Communication

A guide for nonprofit organizations

Communication is a vital tool for shaping the **image of our organization** and **pursuing and conveying our mission**. Organizational communication directly and indirectly supports organizational goals and activities and significantly reveals the organization's culture and values.

→ *This guide primarily focuses on external communication. Internal communication, although also an important area, is primarily a means of organizing effective operation and joint work.*

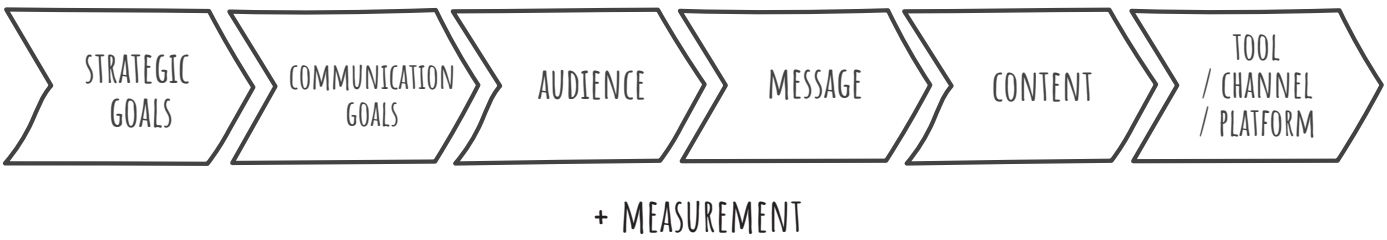
Organizational communication, in its broadest sense, is our **conscious connection and interaction with stakeholders**, i.e. those affected by our work, and includes everything that our organization communicates, regardless of the form of communication.

> At the same time, like (almost) all communication, organizational communication must be **two-way**: it is just as important to consider what opportunities our organization provides for stakeholders to communicate with us as an organization. Therefore, the task of those responsible for communication is not only to communicate through the organization's channels, but also to provide platforms and channels for communication with us in return.

Why do we communicate?

External communication is always a **means** and not an end in itself. It is a way to ensure the sustainability of our organization and to achieve greater impact. Communication must align with and support the organization's strategy: **communication goals** must always be **based on the organizational or strategic goals**.

Accordingly, the process of building and planning organizational communication is as follows:



Conditions for successful and sustainable organizational communication

- clear organizational and strategic goals
- clear communication strategy and concept
- maintaining stakeholder relations and monitoring changes in the environment
- knowledge of stakeholders and target audiences
- existence and maintenance of press relations
- resources allocated for communication
- annual or semi-annual communication plans and budgets
- person/team member responsible for communication
- visual Identity or uniform visual appearance
- appropriate external partners, service providers who participate in the production or production of communication materials (web developer, graphic designer, printer, etc.)

Important

The organization's external communications are ideally handled by a **communications officer or team**. Even if we don't have the capacity to do so, it is important to treat it **as a separate role** within the organization and have one person coordinate all communication-related tasks. The communications officer can be supported by members of the board of trustees or the president, pro bono professionals, and volunteers.

Elements of a communication strategy

- strategic goals translated into communication goals
- analysis of the communication environment: opportunities, threats, analysis of the communication of similar organizations
- analysis and evaluation of our previous communication
- identification and analysis of stakeholders and target audience
- messages
- content
- communication tools, channels, and platforms
- the available capacity: team, resources, tools, etc.
- responsibilities and tasks
- measurement and evaluation plan of communication work

Annual **communication plans** and **campaign plans** are not part of the communication strategy. They are related to the communication strategy in the same way that action plans and project plans are related to the professional strategy of our organization.

Professional strategy → *Action plan, project plan*
Communication strategy → *Annual or semi-annual communication plan, campaign plan*

These shorter-term communication plans, in addition to goals, messages, content, and target audiences, also record specific tasks and schedules.

Target audience and stakeholders

All of our communications should have a specific target audience. Our different target audiences are all stakeholders (or potential stakeholders) in the organization's work. It is important to think of them as such, and not just as a target group to whom we are communicating something.

> An important element of our communication strategy is the **identification and analysis of stakeholders**.

Our stakeholders can be:

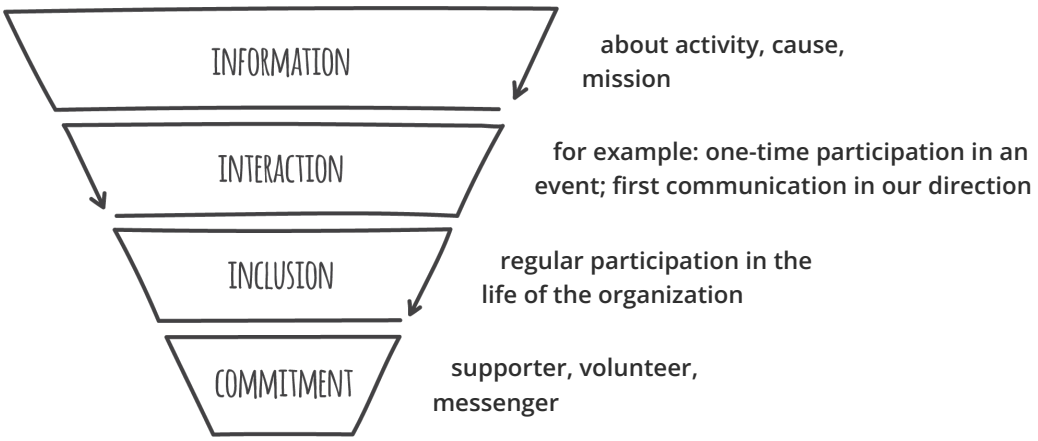
- the primary target audience of the organization's activities, i.e. those who use our "service", "product", and those in their immediate environment.
- existing and potential donors
- existing and potential volunteers
- followers and interested parties
- representatives of organizations working in similar fields
- the broader community in which our organization works (if any)
- professional interested parties
- opinion leaders or influencers
- media personnel
- local and national (political) decision-makers.

If your organization has a **stakeholder map**, it is definitely worth considering and using it when creating a communication strategy or communication plan. Similarly, it is advisable to keep in mind our relationships with our stakeholders, their habits, and to tailor our communication style, messages, channels, and tools to suit them.

> It is important that **every piece of communication content** (i.e. a given post, image, newsletter, article, email, etc.) **is created with a specific purpose**. This could be:
>
> - general information and awareness raising
> - reaching and engaging volunteers (or prospective volunteers)
> - reaching and engaging supporters (or prospective supporters)
> - raising awareness and recognition
> - shaping the image of the organization

It is also worth **imagining our communication**, i.e. our interaction with each of our stakeholders, **on a longer timeline**. The figure below shows how we can deepen our relationship with a given stakeholder over time.

For example, we can first turn someone who doesn't know about our organization into someone who is interested and then turn an interested person into someone committed to our organization who will devote resources to us as an ambassador, supporter, or volunteer.



As we "move down" the communication funnel, every element becomes more personal. This can depend on our organizational culture, but in general, **as someone gets closer to our organization, the relationship with them changes and so does the communication**. We can reinforce this engagement process during our communication by making our channels, messages, content and style more personal.

From message to content

Once we have defined the target groups of our communication, let's formulate clear and consistent **messages**! In each communication, we translate the messages into specific **content**. Depending on the nature of the message, the type of content and the habits of our target audience, we should take into account our available **channels/tools** and **platforms**, as well as their specificities.

Communication tools, channels, and platforms

- press release
- press appearance
- sponsored content
- online or offline advertising
- professional publication
- host an event
- partner organization's communication where our organization appears
- flyer and other printed material
- merchandise products and gifts
- our own online platform (website and blog
- social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Youtube, etc.)
- online and offline press
- Google
- newsletter

Planning

The following tool can help plan our organizational communications at a conceptual level. **The organizing principles are communication goals and stakeholders**, so it can help to decide what, where, how, and when to communicate, and what capacity is needed to do so. This tool can also be useful for annual planning or during the planning of new strategic cycles.

Communication goal:	**Message**	**Tool /channel /platform**	**Content**	**Responsible**	**Timing**	**Required capacity** financial	**Required capacity** manpower, time
Stakeholder group 1.							
Stakeholder group 2.							
Stakeholder group 3.							

For the operational planning of continuous communication work, it may be worth supplementing this tool with a **communication calendar**, in which we can record the planning, implementation and monitoring of specific communication.