Communications Protocol Guidance for Effective Collaborative Action

Introduction

As part of your communication efforts, we recommend co-designing a communication protocol together with your initial group of stakeholders prior to embarking on any communications activities. A communications protocol looks like a code of practice for communication professionals that you ask each of your stakeholders to agree to. It defines a way of communicating for all stakeholders and therefore upholds the credibility of your collaborative initiative.

In this guidance we give some suggestions on how to co-create this protocol. We suggest you consider asking each critical stakeholder to sign it and to define what happens if they do not honour the protocol.

Developing a communications protocol

We recommend considering the following points to be included.

- **Definitions & Boilerplates**

  o Define key terms, those that are most relevant to your process and which will be used throughout to ensure all parties align and use them in their communications in the same way. This ensures consistency and avoids misunderstandings.

  o Create boilerplate texts that can be consistently used in all communications assets, and when pitching, introducing, or explaining the initiative to external parties. Starting with, how would you all describe your initiative?

- **Brand guidelines/ Identity**

  o Define a set of brand guidelines applicable to your initiative, which may include:

    - A logo and/ or Trademark and guidelines for usage.
    - Usage of partner logos (joined branding).
    - Usage of organisation and person's names in acknowledgements
    - Colour palette.
    - Usage of taglines.
    - Fonts.
    - Illustrations.
    - Lay-outs of documents/ publications.
    - Photography and usage of credit.

- **Publications**
  - Consider adding usage of copyright and disclaimers that need to be included in all publications, reports or papers related to your initiative.

- **Digital & social**
  - define who and how your initiative will be represented on social media or on the web.

    For example, are views shared online private or on behalf of the organization? What are topics to avoid, or themes to encourage in the online conversation?

- **Coordination**
  - Define how the coordination of the communications efforts will be organised.
    - Who are the communications focal points for each organization involved and what are their responsibilities?
    - What is expected of each organization regarding communication?

      For example, creation of content can be agreed upon with an Editorial Calendar in which each partner agrees to a regular contribution.

Resources

If you want to see concrete examples of Communication Protocols you could start with these:

- **Better Cotton Initiative - Member Code of Practice.** This is not only on communications but gives an idea of a protocol that all participants can sign up to: https://bettercotton.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/BCI-Member-Code-of-Practice_August-2021.pdf

- Communication Rules from the **Roundtable on Sustainable Palm oil.** https://www.rspo.org/files/resource_centre/RSPO_Guidelines_on_Communications_Claims_110531.pdf

But remember, each protocol is different and tailored to the specific needs of every initiative and the stakeholders involved in it. It is a collaborative effort which should serve as a helpful guide to create consistent, sensitive, and effective communication activities for the benefit of your collaborative effort.