial assessment is presented of the current available resources. You need to be realistic about your financial and personal resources and exactly who will implement the different measures. If you have to prioritize: What is most important to do?

Working in a team is recommended. It will create stability, decrease risks, and make sure that complementary competencies might be more easily available. A communication team may include representatives from your partner organisations, technical specialists, or members of the targeted groups. You may also wish to contract external communications consultants.

Target groups

Earlier you should have determined and specified who your target groups are differentiating between (see >Help desk > Communication plans > Target group); a) the primary target group you are trying to influence and, b) those target groups that will support you or influence your main target group (the ones you are trying to change). In this part of the communication plan you can here include (or in an annex) any target group investigation that you or any other actor may have conducted that describes in more detail who your target group are and what they need, why they think or act the way they do.

Main messages

In almost all extension activities we have a strong focus on the content of our communication. Of course, a big part of communications is deciding what you need to say – your main messages.

Besides the information given about the specific subject (f.i., scientific information), you will also need to develop a set of key messages that explains exactly why you want to reach out with this information and what it is trying to achieve (objectives and goals). But you will also need to develop clear messages that state what you want your target audiences to know, think, or do differently. Often we have a tendency to hide our main messages in too much information, which makes it hard for the target group to realise what is most important to know or learn. By preparing and stating the main messages already early in the planning phase it will help you develop relevant activities and present pedagogic valuable materials.

Your messages depend on who you are trying to reach and what you want the message to achieve. Ideally you need to tailor your message to meet the needs of each different target audience. This will depend on their understanding of the issue, what you want them to think or do, and the personal costs or benefits they associate with making these changes. In most cases, nobody will change anything unless they see a personal benefit or a way to avoid personal costs – whether this be financial or psychological. Due to budget restrictions, a high level of target group differentiation is not always possible, but one should strive to specify the different target groups as much as possible and adapt the methods and tools to each and every one of those.

To summarise, make sure your messages are:

- Consistent with and relevant to your target groups' needs and pre-conditions.
- Simple! This is of course a challenge when working with complex issues, but in each step of a learning process (progression) one can reduce complexity without simplifying too much.
- Use plain language that is active and compelling from the target groups' perspectives.
- Create messages that help achieve your specific objective. This does not mean simply restating your goals! A winning message needs to be compelling to your target group.
- Put yourself in the shoes of the target group and ask the question: "What's in it for me?"
- Once you have identified your main messages, make sure to use them consistently and repeatedly in all future communications. Repetition is important in all communication.

Often when giving relevant information it makes the target audience want to actually do something. If so, your message will need to include a “call to action”. Examples include:

- “Use breeds adapted to the local climate and environment”
- “Develop a marketing strategy for your products”
- “Sign the new government policy supporting bee-keepers develop their business”
- “Make and implement a plan for management of Varroa”
- “Contact us for more information”

The Strategy: Products and activities

At this point, you know what you want to achieve (goals and objectives), who will do it for you (target groups), and what messages you will send to your audiences to get them to act or think the way you want them to. Now you have to **deliver** the messages, through either **products** or **activities**.

There are literally hundreds of products and activities now available to communicators and the list keeps getting bigger. The art of communication is usually to tailor your products and activities to your target groups as good as possible: Which methods of communication are most likely to reach them? Where do they now turn for information and support? You may decide on sending messages through a journal which another actor or perhaps partner is responsible for. Which channel and activity is most likely to reach a national politician or a local bee-keeper? Choosing the right method from the tool-box, and combining them in a smart way, is something you do when you know what you want to achieve, where your target groups are, and what resources you have available. Here are a few examples of products and activities:

Face-to-face communications

- Home and field visits – workshops, demonstrations, advisory services, coaching, etc.
- Learning community events – public meeting, bee-keeping association events or meeting, study groups, etc.
- Professional organizations – meetings, workplace events, business networks, etc.
- Social media – Skype, WhatsApp, Messenger, etc.

Printed/publications

- Posters
- Flyers
- Brochures/fact sheets
- Newsletters
- Bee-keeping journals
- News papers

Electronic

- Websites
- Forum and/or e-mail discussion lists (web-based learning communities and networks)
- Online interactive tools (eg., decision support systems)

- Online library and/or databases
- E-mail/SMS
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)
- OER – Open Educational Resources (such as TedTalks)

Outdoor advertising

- Information in public places, such as parks, around the local bee-institute, etc. (eg., motivating a wider audience of the benefit of bees and pollination, etc).
- Billboards (roadside, on public transportation, at the apiaries, etc.)
- Point-of-purchase materials (at the bee-keepers' shop counters, in connection to other purchases of material such as hives, winter feed, acid, etc.)

Media

- Radio/pod (listen-on-demand)
- Newspapers (both professional reportage and public discussions/debate articles)
- Television
- Internet (f.i., government or the national authorities websites)
- Magazines
- Video news release (DVD, CD)
- Journalist workshops (targeted to create engagement among ambassadors)
- Press releases, conferences and trips
- Story submissions

Educational (for teachers and students)

- Learning programs (with material developed to fulfil a study plan)
- 'Study Packs' (physical and/or web-based)
- Interactive apiaries (learning by moving around in a web-based learning environment)
- Interactive games

Other

- Roll-ups, displays
- Film
- TV or radio spots
- Using 'champions' or 'ambassadors' who are connected to and respected by your target groups (i.e. they represent examples your target groups can follow)
- Competitions and awards (e.g. which target groups can do the best job in doing what you want them to do?) (e.g. stories, photo)
- Grants (e.g. to local bee-keeping associations for implementing awareness-raising projects)
- Workshops and trainings
- Annual celebration days
- Demonstrations

How to work with media

Mass media can support your communicative goals and influence your target group to think or act differently. But this is not an easy channel to work through. When dealing with the media, as for instance when writing a press release, here are some important points to keep in mind:

- What is your news? You need to find an approach that grabs the journalist's interest. What makes your goals and objectives current or relevant to their readers? Is there a conflict? What is the human side of the story? What makes it new or a headline?
- What type of coverage do you want (e.g. basic news, feature article, editorial, public service announcement)?
- Do you have a good media contact list that's up-to-date and linked to those media that will reach your target groups?
- Be prepared! How will you respond when the media calls you? Are you ready for tough questions? Have you already worked out 'positions' or key messages for the media and do you have evidence to support what you say?
- Will you launch your project, program or communication plan with a media-related activity (e.g. press release, conference, trip)? If so, what is important to stress so that you create an engagement among key actors and the primary target groups?
- What combination of media-related products and events will you use in the future, when implementing activities or wrapping up a project?
- Do not send information repeatedly to journalists – once they perceive you as a source of useless information, they won't even bother looking at anything you send in the future.
- Prepare 'media kits' for media – folders that include all information that may be of interest, distributed during press conferences and field trips with the press in the field, among other media events.
- Designate one person in your organization to serve as the media spokesperson. Depending on the issue all media calls could be directed to these people. This could assure that the relevant and right information reach the journalist. These persons can always link journalists to the most suitable team members or other resource persons, if necessary.

More about distribution

Once you've decided on what kind of products you will develop, such as brochures, folders, publications or fact sheets, a major question is how many you will produce. This has become a bit easier due to Internet, but most bee-keepers still prefer written material. Such production can be very costly, as can distribution and, if needed, translation.

Imagine that you decide to produce a nice glossy brochure, 8 pages long. 1000 copies sound like a good idea. So, the publications are printed, and many boxes are delivered to your

office. You have a distribution list of about 100 to which you send copies. Over the next few months, you're able to distribute a few hundred more here and there. After that, about 500 copies are shipped to the storage room in the basement. And you never know whether the publications you actually distributed had any effect or not. This is a common situation. It might have been worthwhile, but nevertheless think carefully about who you are trying to distribute to (target groups) and the costs (from production to distribution). A short notice linking to a homepage for more information might actually be much more effective than a nice glossy brochure.

Pre-testing (if relevant)

Before 'launching' all your activities in the real world, you might pre-test your messages and products with a smaller segment of your target group. This will help you assess if everything really works the way you thought it would. This process can prevent costly, and sometimes embarrassing, mistakes before it is too late! Remember - your target group is the expert.

Pre-testing is only useful if you ask your sample of people the right questions, linked to your goals and objectives. For example, regarding your target group, do they:

- Understand your message?
- Find other, unintended meanings in your messages?
- Prefer words, models or pictures?
- Get motivated by your message?
- Have easy access to your product or activity?
- Find your products appealing or 'grabbing'?
- Differ among themselves in terms of reaction (e.g. gender, age, size of operation)?
- Remember your key messages later?
- Trust the messenger?
- Have a better understanding of an issue or solution after seeing the message?

There are different methods for pre-testing, using individual selected from your target group, making a focus group interview or even 'test run' your concepts with a smaller group.

Fundamentally, pre-testing means that you really need to listen to your target audiences and make any changes to improve the way your message is received and acted upon. This is especially important if you will spend a lot of money on single effort in order create change.