



# CHANGE TOOLKIT

## Tool: Communications Plan

Used in:  
PLAN

My Notes

### What is it?

A communications plan is a standard process for planning communications activity. It can be tactical (short term planning) or strategic (longer term planning, i.e. three to five years). It deals with the fundamentals: why you are communicating, what, to whom, and how. It also includes evaluation.

### Why use it in a change process?

Good communications are especially important during change, particularly during the Plan stage of the change curve. Making sure people are aware of what is happening and why makes the change process smoother for everyone.

Planning communications is not just about telling people the right things, at the right time (taking into account where they are on the change curve). You also need to listen to peoples' concerns and questions.

Using a communications plan can help you to do all this effectively.

### What do I need to do?

Follow the steps and guidance in the example communications plan template below, tailoring it to suit your particular project or change.

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## **COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

### **1. Aim**

This section should state what we are trying to achieve and the aim of the communications plan.

### **2. Introduction**

This should introduce the project and provide background information, as well as identify what analysis has been undertaken and the basis of any research. Planning techniques (such as SWOT – Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) can also provide useful information at this stage. It should identify where we are now and include any information generated as part of any audit. It should also clearly articulate the role of the communications strategy in the project and include responsibilities where relevant.

### **3. Objectives**

The objectives should be measurable steps which are going to be taken to reach the aim. They need to be SMART (Stretching, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time bound). They also need to be practical and precise.

The objectives also need to explain what effect the communication will have – is it cognitive (aiming to change the way people think), is it affective (aiming to change the way people feel), is it co native (aiming to change what people do). Examples may include creating awareness, promoting understanding, raising profile, informing and persuading.

#### 4. Campaign Stakeholders

This should include the identification of key groups and audiences. This could include a wide range of audiences such as internal (all staff, directors, managers, etc.) councillors, residents, media, partners.

Segmentation techniques (such as the power/interest analysis) can help to identify stakeholder groups and their relative importance.

- **Primary target audience** – consists of those who are directly affected by the messages being communicated.
- **Secondary target audience** - groups who will benefit from receiving the campaign message or who influence the target audience in the future e.g. Members, Trade Unions.
- **Stakeholders** – other people and groups who might directly or indirectly benefit from the campaign message

Audience	Power	Interest	Importance

#### 5. Project Stakeholders

It is also useful to identify project stakeholders. Use the table below to illustrate the project stakeholders. These may change as the project progresses; the communications plan should be a living document.

Name	Title	Role	Contact

## 6. Key Messages

Messages help to articulate key points and will help to shape and focus attitudes and opinions. This will identify which of the messages are important and their relevance to each of the stakeholder groups. They should be identified from the analysis and derived from the objectives. Key messages are also an essential part of evaluation.

Audience	Key messages

## 7. Strategy

The strategy should articulate how the activity and campaign will be carried out. It should have a rationale, be proactive, focus on results and be dynamic. It should include identification of stakeholders and messages

## 8. Tactics

This should consider the internal and external methods available to the council Tactics should cover the specifics of what you intend to do, produce or undertake. It should explicitly cover the **timescales** and **resources** available.

## 9. Other Considerations

The development of any communications plan should pay regard to hard to reach and vulnerable groups of people. This includes translation and interpretation requirements. All communications should be in plain English.

## 10. Evaluation

The evaluation and measurement element of the plan should identify how the tactical steps will be monitored. This should identify ongoing measurement as well as evaluation of the results and completion of the plan.

Measurement can be considered at a number of different levels:

- **Input** – the contribution you have made in terms of time, resources and material
- **Output** – the simplest measure, recording what messages went out and their degree of exposure and audience reach
- **Out-take** – the extent to which the audience was aware of the message, understood it and remembered it.
- **Outcome** – the degree to which the campaign had actually changed audience opinion, behaviour or attitude.
- **Outflow** – the overall reputation of the organisation among stakeholders.



The evaluation should cover whether the objectives were met, whether the strategy worked as intended and should also look at where do we go from here.

## 11. Appendix

Once a plan has been agreed, a schedule or time line will help to identify the proposed timescale for all communications activity. It can be reviewed and updated at regular intervals. It should also identify any key dates, such as council meetings and decisions.

Type	Message	Responsibility	Distribution	Media	Timing