

Strategic Communication for NGOs

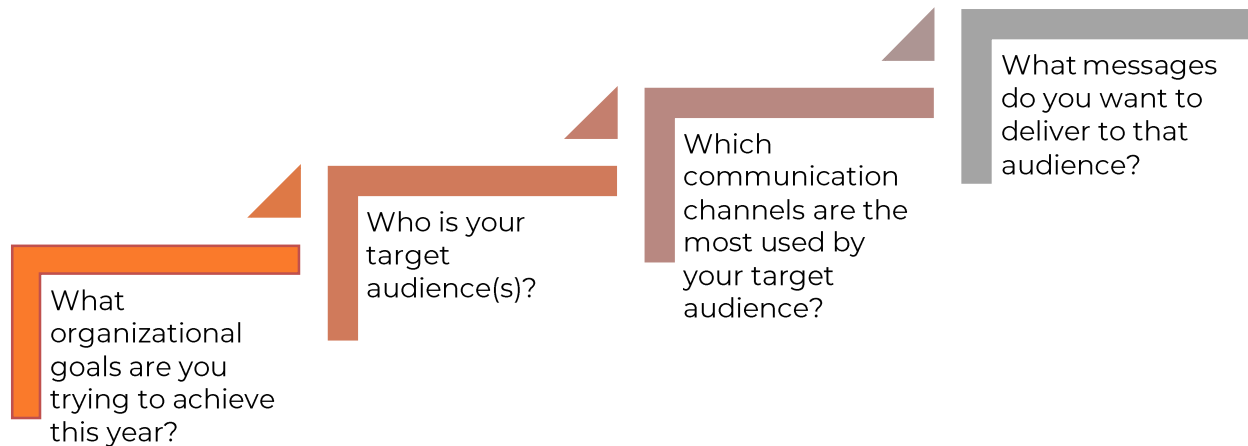
Communications



toolbox INDIA Foundation

Strategic Communication for NGOs

Before starting this section, gather your team and ask yourself the following questions:



Program implementation often leaves non-profits with not enough time or resources to devote to their communications. Without strategic communications, they can neither showcase their work, nor raise awareness about their causes, nor attract potential funders. For this reason, a good communication strategy is fundamental to today's NGOs as it allows you to inform your target audience more smartly and effectively while meeting core organizational objectives.

In this section, you will learn what strategic communication means, what a strategic communications planning process entails, what their benefits are, and lastly, how to create a strategic communications plan.

What is strategic communication?

Strategic communication entails the purposeful use of communication to advance the organization's mission. It goes beyond specific communication tactics, like organizing events or sending newsletters. Instead, it focuses on communications holistically, which includes public relations, management communication, and advertising.

Strategic communication can help organizations achieve specific goals and outcomes and attract like-minded people and supporters of their cause. Its primary aim is to articulate the process of reaching the right person with a compelling message at the right moment to support the organization's goal.

What is a strategic communications planning process?

A strategic communications planning process refers to the process of synchronizing the communications function and the organization's mission, vision, and core objectives to achieve goals.

What are the benefits of a strategic communication plan?



Source: Based on Patterson S, and Radtke J. (2009) *Strategic Communications for Non-profit Organizations: seven steps to creating a successful plan*, Second edition, John Wiley & Sons, Inc: New Jersey.

What are the steps to create a strategic communications plan?



Before starting, one should remember that creating your strategic communications plan should not be tedious and lengthy. On the contrary, treat it as a productive task that will allow you to align your organizational goals with your communications objectives, better understand your audience, and find appropriate ways to deliver your messages.

- **Perform a situational analysis**

Your NGO's internal and external environment has to be examined to identify its strengths and weaknesses. The purpose is to ensure that the strategic plan reflects the environment surrounding the organization; this way, it can address potential challenges and leverage existing advantages. To assess your organization's current situation, you could use one of the following tools: PEST analysis, SWOT analysis, or Stakeholders' scan.

- **Identify your target audience**

At this stage, your NGO needs to know whom does it need to reach, to achieve its goal. The more specific you are in defining your audience, the more efficiently you will design your strategy. Avoid generic characterizations like "a large audience, everyone above 30 or the general public" as it will diminish your message. Choose a specific, definable audience: male teachers above 30 in Tier 1 cities, CSR branches funding health programs, public servants belonging to the education Ministry, so on and so forth.

- **Establish your goals and objectives**

Despite being used interchangeably, goals and objectives are not the same. Goals refer to the overall desired result of an action that will bring about some change. In contrast, objectives are the smaller achievements of the goal-setting process. Ideally, they should be SMART, which means Specific, Measurable, Appropriate, Realistic, and Time-bound, and they should always build towards your mission.

To define the goal of your strategic communications plan, ask yourself the following question: Why are you launching communications efforts in the first place? What, specifically, do you want to achieve? On the other hand, to develop your objectives, you need to have clarity on whether you want to raise awareness, modify behaviors, interests, opinions, or call to actions.

The strategic communications plan and the overall organization's purpose must be aligned. It means that the organizational vision and mission should be consistent with the communication's goal and objectives. Depending on the organization's size, include the Board of directors and as many staff as possible during this process.

- **Make your message matter**

Once you have identified your target audience, break down your objectives into relevant messages defining what you would like that audience to do. Be as creative as possible since you will need to hold your audience's attention for long enough to receive your entire message. Craft your message by first introducing the problem, then presenting your solution, and finally leaving them with a concise call to action. Finally, plan the timing and periodicity of your messages in an intelligent and balanced way; Actively guard against spamming or bombarding them.

- **Communications through multi-distribution channels**

Leverage all means of communication, both traditional and social media, but be critical about it. An excellent strategic communications plan chooses appropriate channels according to their target audience and tailors their message to fit the tonality of that channel. The use of native analytics on platforms like Twitter and Facebook or any other social media management tool will allow you to reach them easily. In other instances, it may be more prudent to write a report, send a newsletter, or organize an event. The options are endless, use them wisely.

- **Measure your impact**

Identify the tools that you will use to assess your communications. Include SMART indicators to measure your success, in terms of the number of hits your website received, percentage of increase in funding following a mail-out, number of attendees to an event, Twitter retweets/likes, Facebook comments/shares, etc. By doing so, the strategy can be reviewed and enhanced as it becomes easier to determine what is working, what should be improved, and what should be avoided.

What are the roles and responsibilities of the Board of directors and staff members in a strategic communication process?

Board	Staff
Inspires and guides during the planning stage.	The staff is involved in the planning stage and is responsible for executing it.
Extends support to the staff in drafting customized messages to reach the intended audience.	Draft the messages addressed to the intended audiences. This is conducted in consultation with the Board.
Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the communication channels and provide feedback on the same.	Develop and identify communication channels to support the objectives of the communication plan.
Identify key audiences to be part of the communications strategic plan	Identify key audiences <u>to</u> be part of the activities of the organization.

Further reading

PR in Practice: Planning and Managing Public Relations Campaigns: A Step-by-step Guide: 1, By Anne Gregory

Press Releases Are Not a PR Strategy, by Linda B. VandeVrede

Strategic Communications for Non-profit Organizations: seven steps to creating a successful plan, by Patterson S, and Radtke J.

Strategic communications framework by United Nations Economic Commission for Europe