Communication plan

NTNU template

Communication plan (NTNU template)

This is an overview of the most important elements of a standard communication plan. Each point is described in detail, with examples, in the document below. Exercises / help for reflection are also suggested for each point.

1   What are the goals? (What are the most important goals of the organization, unit, project, etc.?)

2   What is the communication goal? (What do you want to achieve with the communication)

3   Analysis of the current situation (What does the situation look like today?)

4   Audiences (Who do you need to communicate with to achieve your goals?)

5   Channels (Where/how do you connect with your audiences?)

6   Message (What do you want to say?)

7   Responsibility for the communication (Who does what?)

1 What is the overarching goal?

The top priority in a communication plan is to know what you want to achieve. When we talk about goals, we are not usually talking about communication. We are talking about **overarching** goals: for NTNU, for the faculty/department, for the research project: Very specifically, what do you want to change or achieve?

Often you can find goals in governing documents. For example:

- Development goals in NTNU's strategy
- Goals for our activities in annual plans
- Deliverables in research applications

Examples of goals from different strategies and research applications:

- The Faculty's academic activities provide an evidence base for coherent and sustainable priorities in health policy.
- The Department aims to increase the number of excellent teaching practitioners.
- The research group's results will help to reduce CO2 emissions in the Norwegian construction industry.

Alternatively, the goal may be a single issue that you want to achieve or change:

- Ensure that all heads of study programmes introduce the new KASPER system.
- Ensure full funding for the fifth year of study in the teacher education programmes for primary and lower secondary school teachers.
- All students and staff must clean up after themselves in the cafeteria and dispose of rubbish.

Exercise:

Describe the overarching goals of the organization, the unit or the project.

2 What is the communication goal?

Start from the overarching goals and ask yourself: *For us to succeed in achieving these goals, what needs to be communicated?* Not all goals have associated communication goals or belong in a communication plan. Important sub-goals for a research project might be to develop a new method, establish a steering committee or appoint a coordinator. None of these normally need to be included in a communication plan.

Example of goals that have associated communication goals:

- The research group's results will help to reduce CO2 emissions in the Norwegian construction industry.

This is the overarching goal. To achieve this goal, you need to make the construction industry aware of the research results. To achieve this, communication is needed. For example, the associated communication goal might be:

- We will communicate with key players in the industry and showcase the results from the research project.

Exercise:

Describe the most important communication goals and link them with the overarching goals.

3 Analysis of the current situation

Whether you plan to create an extensive or a simple communication plan, you need to know the reality of the situation you are going to communicate in.

An important part of the preparation for a communication plan may be to gather data from surveys and to collect facts and figures that clarify the current situation.

If you know the current situation well, it will be much easier to work with effective and goal-oriented communication.

Example:

- What is the Norwegian construction industry's view of its own CO_2 emissions? Is the industry ready to transform its production and look for new methods? Or is the industry hopelessly behind the times and does it have to be convinced of the need to switch to new methods?
- Why don't students and staff clean up after themselves in the cafeteria? Don't they care? Can't they find the waste stations? Do they think the staff should do it?

These are different realities that need completely different communication approaches.

In a more extensive communication plan, it will also often make sense to create a stakeholder analysis, where you identify the needs and interests of the most important target audiences and consider how to build relationships with different actors.

Exercise:

Describe the current situation and what it means for further communication work.

4 Target audience

Start with the goals and ask the question: "To succeed with the goals, who do we need to communicate with?" Define and delimit the target audience as clearly as possible. (Note that the term "stakeholders" is often used instead of "target audience" in this context.)

Example:

- Goal: Your research will help to reduce CO_2 emissions in the Norwegian construction industry.
  - In this case, "business and industry" is a hopelessly large and not very relevant target audience. "Leaders and top developers in the Norwegian construction industry" is far more manageable and focused. Or perhaps the most important target audience for the project is simply "the development director in Statsbygg".
- Goal: Ensure that all heads of programmes introduce the new KASPER system.
  - In this case, you must communicate with all heads of the programmes, but in addition it makes sense to communicate with heads of departments and deans. If students benefit because the employees use the system, students are also a relevant target audience.
- Goal: Ensure full funding of five-year programmes in teacher education.
  - Here, the most important target audience is politicians (for example, the Minister of Education and Research, the Minister's advisers and the Standing Committee on Education and Research). In addition, a variety of other organizations can be informed and linked up, such as interest organizations for teachers, the Norwegian Student Organisation, other universities and university colleges, and our own students.

It is also relevant to ask:

- Who **must** we communicate with (internally and externally)?
- Who **should** we communicate with?
- Who **can** we communicate with if we have the resources for this?

Exercise:

List the most important target audiences. Describe briefly why they are important and link different audiences with each communication goal.

5 Channels

A good communication channel is where you meet your most important audiences, at a time when they are receptive to your message.

Which channels to use depends entirely on who your audiences are and where those audiences are available to you. Media, websites, intranets and social media are well-established and effective channels, but remember that conferences, workshops, email and personal meetings are equally important.

Example:

- If your goal is to get other researchers to use your research results, publications and scientific conferences are usually your best channels. If you plan to share tools, data or background information with other researchers, the research project may need a dedicated website.

- If you want to reach out to leaders in business and industry, Dagens næringsliv, Aftenposten and sector-specific media are good channels, but the annual trade fair may be just as important.

Using established channels, with established audiences, is often very effective. Be critical about creating new channels and only create channels that you **know** you really need and have the resources to maintain.

A channel matrix can be a useful tool for planning your communication.
(See page 9).

> ## Exercise:
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> **Describe the most important channels for each target audience. Also think about how much effort will be needed to use each channel.**

6 Message

A message is the essence of what you want to say, summarized in a way that sparks interest among your most important audiences. The message sums up the point you really want your audience to hear, understand, and remember.

A good message grabs attention: the one sentence that makes your target audience sit up and want to know more. A bit like a good headline for a newspaper article.

For complex projects or communication initiatives on a larger scale, you usually need more supporting messages as well.

These questions may be a useful starting point for creating messages:

- What is the most important thing you want your target audience to know about the organization, the research project, or my case?
- What is unique or special about my organization, research project or case?
- Why is this important to my target audience? Look at the organization, the research project or your case from the target audience's perspective. When you are working with a message, one of the most important things is to try to get into the mind of the user/target audience and ask yourself: **What's in it for me?**

Creating good messages takes a lot of work, but it is worth the effort, because once you have taken the trouble to plan a good key message and good supporting messages, you usually know what to say next. A good message must stand the test of time and cannot be repeated too often.

Exercise:

Find the essence of what you want to communicate and formulate a message. Reinforce this with supporting messages if necessary.

7 Responsibility for communication

The responsibility for communication is linked with the responsibility for the issue in question, both for managers and for employees. In general, this means that the person closest to the issue must communicate about it, and the person who has the responsibility for the case also has the responsibility for communication.

Example of communication responsibility:

- Spokesperson. The person who is designated or is responsible for making a statement on behalf of the organization. This is often a manager or a person with top-level responsibility.
- Press contact. The person whom the media should contact, either to get information or to get in touch with the spokesperson. The press contact and the spokesperson may well be the same individual. This is typical for a research project, while "NTNU" or "IV Faculty" are examples where the spokesperson and the press contact will often be different people.
- Person responsible for work with communications. The person who follows up the communication responsibility in the unit or project.
- Content manager: Responsible for creating content for, updating, maintaining and operating communication channels (website, social media, etc.).

Exercise:

Describe the allocation of responsibility for work with communications. (Who does what.)
If relevant: Describe who is responsible for comment to the press.

Channel matrix

A channel matrix can help you sort the channels that work best for different audiences. **Here is an example.** A matrix like this must be designed for each communication plan.

	Politicians/ authorities	Business and industry	The public	Journalists	Own employees	Researchers in Norway	Researchers abroad	Research Council of Norway/EU
National media	x	x	x		x	x		x
Local media		x (local)	x (local)		X (local)			
Industry media		x						
Social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter)		x	x	x	x			
Seminar X					x	x	x	
Workshop Y								
Personal contact		x				x	x	
Visit/public relations	x	x			x			
Gemini/Forskning.no				x		x		
The project's website		x			x	x	x	X
Sector media (Khrono, Universitetsavisa, etc.)	x			x		x		x

Action plan

The communication plan should be followed up by a concrete action plan or list of initiatives.

Date/Week	Activity	Goal of the initiative	Target audience	Channel	Sender	Responsible for implementation