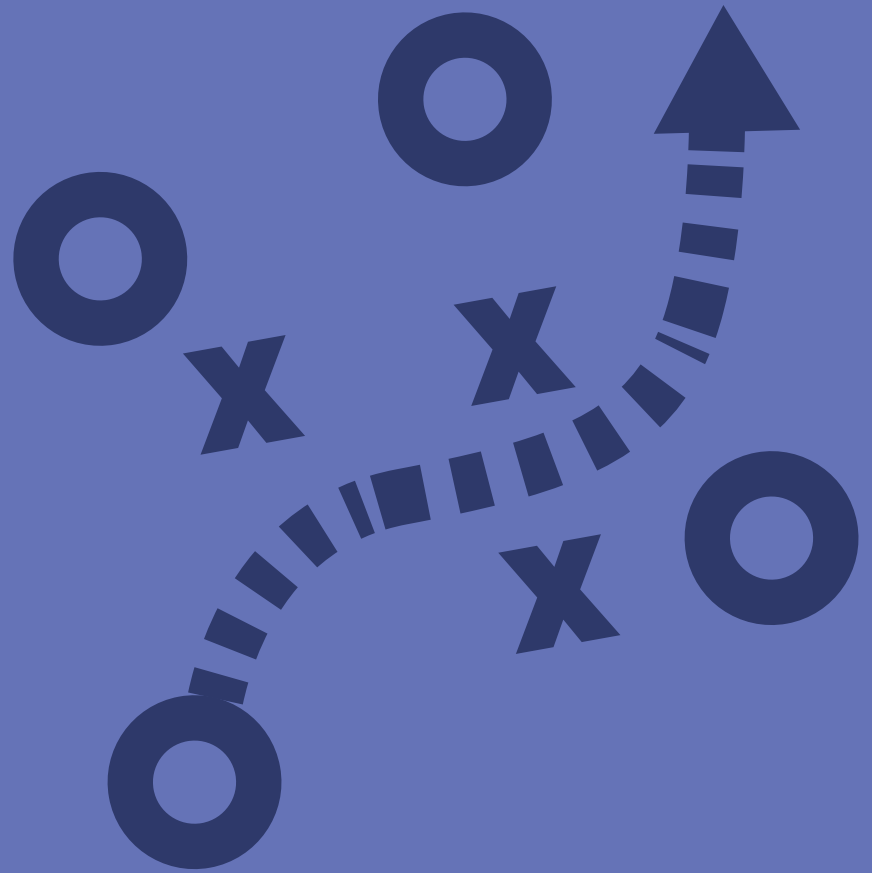


BEING STRATEGIC



research communication

Strategic Communications Workbook



**UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA**

DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP CENTRE

Introduction

This workbook has been designed for a foundational workshop in a series on communicating research. This booklet presents questions and considerations that professional communicators consider when developing communication campaigns. The final result of this would be the drafting of a report or policy document, that all members of the communications team could consult when implementing their campaign.

For the purposes of this workshop, the questions have been situated within a research context and are intended to provide a framework for communicating research findings. This workshop and workbook are intended to help researchers think comprehensively about how they are communicating their findings and to consider how they can use non-traditional communication techniques to grow bigger audiences for their work.

This workbook draws from a number of sources including:

Falkheimer, J. and Heide, M. (2015). "Strategic communication in participatory culture: from one- and two-way communication to participatory communication through social media," in D. Holtzhausen and A. Zerfass (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of strategic communication*, New York & London: Routledge, pp.337-348.

Fann Thomas G and Stephens, K.J. (2015). "An introduction to strategic communication," *International Journal of Business Communication*, 52(1): 3-11

Mahoney, J. (2017). *Strategic Communication: Campaign Practice* (2nd ed.). Australia and New Zealand: Oxford University Press.

McMahon, Rob. (2017) COMM 506: Strategic Communications in a Digital World. Lecture Slides. Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta.

Tyson, William. (2010) *Pitch Perfect: Communicating with Traditional and Social Media for Scholars and Researchers, and Academic Leaders*, Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Walker, R. (2019). *Strategic management communication for leaders* (Fourth edition.). Wessex Press, Inc.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

A Situation Analysis consists of doing an in-depth evaluation of the current “situation” prior to beginning a strategic communications plan. This means evaluating your own goals and needs, understanding the communication full circumstances you are working in and understanding your core audience. A situation analysis will eventually help you to select the appropriate communication channels and help you to create messages about your research that are effective and responsive. A situation analysis will also make you consider the weakness of your research and how to effectively respond to criticism.

Landscape Scan | Internal

A landscape scan is exactly what it sounds like: a scan of the environment or the space you are in. In this case, an internal environmental scan means taking a look inward and clearly stating your goals. What do you need to achieve by communicating your research. Aside from full-filling criteria of employment or fulfilling terms of a grant funder, ask yourself what you want to achieve from communicating your research. It could be as simple as just wanting to share findings, but you may also be interested in bringing to light to social issues, or to better educate the general public.

What types of goals do you need to achieve with your research?

- Are you seeking tenure? Starting a long-term project?
- Applying for a future grant to expand your research?
- Are you a graduate student starting a Masters or Ph.D.?
- A Postdoc looking for a tenured position?

What are the communication requirements of your grant funders, your department, or your supervisor?

Are you required to publish in specific journals? Are you expected to present at Conferences? Do you need to prepare a thesis, pass a defence?

Do you have an external research partner and what obligations do you have to sharing/informing them about how you approach communications?

What kind of time commitment, staffing and workload are you function under? How much time do you have to produce communication objects? Who is going to do this work? Do you have resources for assistance with the work?

What have you done with past projects? Evaluate what you might like to change about past projects and their dissemination. If you are new to research, how important is communicating to your research? Do you plan to continue in academia?

Environmental Scan | External

Now that we have focused on our internal feelings and circumstances, we turn our environmental scan outward to look at the research community and greater world. It is sometimes easy to get preoccupied in your own area of expertise so it is important to think both big and small in this exercise. Start with your area of study and look outward. The main goal of this exercise is to answer the question: where does my research fit into the greater picture?

What is the current climate in your field of study?

- Is there a focus on a certain type of research?
- What is trendy? What is not?
- What is the lay of the land - who is studying what?
- Who are the big players and how do you fit in?

How does your research relate in terms of your local community (the city you live in)?

- Does it have a regional focus?
- Does it impact local industry and business?
- Does it deal with a particularly cultural or social group?

What is the current political/social climate provincially? nationally? How does your research relate to these issues?

Is there wider public discussion of the research in your field? How is it framed?

Could your research/findings be politically, socially volatile in some way?

Are there misconceptions or stereotypes about your area of research within the public consciousness?

SWOT Analysis

SWOT Analysis is an established strategic planning technique that can be used to identify **s**trengths, **w**eaknesses, **o**pportunities, and **t**hreats in a planning process. Once you have completed a landscape scan both internally and externally, you can now begin to analyze your communication goals, and identify weakness. Identifying weakness allows you to be prepared when faced with criticism or opposition. A good communication plan builds on strengths, but also prepares a response for anticipated criticism.

Strengths

Weaknesses

Opportunities

Threats (Criticism)

Target Audiences

What is the primary audience for your communication strategy? List the key actors.

Are there practioners of some field or area that might find your research meaningful / helpful?

Do your research / findings impact specific communities or age groups?

How will you frame your messages to these groups? Do they require a different approach?

Key Messages

Taking into consideration your Environmental Scan, your proposed audience and your SWOT analysis, you must now develop the messages that speak to your research and your research findings. Word the responses below framing them for your target audience.

What do we know because of your research? What was successful? What did we learn?

How will your research / findings impact the bigger picture?

Were there challenges with your research/findings? How might you address criticism?

Are there stories or examples you came across in your research that could be useful?

What could be the next step in continuing to build on your research?

Consider a secondary audience, how would you frame these points for them?

Channels

Channels are the mediums or devices by which we communicate. Traditional scholarly communication uses article (writing) or public presentation (oration) to share information. In the current age there are many more ways to share your research. Here you will outline which channels you will use to communicate your findings.

Are you required to use a specific channel to communicate your research? (Open-Access Journal, Thesis, Conference?)

If you are going to publish a paper, what journals will you submit to?

Are you going to present / poster at a conference? Which conferences?

Look at some of the alternative channels on the right and consider what channels you might be willing to try in the future?

- Open Educational Resource (OER)
- Practitioner or Community Presentations
- Op-Ed in Newspaper
- Websites
- Blogs
- Podcast
- Video
- Photo essay
- Art installation
- Community Event
- Social Media*

* Social Media works in unison with all the above channels as you can push links to these things through social media.

Communication Materials

What keywords best describe your research? What are some potential paper titles?

Describe images or visual concepts that might be used in conjunction with text when communicating your research? Do you have photos that you can use from the data gathering process? Data visualizations?

What materials will you produce? Paper? Presentation? Look back at your channels and list here what kinds of materials you might develop outside of academic papers? Can you share your data?

Schedule

On what time frame will your communications roll out? Will publish and present at the end of the project, or could you use alternative methods mid-project (blogs? newspaper articles?). What are the submission schedules for the journals or conferences you plan to present at?

Assessment

Consider evaluating your communication strategy. Set some goals that you can evaluate at the end. What worked? What didn't?