

## **Communication Planning Methodology**

The following methodology is one model that has been used to develop successful communication plans. It should be considered a general guide for planning the effective dissemination of information that is received, understood, and utilized by the target audiences for successful completion of the proposed project.

1) Audience – What groups and individuals are important to the success of the project?

It is important to identify all project stakeholder groups so that the communication approach can be customized to best meet their unique characteristics and individual requirements. Each project stakeholder group – management, staff, end-users, elected officials, the public, and the media have different communication requirements based upon their role as it relates to the project.

2) Desired Behavior – What do you want each identified audience to do?

The communication plan should identify the roles of each stakeholder group and what they must do or believe for the project to be successfully implemented. For example, the role of senior management and executive steering committees is to provide high-level guidance and support for the project. On the other hand, end-users will be required to participate in requirements definition, user testing, and training activities and then adopt and use the system once it is implemented.

3) Message – What project related information or messages will lead to the desired behavior?

The communication plan should account for different types of messages. For example, some communication will be compulsory based upon statutory, policy, or rule-based requirements. Persuasive or marketing oriented messages may help sell the vision of the project and convey the expected benefits that will be realized over time to users and management. Other types of communication activities will be operational in nature, providing information that is needed for end-users to perform their jobs.

4) Channels and Timing – How, when, and how often will you send the project related information or convey the needed messages?

Information can be delivered via many mechanisms or channels, ranging from very interactive face-to-face communication such as staff meetings and focus groups, to print or one-way communication such as newsletters, written reports, and plans. Mediated channels such as video and audio conferences, e-mail, voice mail, and intranet or internet list servers and websites can accommodate more timely feedback than print channels, but less timely feedback than face-to-face channels.

Timing and frequency of messages and information will vary according to the purpose and channel. For example, statutorily required reports may have specific due dates or time frames. Training information is most effective when it is conveyed to users just before they are expected to perform the task or use the system. Repeating and reinforcing key information and messages using more than one channel generally increases the likelihood of

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effectively communicating the information.

- 5) Responsibility – Who will prepare and deliver the message? Who will pay for preparation and delivery?

The communication plan should identify resources for planning, assigning, funding, executing, and tracking communication activities. The person or entity delivering the message must be perceived as a credible source, particularly in face-to-face communication situations and when *persuasion* is one of the goals of the message.

- 6) Review and Evaluation – How will you receive feedback from your audience to know whether the communication has been successful? How will the groups providing the feedback know that their message has been properly received?

The communication plan should identify some sort of measurement or indicator for tracking whether the goals or solution to the problem has been achieved. This should relate to the description of the desired behavior in Step 2 above. For critical messages or audiences, the plan should specify processes or mechanisms to actively facilitate and respond to feedback or to determine whether your messages or your project is meeting the informational and functional needs of the target groups.