The Communications Strategy Template is intended for use specifically for projects that require a robust communications strategy, but is a useful tool for any project to effectively strategize toward communicating messages effectively. This template guides your project in completing a plan for communications strategy and deliverables. It will guide you through sections on audiences, resources, barriers, goals and objectives, messages, products and channels, and ultimately evaluation. We intend for projects to consult this template early on to begin thinking about communications audiences and objectives. Complete with partner input and revisit during the course of the project.

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| Audiences: Whom do you wish to impact? What is important to know about them? | |
| Conduct an analysis (e.g. force field, social network, stakeholder, SWOT, outcome mapping, etc.) to identify 2-3 key audiences that are integral to achieving your goals in research translation. Identify audiences you would need to directly influence to create the change you seek. Potential audiences include fellow scientists, funders, journalists, policymakers, non-governmental organizations, and various publics. Be specific—for example, specify the kinds of policymakers at a national or local level, in a Ministry or in parliament, or even one specific policymaker, that make up your key audiences. | |
| Audience 1: | |
| Audience 2: | |
| Audience 3: | |
| Research your audiences through interviews, focus groups, surveys, or secondary research. List important facts learned about your key audiences that influence how you will communicate with them. Important information may include their knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, preferred communications methods, cultural needs, the existing policy infrastructure, timing in legislative cycles, etc. Note the most important information about your audiences that will help you develop strategies for developing messages and products through specific channels. | |
| Audience 1 Facts: | |
| Audience 2 Facts: | |
| Audience 3 Facts: | |
| Resources: What resources do you have? What resources do you need? | |
| Assess your resources in order to develop a feasible communications strategy and/or demonstrate need for further resources. Consider both budgetary and human resources, including: honoraria, information technology, materials, meeting expenses, personnel, travel, etc. | |
| Budgeted resources: | |
| Needed resources: | |
| Barriers: What may interfere with communication? | |
| Engage in a process to identify potential barriers to communication (e.g. problem tree analysis). Barriers may be related to culture or language, translating research into policy and practice, technology, skills and capacity, etc. | |
| Potential barriers: | |
| Goal and Objectives: What do you wish to accomplish? | |
| Identify an overarching goal for your communications. Goals are more broad-based and allude to impact. What is the desired impact for your team’s research? Potential goals include influencing policy, changing practice, and improving well-being. | |
| Goal: | |
| Identify three communications objectives that align with your goal. Keep in mind the acronym “SMART,” which reminds us that objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Potential communications objectives during the course of your project include: | |
| * Ensure 100% of key stakeholders are informed about important issues throughout the project * Engage 80% of stakeholders within the project’s first six months to promote interest and ownership in the project * Position your work such that 70% of stakeholders perceive project team as experts during and after research * Maintain transparency such that 90% of stakeholders perceive project team as open and transparent throughout the project * Engage stakeholders to the extent that 60% provide feedback to project before the project’s end | * Participate in three local community engagement events within the first six months to ensure that 70% of the community feels the project team cares about them and their concerns * Demonstrate that your team shares community values with 70% of the local community feeling that the project shares its values by the end of the first year of the project * Frame research implications so that 80% of key audiences view the research topic in ways that resonate with their values at project’s end * Share information with five policy influencers within the Ministry of Education by the end of the project |
| Objective 1: | |
| Objective 2: | |
| Objective 3: | |
| Message: What do you wish to communicate? | |
| For maximum impact, summarize your research implications in three key points that are easy to communicate, remember, and repeat. Choose language that is actionable and compels the reader to do something in response to the information. | |
| Key Point 1: | |
| Key Point 2: | |
| Key Point 3: | |
| Storytelling is a powerful communications strategy. Employ storytelling techniques such as setting, character, plot, conflict, theme, and narrative. Tell stories that align with your key points and resonate with your audience. Include vivid detail and emotion in order to cause changes in attitudes and/or behaviors. Consider framing your messaging around the existing problem and the potential solutions. Focus on creating value for others and evoke your audience’s sense of community. | |
| Story 1: | |
| Story 2: | |
| Story 3: | |
| You may have developed your key points and stories from your knowledge of specific audiences. If not, highlight different aspects of your message for different audiences, according to their interests, passions, and needs. What important points and/or compelling stories will resonate most with your key audiences? | |
| Audience 1: | |
| Audience 2: | |
| Audience 3: | |
| Products and Channels: What will you do to accomplish your goals? | |
| Identify products that will communicate your key messages to your key audiences most effectively. Products may include blogs, case studies, educational materials, fact sheets, journal articles, newspaper and magazine articles, podcasts, policy briefs, press releases, research reports, videos, website content, etc. Make sure your project has an individual or institution responsible for producing these materials. Examples of these products will be available on the LASER PULSE website. | |
| Audience 1: | |
| Audience 2: | |
| Audience 3: | |
| Identify channels that will enable you to disseminate your products to your key audiences. Channels may include communities of practice, conferences, debates, e-mails, forums, media events, meetings, panels, phone calls, presentations, social media, symposia, training sessions, webinars, working groups, etc. | |
| Audience 1: | |
| Audience 2: | |
| Audience 3: | |
| Identify important dates for communications: Days or months for planned events or existing conferences, community events, or legislative events that you might want a representative to attend. If more than a few dates are significant, consider organizing these in a Gantt Chart. Make sure your project has an individual or institution responsible for communicating during key events. | |
| Important Dates Audience 1: | |
| Important Dates Audience 2: | |
| Important Dates Audience 3: | |
| Evaluation: How will you know that you’ve succeeded? | |
| When feasible, work with an independent evaluator to evaluate the impact of your communications strategy. Assess the effectiveness of your strategy with both your internal team and your key audiences. Analyze and discuss the results; then, use them to revise your communications strategy. Potential indicators for measurement include: Reach, usefulness, actual use, changes in knowledge and/or attitudes, changes in policy/practice, partner and/or end user satisfaction, partnership outcomes, etc. | |
| Internal team indicators: | |
| Audience 1 indicators: | |
| Audience 2 indicators: | |
| Audience 3 indicators: | |
| Evaluation findings and trends: | |

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