**Communications plan template**

**Guide to this template**

*This template has suggested headings and comments to help you write a communications plan. Different projects or issues will require different levels of detail. This plan provides a starting point so feel free to tailor it to make it work for you.*

**Help us to help you**

*How helpful is this template? What parts were really useful, is anything missing, what areas would you like more guidance in? Email us on* [*comms@communitycomms.org.nz*](mailto:comms@communitycomms.org.nz)*. Thanks!*

**Purpose**

* Provide one or two sentences about the topic your communications plan covers.
* Outline why you need to communicate.

**Communication objectives**

* List one or more objectives you want to achieve. These should be linked to wider project or organisational goals.
* It is useful to make your objectives SMART: specific, measureable, achievable/realistic and time bound.

**Background and environmental factors**

* It may be helpful if you insert a brief summary of the project or of previous communications on this topic, for example whether anything has been said to staff, stakeholders or the media.
* Write about any internal or external factors, for example:
  + related or interdependent projects, or
  + other external events that may impact on your communications (eg media coverage of a topical issue; another organisation’s activities that are relevant).

**Stakeholders and audiences**

* Ask yourself who needs to know, who can impact your work and who does your work impact? Then list them as either a stakeholder or audience:
  + stakeholders are those you want to work with in your communications or project
  + audiences are those you are wanting to communicate with.
* Do you need to break groups down? For example, the public may be too big a group and you might need to think about population sub-groups, like young people or those living in a particular suburb.

**Approach**

* Talk about (at a high level) how you plan to achieve your communications objectives – what approach will help you get there?
* Outline the rationale for your approach and the communication activity planned. For example, why you want to target a particular group and how your choice of channel (eg face to face meetings, or twitter) is suited to them.
* What are the barriers, risks and issues your communications needs to take account of?

**Messages**

* Your messages should be focused on your identified stakeholders and audiences. Use language they will understand and take into account their existing knowledge.
* Depending on the topic, you may develop different sets of messages for various audiences, tailored to their area of interest. Or sets of messages that change as time goes on.
* Focus on the end use/outcomes rather than the process.
* Can your messages highlight the positive difference your initiative will make to the audience or stakeholder groups?
* Use the what, when, why, who, where and how questions to make sure you’ve included the basic information in your messages.
* What is your call to action – what do you want people to do after they hear your messages?

**Action plan**

* When thinking about your communication activity think about tools and channels. A tool is something that contains your messages and the channel is how you get it across. For example:
  + tools – media releases, fact sheets, articles, brochures, question and answer sheets, posters, presentations, briefings, memos, a tweet or post
  + channels – news media, internet, twitter, facebook, conferences, workshops
* Who will do what? Who will be your spokesperson/people, who will draft the communications and who will approve it?
* You can structure your action plan as follows. You may not need all the columns.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Communications activity**  **(tool or channel)** | **Target audience** | **Who’s involved and what is their role** | **Timing** | **Resource (hours or dollars)** |
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**Measurement**

* How will you know you’ve been successful, or whether you need to change your approach? Frequently used measures include:
  + formal research
  + debrief of project team
  + anecdotal feedback from customers (internal and external)
  + focus groups and surveys
  + number of website hits or retweets
  + Number of media clippings or coverage of key messages in the media

**A quick check…**

A good communication plan flows and its sections are connected. For example:

*□* Do your objectives cover all your stakeholder and audience groups?

*□* Is your approach in line with your objectives, and does your communication activity reflect your approach?

*□* Do you have communication activity that targets each of your stakeholder and audience groups?

*□* Are your messages appropriate for your different stakeholders and audiences?

*□* Will your measurement technique help you assess how effectively you met your objectives?

**To find out more, visit www.communitycomms.org.nz. For advice or a communications boost, email us at comms@communitycomms.org.nz**