

Communications Issues

A Community Service of Harley House Consultants Inc.



COMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT PROCESS

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Making Communicators Better Managers—Making Managers Better Communicators

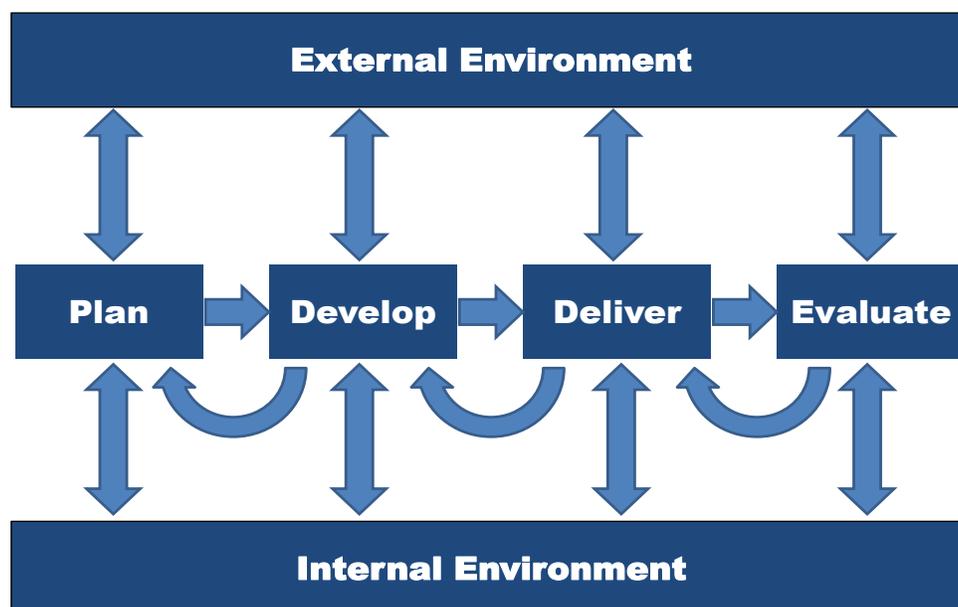
Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide communicators with a process to improve the management of communications projects. Whether you are preparing a speech, or launching a communications strategy in support of a major program announcement, it is important to follow a systematic and pragmatic approach to the planning, development, delivery and evaluation of that communications output.

One of the major objectives of adopting the Communications Management Process to manage individual communications outputs, services and complete campaigns, is to improve their communications and cost effectiveness. This cannot be accomplished after the fact; it must be built in throughout the communications management process by:

1. Undertaking an analysis of the external and internal environments so as to define the issues and opportunities and formulate a communications plan/strategy with SMART objectives.
2. Developing a strategic communications program/output and pre-testing its components.
3. Delivering the strategy/output and assessing its impact so as to take course corrections.
4. Carrying out a post project evaluation so as to demonstrate effectiveness of the communications effort and documenting lessons learned.

This document has been set up to outline the four simple steps to follow as you plan, develop, deliver and evaluate any communications output. For each step in the process, we have identified a list of potential questions to help guide the management of the process. Individuals interested in learning more about how and when to adopt the Communications Management process are encouraged to register in the training program scheduled for Friday, October 31, 2008 in Ottawa. To learn more, please go to: www.harleyhouse.com/training.jsp?tgt=CT



By adopting this simple communications management process you will find that your communications efforts:

- Are easier to plan and implement.
- Take less time to execute.
- Are more effective.
- Are more creative.
- Are more likely to be used.
- Provide you with more opportunities to make comparisons between strategies and outputs.

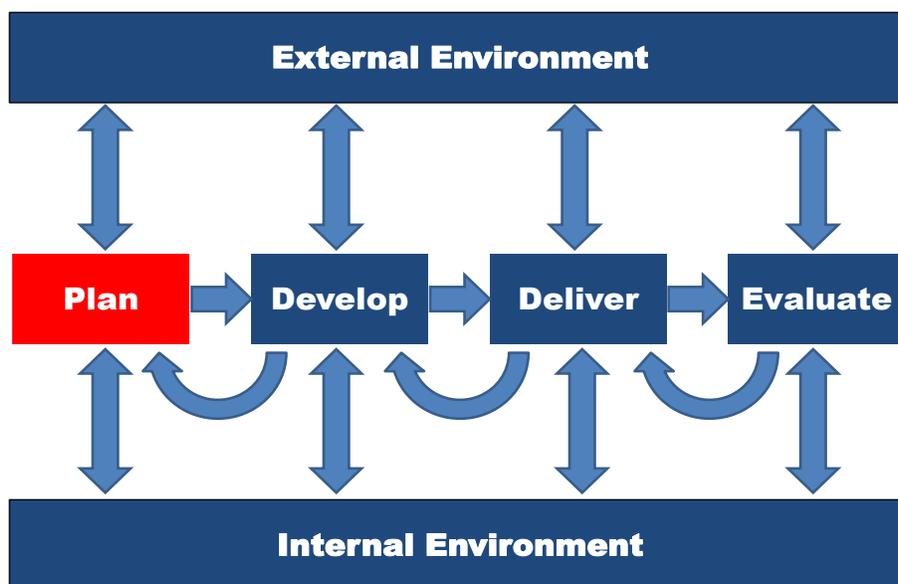
This document is an extension of the Communications Strategy Planning Template that was made available last month. This template was designed to assist Government Canada Communication professionals prepare strategic communications plans at the corporate, program and project level. The template has been created and used by Harley House Consultants Inc. in the preparation of Strategic Communications Plans on behalf of numerous clients. If you would like to obtain a copy of the Communications Strategy Planning Template, please feel free to contact us via email at, dale@harleyhouse.com, or visit our web site www.harleyhouse.com.



Step 1 - Planning

The focus of this first step of the Communications Management Process is on preparing:

- Public Environmental Analysis
- Communications Objectives
- Target Audiences
- Themes & Messages
- Communications Activities
- A Work Plan (Timing & Budget)



Public Environmental Analysis

A Public Environmental Analysis report should summarize the current public perceptions and sensitivities on the issue and identify national and regional patterns. In preparing this synopsis, it may be appropriate to:

- Summarize both national and regional media coverage of the issue, noting any significant trends.
- Outline the findings of any special studies or public opinion polls on the topic.
- Specify trends revealed by an analysis of enquiries to the Department/Agency and the Minister.
- Indicate unusual lobbying activities, demonstrations or other public pressures.
- Identify noteworthy attention given to the issue in the House of Commons (e.g. questions, statements).



Communications Objectives

The objectives of the communications activity should flow from the program/departmental objectives and from the Public Environmental Analysis. Regardless of the type of communications activity, the objective should specify a desired outcome and be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely. SMART objectives are defined in the following terms:

Specific - Audience, messages, desired response, timetable

It is often useful to think about the objectives and their relationship to your target audiences – right from the beginning. What does this strategy have to accomplish? Am I trying to inform, educate, change values, change behaviours, get immediate action, or get someone to do something? By when do I want to accomplish my objectives? Be as concrete as possible.

Measurable - Awareness, understanding, support

Objectives must be measurable so that you can demonstrate communications results. Use benchmark data if possible and state objectives in terms of... “Increase awareness from x% to y%.” If benchmark data does not exist, state the objective in terms of... “Generate x number of media enquires”, or “Achieve an understanding level of y%.”

Achievable - Possible given the public environment, timing, and available resources

It is important to ensure that your objectives are doable given the current situation. Also ensure that achievements are attributable to the communications strategy. You do not want to be accountable for achieving objectives that are outside your control. If not achievable, identify what additional activities could be carried out if specific additional resources were available.

Relevant - To the organization’s mandate

Can I sell these objectives to my clients – program, policy, my boss, others? Do they support the objectives outlined in the organization’s departmental strategic planning framework? Do my objectives fit with the Government’s overall agenda/messaging as outlined in the Speech from the Throne and budget?

Timely - Can be achieved in time to contribute to the overall objectives

How long do I have to achieve the results? One month? Three years? If the strategy is intended to support legislation before parliament, is the strategy designed to achieve its objectives before the legislation is scheduled to be passed?

Examples of SMART communications objectives include:

- **Output Objectives** defines the quality and quantity of communications activities developed and delivered. The output objectives are the easiest level of objectives to define and measure. The achievement of these objectives is typically tracked through secondary data analysis, and assigning project numbers to track the number and nature of communications projects and services provided.
 - *Plan, develop, deliver and evaluate the communications products and services identified in the communications strategy in the allotted timeframe.*
 - *Produce and distribute x copies of the poster by March 31, 2009.*



- **Out-take Objectives** defines to what extent target audiences are aware of core themes and messages, and have retained and understood them. The primary tools used to track the achievement of out-take objectives is quantitative and qualitative public opinion research. Additional tools could include public enquiries tracking, recording the number of visitors attending an event or speech, and tracking the number of visits to websites in order to assess audience exposure to communications themes and messages as a proxy for awareness.
 - *Make 75% of eligible clients aware of the existence of the program within 12 months of the launch of the initiative.*
 - *Make 85% of media from major city daily newspapers aware of the existence of the new program by March 31, 2009.*

- **Outcome Objectives** defines to what extent the target audiences change their behaviour or support. Outcome objectives are the hardest to track because they are typically more long term, and may be influenced by many variables outside the control of communications. Social marketing campaigns such as Health Canada programs to reduce tobacco and alcohol consumption are examples of programs with outcome objectives. However, behaviour is not just influenced by communications but also by environmental, social and economic conditions. Techniques include focus groups and interviews with members of target audiences, research with media representatives and other opinion leaders and observation of people's behaviour. Benchmark research is a pre-requisite to determine baseline behaviour amongst stakeholder groups.
 - *Have 1 million eligible clients contact* the department for further information on the program within 18 months. * Includes enquiries and applications*
 - *Have 10 editorials in major weekly newspapers that are supportive of the department's new program.*

Target Audiences

Accurately identifying the target audience for the activity serves many purposes. These include:

- Laying the groundwork for the best type of communications vehicle to be used;
- Identifying all national and regional groups that have or could have an interest in the issue and/or program;
- Establishing a benchmark for the success of the campaign (i.e. identify the target groups that must be reached for the campaign to achieve its objectives); and
- Identifying target groups that should be consulted before and/or after the activity is distributed to gauge the impacts and effects of the activity.

The major target audience should be defined in terms of:

- Size
- Location
- Characteristics
- Information requirements
- Priority



Themes and Messages

In developing themes and messages, it is important to identify the key themes and messages intended for the target audience that are to be communicated through the activity. These themes and messages should not be cluttered with details. For each, a brief rationale should be presented. Finally, the themes and messages should be linked to the objectives of the individual department/agency and to the global goals of the government, as outlined in the Speech from the Throne.

Communications Activities

The choice of the communications tools and/or activities to be employed depends on a number of variables such as:

- Approach to the campaign (e.g. proactive or reactive; low or high profile).
- Nature of the target audience (e.g. national or regional; narrow or broad; level of education; size).
- The complexity of the issue or information disseminated.
- Communications opportunities that exist (e.g. widespread public and/or media support for the issue; support of interest groups and/or provincial governments; major events offering appropriate symbolic support for the initiative).
- Communications impediments that exist (e.g. media hostility; public indifference; complexity of the issue; competing regional, sectoral or international interests).
- Timing (e.g. choice of launch date, length of campaign/program);
- Budget (e.g. amount required to launch and sustain campaign; source of funds).
- Ministerial involvement (e.g. role in announcement, public perception of minister(s), language capability).

Once these variables have been considered, the communications activity or activities should be finalized.

Work Plan

A work plan is required so that progress can be tracked to ensure that the initiative is on time and on budget. In terms of timing, the following must be taken into consideration:

- When the activity is needed.
- The time needed to properly produce the activity.
- The time required to obtain all necessary approvals.
- The time it will take for the activity to reach the target audience.
- The anticipated elapsed time for the intended objectives to be achieved.
- Optimal timing for disseminating further information to reinforce the message.
- The launch and completion dates for the activity.

The budget includes:

- Costs to produce and pre-test the output(s).
- Costs to distribute the output(s).
- Costs should include both out-of-pocket expenses, travel costs and person days.



Planning Checklist

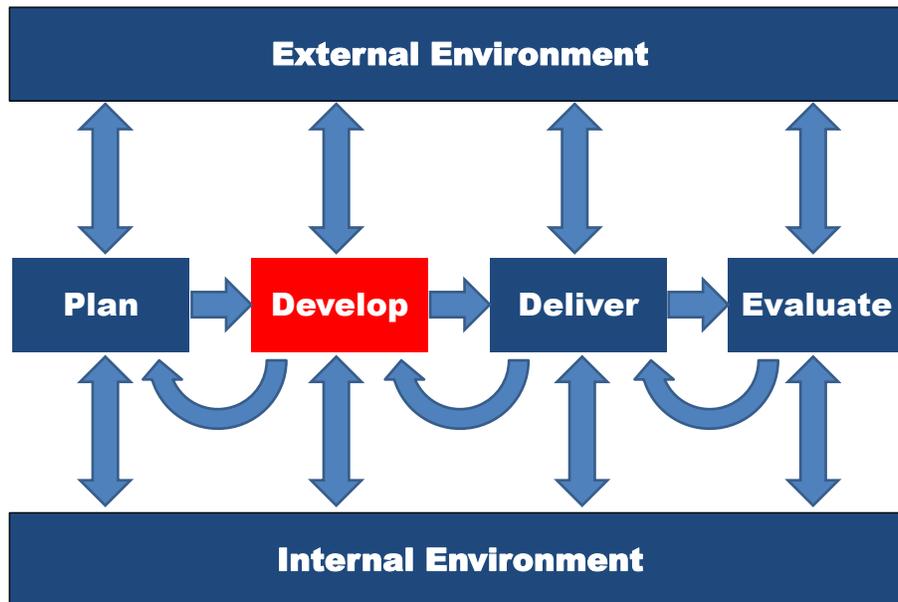
The Planning Checklist provides criteria against which to assess the planning of the communications activity. For any criteria not met, action should be recommended. This might include revising the objectives or not proceeding with the communications activity, or proceeding with an alternative activity.

PLANNING CRITERIA	YES	NO
1. Is a sufficient body of research available to permit an adequate analysis of all internal stakeholders (Minister's office, employees, managers, unions)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Is a sufficient body of research available to permit an adequate analysis of all external stakeholders (taxpayers, clients, special interest groups, media)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Do we know how the identified issues and opportunities impact on the organization's goals, objectives and programs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Are we aware of the ways by which various publics have reacted before?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Are there potential internal +/-or external threats and opportunities that exist that may impact on the organization proceeding at this time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Do we know how the public will respond to changes to the organization's goals, objectives, programs, etc.?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Have <u>S</u> pecific communications goals and objectives been defined? (e.g. audiences, messages, desired response, timetable)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Have these goals and objectives been defined in <u>M</u> easurable terms? (e.g. awareness, understanding, support, action)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Are these goals and objectives <u>A</u> chievable given the public environment, timing and available resources?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Are these communications goals and objectives <u>R</u> elevant to the organization?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Can these communications goals and objectives be achieved in a <u>T</u> imely fashion so as to contribute the overall objectives of the organization?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Have the target audience been defined in relevant terms?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Are the proposed themes and messages appropriate given: a. The mandate of the organization? b. The communications objectives? c. The target audience?	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
14. Are the proposed communications activities appropriate given: a. The mandate of the organization? b. The communications objectives? c. The target audience? d. The complexity of the issues? e. The proposed timing? f. The allotted budget?	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
15. Has a detailed project schedule been prepared?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Has a detailed production and distribution budget been prepared?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Step 2 - Development

During the development step, the communicator is concerned with whether or not the production of the products is on track, and with assessing the creative components of the strategy/output in order to maximize its effectiveness.



Production Schedule and Budget

During the planning phase of the activity, some preliminary thought will have been given to the schedule and budget for the activity. It is at this phase that a detailed budget and schedule must be prepared that provides the basis for monitoring and assessing the progress of the activity through the development phase.

Assessment of Creative Components

The basis for development of the creative components will have taken place during the planning phase. As these are being developed, the following points should be taken into consideration:

- Whether the overall content matches the objectives of the activity.
- Whether the production is on schedule.
- Whether the production is on budget.
- Whether all individuals involved in the production of the activity have been briefed on the communications plan.
- Whether the text and visuals have been analyzed to make sure the target audience will find them clear, interesting, and informative or persuasive.
- Whether the activity has received all the required approvals.



A pre-production test of the concept of major activities is recommended. Such a pre-test can include:

- Focus groups with the target audience.
- Peer review.
- Review by originator and management.

The purpose of the pre-test is to ensure that:

- The activity meets the objectives of the originator and senior management.
- The originator and senior management are satisfied with the creative components of the activity (e.g. images, colours, text).
- The target audience receives the intended message.

Development Checklist

After the pre-test, a development assessment report should be prepared. The Development Checklist provides the originator and communicator with a number of points that will help ensure that the communications activity achieves its objectives.

CRITERIA	YES	NO
1. Have the intended audiences been identified?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Has the best message to reach each audience been defined?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Has the best medium to communicate the intended messages been identified?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Can this medium be effectively tied in with another medium?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Should this message be tied in with another message?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Has the timing been identified?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Is the audience large enough or significant enough to warrant the action?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Will the strategy or plan of action meet the requirements of the audience?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Does the strategy or plan of action support the overall objectives of the organization?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Given the audience, is the proposed content and format appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Will this medium reach the audience?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Has the overall strategy and its individual components been pre-tested using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus groups? ▪ Peer review? ▪ Reviews by originator/management? 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
13. Did the pre-test reveal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The activity meets the objectives of the organization? ▪ Creative components are effective? ▪ The target audience understands and believes the messages? 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

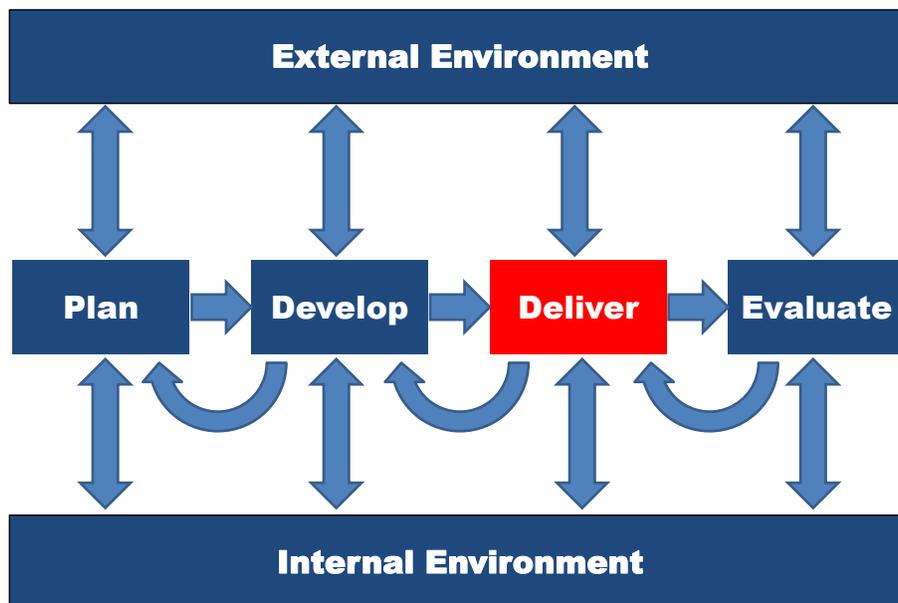


Step 3 - Delivery

Even during the delivery step, it is critical to manage the process so as to identify any refinements that are required to address unforeseen reactions to the strategy/output and/or take advantage of opportunities to shift resources between regions or outputs.

The focus of the Delivery Step of the Communications Management Process is on:

- Delivery Monitoring
- Delivery Effectiveness



Delivery Monitoring

In monitoring the delivery of the activities, central records should be maintained regarding what information went where and when. This would include such things as:

- The frequency with which activities were used (e.g. the number of showings of an audio-visual, advertisements, number of publications distributed).
- The number of individuals within the target audience who were exposed to the activities.
- Which advertisements were placed in which media and when they were placed.
- Which publications, brochure, or posters were distributed to which audiences, when, and how (e.g. by mass distribution or in response to enquiries).
- Which exhibits were displayed at which locations, when, and how many people attended.
- Which reporters attended which news conference, or made an enquiry and what they reported in which media.



Delivery Effectiveness

The purpose of assessing delivery effectiveness is not to assess the effectiveness of the message of the activity, but rather whether the message reached the intended audience. As a result of monitoring the delivery, an analysis of how many individuals within the target audience received the message can be made. This is then compared to the planned distribution to assess whether:

- The message and activity reached the intended target audience.
- The activity was carried out in a timely and cost-effective manner.
- The message was properly reinforced.
- Duplication and overlap were minimized.

Delivery Checklist

To assist in the monitoring and assessment of the delivery phase of an activity, the following Delivery Checklist is provided:

CRITERIA	YES	NO
1. Is the strategy on budget and on schedule?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Did the strategy or plan produce the communications outputs that were intended?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Is the message reaching all of the intended target audiences?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Did the strategy or plan communicate the objectives it was intended to address?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Is the strategy achieving the desired audience impact?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Does the target audience believe the message?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Are there components of the strategy that are more or less effective?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Are there new tactics that should be added to the strategy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Should more or fewer resources be directed at a particular target audience or geographic area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Has the public environment evolved/changed in such a fashion that would require an adjustment to the strategy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

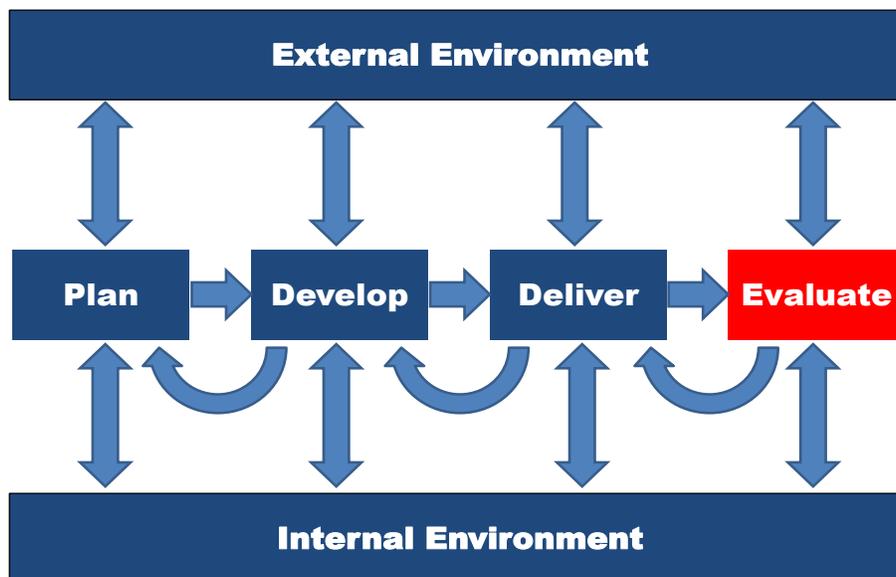


Step 4 - Evaluation

This final step in the Communications Management Process is concerned with assessing the extent to which the objectives of the activity were met.

One of the keys to evaluating what a target audience learned from a communications campaign is to consistently measure the same knowledge, awareness, and understanding variables against those measured prior to the launch of the activity. As a result, the research conducted prior to the planning of the activity (e.g. a survey), or information collected in the public environmental analysis process, can be used to make pre and post comparisons. It is important to remember however, that information from a number of sources (both controlled and not controlled by the organization, e.g. the media or a special interest group) may affect the target audience.

The impacts and effects of a communications activity should be monitored and assessed as the program is being executed. This monitoring will enable the department to adjust the communications activity (if possible) to make it more effective.



If the campaign is properly planned, its evaluation is relatively easy. The evaluation of the activity is concerned with:

Communications Effectiveness

- Did the activity reach the intended target audience?
- Did the activity meet its communications objectives?

User Satisfaction

- Did the target audience find the activity to be informative and interesting?
- Did the activity address the requirements of the originator and the department?

Cost Effectiveness

- What is the cost per thousand reached?
- Was the activity produced within budget?



Evaluation Checklist

To assist in carrying out a post program evaluation of the effectiveness of the communications strategy so as to demonstrate the contribution to the organization’s objectives and to document lessons learned, the following checklist is provided.

Evaluation Criteria	YES	NO
Part I – Communications Effectiveness		
1. Was the output/strategy completed on budget and on schedule?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Did the output/strategy or plan produce the communications outputs that were intended?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Did the message reach the intended audience?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Did the publics believe the message?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Did the strategy or plan communicate the objectives it was intended to address?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Has the impact/effectiveness of the strategy been documented?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Were there “lessons learned” that could be applied to future strategies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Were the results of the evaluation made available in time for them to be useful?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Was it determined how the strategy could have been improved?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Were actionable findings and recommendations produced as a result of carrying out the evaluation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Have the results of the evaluation been added to the organizations public environmental analysis database?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Part II – User Satisfaction		
12. Did the target audience find the output/strategy informative and interesting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Did the strategy achieve the desired audience impact?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Did the output/strategy address the requirements of the organization?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Part III – Cost Effectiveness		
15. What is the cost per thousand reach?	\$	
16. Was the output/strategy produced within budget?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Did the results of the output/strategy justify the cost?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

