Communications Guidance for Effective Collaborative Action

"The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said"

~ Peter Drucker ~

Introduction

The ultimate goal of communication is to help ensure that audiences – specifically those critical to the success of the collaborative action work – understand, actively support and stay engaged. All collaborative initiatives have limited human and financial resources, so it is important to use communication resources strategically to reach audiences that will help your collaborative action initiative, rather than communicating widely and hoping for the best.

How to ensure Effective Communication in a Collaborative effort?

Effective communication is key throughout the entire process and in all the Building Blocks and an Essential Practice of the Effective Collaborative Action methodology. Including a communication person or someone responsible for communications activities is very important in the Backbone support team and should be appointed early on.

Recommended principles

A strategic communications approach is grounded in a solid understanding of:

- The audiences and their communication needs, including how these needs evolve over time.

- Paying special attention to those voices that may not be always heard, e.g., marginalized communities.

- The systems that need to be in place so that key decision-makers and associated groups receive and share regular and useful information.

- The appropriate human and financial resources needed to support communications that are clear and consistent throughout the collaboration journey.

- Ensuring that the collective effort amongst all involved is always acknowledged and demonstrated.

Approaches

A key first step towards successful communication is taking the time to:

a. **Identify your audiences** – internal and external

b. **Understand your audiences**

c. **Develop a communications strategy and plan** targeted and differentiated to your audiences

Important questions to consider when building this fundamental understanding of your audiences are the following:

1. Who are they exactly?

2. What are their concerns? What would motivate them to support the collaborative process?

3. What action do you want them to take/ or what role are you expecting them to play?

4. What are the best and most cost-effective ways of reaching the identified individuals and/or groups? But not only the most cost-effective, which ones are the most influential?

A good place to start when building an understanding of your audiences is the stakeholder engagement plan. The analysis involved in producing this plan provides insights into who the key audiences are, their key concerns and motivations for change. A simple matrix, such as the example below, can be used to map audiences. It is important to work with the wider team and your key starting stakeholders to articulate and agree on the audiences' "desired beliefs" and "desired actions". The primary audiences are the stakeholders participating in the collaborative action initiative, but it is also important to identify external audiences with whom lessons learned will potentially be shared. From here, messages can be easily tailored for each of the audience groups.

TOOL: Mapping audiences

Audience/Individual	Key concerns and beliefs	Desired beliefs	Desired action	Most cost-effective & influential communications channels	Communication needs
Civil Society					
Indigenous Leader					
Farmer group					
Private Sector					
Local Government					

Developing a communications strategy and plan

A simple plan outlines your goals, how you would like to achieve them, what success would look like (measurable) and a description of key products to support your activities.

See below a simple tool to develop such a plan.

Goals	Strategic approaches	Indicators of success	Description of key activities	Description of key Products
Example: By end of (INSERT DATE), representatives from key stakeholder groups are highly aware of and proudly engaged in key collaborative processes, proactively providing information and feedback through their networks. By end of (INSERT DATE), 40 % of communications content disseminated comes directly from stakeholder groups.	Providing clear and consistent information and updates, especially around key moments. Creating space for stakeholder groups to communicate progress and learning, ideas, and other information.	# of visitors to the website # of opens on the e-newsletter % of subscription increase % of stakeholder shared content	Keep stakeholder representatives updated with informative information bites and encourage representatives to share these through their organizations and networks Mini outreach campaigns to create stakeholder engagement around key moments, processes and events	**Information kit** containing an explainer video, brochure and general PowerPoint presentation for use at all types of events to provide information about what the XX is, how it works and why it's important. **Website** **E-update** **Outreach Plans** **End of year** summary of key activities, development and achievements. **Event calendar**

In addition to indicators of success in the plan, signals of change can be detected throughout the process to measure how effective communication evolves.

Next to your communications plan consider developing a content calendar to guide the content development required for various channels available and a social media plan.

Suggested other communications principles:

- <u>Co-create and shape together</u>: Wherever possible, space will be created to allow representatives of stakeholder groups to contribute and shape communications, enabling them to truly be engaged and to share and enrich communications content, making it more relevant to the targeted audiences.

- <u>Keep it simple</u>: All content developed will be drafted in plain, easy-to-understand language, avoiding jargon.

- <u>Culturally sensitive</u>: Language and communication approaches are culturally sensitive.

- <u>Create engaging content</u>: Focus on the people behind the organisations, the data or the technical reports. People connect to people so make them the heart of 60% of your stories.

- <u>Measure and adjust</u>: Ensure monitoring and evaluation of the communications strategy and plan is in place to ensure that communications are 'hitting their mark' as your journey evolves and that funds are being used as effectively as possible.

Resources

Examples of Communication Plans:

- Papua New Guinea communications plan on palm

- Papua New Guinea Brochure on palm