

Road Map to Impact: Setting Communications Objectives

Communications can be held accountable for achieving three main outcomes, all of which are measurable: Raising awareness, changing attitudes and motivating people to take action.

Strategies, messages, creative content and engagement activities must all be designed to achieve specific, strategically selected *communications objectives*.

These objectives are described in this workbook, along with guiding questions than can help you set the right ones to advance your cause.



BE AWARE OF THE NEED

First, the audience must be aware of the *need* addressed by your cause.

To raise awareness, communications must capture the audience's interest or imagination, so that they will pay attention.

Surprising the audience is a powerful way to begin, because the brain is wired to focus on new stimuli.

KEY QUESTIONS

What does the audience currently know about the need your work seeks to address?

What's the most surprising and meaningful idea or information the audience doesn't know?



CARE ABOUT THE CAUSE

People must care about the cause to even *stop and think* about it, much less be moved to act.

Putting people in the picture first is perhaps the most powerful technique for making your audience care, because it creates a human connection that can activate aspirational ideas and emotional reactions. Ideally, the audience members *see themselves* in your message.

KEY QUESTIONS

Does your audience care about the issue?

Who is involved in the cause?

Who is affected by the problem?



UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM

People make sense of situations by quickly creating cause-and-effect stories featuring people acting with intention. Narrative helps create instant comprehension of the problem and solution.

Stories about people overcoming obstacles and achieving goals can illustrate a complex problem and solution in understandable, human terms—and show that change is possible.

KEY QUESTIONS

Do people understand the problem and solution?

What goals are the people affected by the cause seeking to achieve in their lives?

What problem stands in the way? Keep it simple: Focus on the most prominent and important aspect of the problem.

What is the solution? Focus on the aspect of the solution that addresses the problem directly and delivers the most benefit.

Do people understand the problem and solution?



FEEL A SENSE OF URGENCY

Every communication intended to motivate behavior must create a *call to action* that moves people to act *immediately*.

People are bombarded with appeals for their time, energy and money. If they don't act when we have their attention, we're likely to lose them. People can also be apathetic, which means they lack interest, enthusiasm or concern.

An effective call to action will create an emotional reaction. A sense of urgency may be evoked through negative and positive emotional appeals: People may respond in reaction to pity, anger or fear. They may react to the exciting possibility of grasping an opportunity—*right now*—to do something positive. Explore various emotions that create a sense of urgency or possibility.

KEY QUESTIONS

Why should the audience take action right now?

Why should people take action on this, and not another cause?



KNOW HOW TO HELP

The specific *actions* we ask people to take must be meaningful in advancing the cause, but simple for the person to do. They should be fun and interesting, as well.

Actions take many forms. We can ask people to "learn more" by downloading information or viewing a video. "Spread the word" by sharing information with their social networks. "Speak out" by signing a petition or writing a blog post. "Get connected" by meeting others with similar values and interests.

The action needs to not only benefit the cause, but provide an *emotional benefit* to the audience. Understand and deliver the emotional reward that comes with taking action, such as recognition, accomplishment, personal expression or connection to others.

KEY QUESTIONS

What can people do to advance your cause?

How does taking the action make them feel?