

# COMM OUT

Communication planning  
– seven steps to plan your  
communication

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# Contents

Plan your communication	3
Seven steps for planning	4
1. Background an purpose	5
2. Target groups	6
3. Communication objectives	8
4. Message	9
5. Resources	11
6. Activity plan	13
7. Evaluation and follow-up	15
About this publication	17

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# Plan your communication

The Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCMS) has an approved communication process, which means that communication planning must take place at the start of new projects and assignments (GS Decision 28/2013). Well-prepared communication initiatives result in more opportunities for creating interest and involvement in our politicians' political initiatives to make the Nordic Region an attractive place to live, work and do business, and to strengthen the Region internationally.

## Tool for specialist advisers and project managers

This document is a tool primarily for specialist advisers within the different subject fields and project managers who are not used to planning communication initiatives. It includes a checklist of what to consider when planning effective communication initiatives.

The Secretariat's communications department can help you with planning and activities, but you should read through this document, fill in the relevant sections, and set aside a communications budget for this co-operation to be as effective as possible. GS Decision 28/2013 states, "*There must be a communication budget within the project/assignment framework. The contents of this budget is to be discussed between the specialist adviser and the communications adviser.*"



# Seven steps for planning

When you start planning, you should first answer three questions. Use your mission statement or project directive as support. If these are well articulated, the answers should be easy to find.

1. **Which political initiative forms the basis for the assignment/project? (background and purpose)**
2. **Who will benefit from the outcomes? (target groups)**
3. **What should they know or do when they find out about the assignment/project? (communication objectives)**

Once you have answered these three questions, it's time for four new ones. This is where you will probably need help from a communications adviser with knowledge of communication strategies, communication channels, and evaluations, as well as the costs. You can answer the following four questions together:

4. **What should we say to the target groups so that they understand the political initiative? (message)**
5. **What sort of budget is required to be able to implement the proposed activities and evaluation with regard to the target groups and objectives? (resources)**
6. **When and by way of which channels/locations should we communicate to inform our target groups of what we're doing? (activity plan)**
7. **When and how should we evaluate whether we have achieved our communication objectives? (evaluation and follow-up)**

Planning is complete after you have followed these seven steps. The communication work can then begin.



# 1. Background and purpose

## Which political initiative forms the basis for the assignment / project?

Is this a new project, a new assignment, a current issue that the ministers have put on the agenda, or an issue that has been on the agenda for a while?

### **In what way can the outcomes benefit residents of the Nordic Region?**

Try to be as specific as possible. If it relates to a topic with multiple approaches, such as *Increasing mobility for entrepreneurs in the Nordic Region by reducing obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement*, make a list of the various barriers in order to identify specific target groups in the next stage of planning.



## 2. Target groups

### Who will benefit from the outcomes?

Think about who needs to know about the assignment/project, or who should take action in one way or another. Why are they important? Identifying your target groups is one of the most important jobs in planning. We want to communicate with individuals.

You may have several different target groups, each of whom may need to know different things. For some it's enough just to know what's going on. Others may need to be more involved if they are to be ambassadors. Remember your internal target groups, such as your colleagues, heads of department, and project managers of ancillary assignments/projects, as well as those who have ordered the assignment/project.

Also think about any groups that are critical of the assignment/project. They also need to know what's going on. It's always better to be prepared for criticism than to be caught off guard.



**Write your target groups in the table.**

List them as external or internal, state whether they are very important (must know), important (should know), or not so important (keep updated), and what you know about the target group, e.g.: Where can you find them? Specific age groups?

Target group	Importance	External / Internal	What do we know about the target group?

### 3. Communication objectives

#### What should they know or do when they find out about the assignment/project?

Communication objectives are formulated on the basis of the effect you want to achieve with your communication and your messages.

- Knowledge? What do you want the target group to find out, know or become familiar with?
- Change in attitude? What do you want the target group to get an understanding of, accept, or become very positive about?
- Motivation? What do you want the target group to become motivated to try out?
- Action? What do you want the target group to do?

Be realistic in relation to the schedule and budget of the assignment/project and focus on the very important and important target groups. Sometimes it is a good idea to interview a few people from some of your target groups in order to set realistic objectives that can be evaluated.

What effect do I want to achieve in the very important and important target groups? Knowledge, attitude, motivation, or action?



## 4. Message

### What should we say to the target groups so that they understand the political initiative?

What is the most important thing for your target groups to take on board? What is the political initiative about? Why is this an important issue right now? What problems does the outcome solve for the target groups? What are the target groups expected to do? Is there anything that will be adversely affected by the political initiative?

These are the questions that the message has to answer. One way of developing a message is to develop questions and answers (Q&A). From these, highlight a maximum of three key messages and some sub-messages that support (argue) the key message. A Q&A is also good to have to hand for everyone involved throughout the assignment/project.



Possible question I could be asked	My answer

Look at your questions and answers and try to formulate a maximum of three key messages to be used throughout the assignment/project. You can then formulate some sub-messages for each key message to support the argument.

Adapt the message to your target groups. Motivation for and knowledge of the political initiative may differ among them. Try to put yourself in the shoes of each target group and answer the question, "What does this mean to me?" (target group).

## 5. Resources

### **What sort of budget is required to be able to implement the proposed activities and evaluation with regard to the target groups and objectives?**

There must be a communication budget before the assignment/project starts, regardless of whether you're working with an external supplier or with NCMS's communications department. The assignment/project budget must state the total amount for communication. This total amount must be allocated to different activities in the communication plan.

Remember to plan communication initiatives for the entire assignment/project – from beginning to end. If you keep your target groups interested throughout the assignment/project, expectations and interest in the outcome will grow.

In the next stages of planning, the budget for the activity plan must be itemised by activity. Make sure you write down what is included in each budget item. For instance, what is covered by the communication budget for a planned conference?



Costs such as the design of a programme, a printed report, translation, interpreting, a special website, an app, a social media campaign, a moderator, or hiring someone to write about the conference are obviously part of the communication budget. But should the venue, food and drink, and expenses for guest speakers be included? This has to be clarified before starting any activities.

By following all the previous planning stages, communication activities will become more cost effective than by simply guessing. If you are unfamiliar with costing communication initiatives, enlist the help of a communications advisor.

## 6. Activity plan

### When and by way of which channels/locations should we communicate to inform our target groups of what we're doing?

Only now has the time come to plan the various activities for the target groups. What specifically should we do? When should it be done? Who does it? Examples of activities include newsletters, presentation materials, events, campaigns, conferences, media meetings, etc.

In this you must take the communication budget into account, as well as the objective of the communication and who needs to be involved. Planning always takes place together with those responsible for the various activities.

Timing is important when planning activities. When is an issue interesting to highlight and in what sort of forum? Does this clash with another current issue? Can we work together with others participant in their arenas? Where can we best reach our target groups?

As part of Nordic co-operation, it is important to know what's going on in the different countries. Is the issue of equal interest in all the Nordic countries? Should we adopt different approaches in the different countries, or can we communicate in the same way?



How to set up an activity plan: Create a separate document with the headings from the table below. This is a living document. The activity plan must be updated if you find that a planned activity cannot be carried out, or if there are any new additions.

Activity	Target group	Message	Budget	Channel	Time	Responsibl	Deadline	Status

## 7. Evaluation and follow-up

**Always evaluate major communication efforts by asking the following questions, for example:**

- Was the communication objective achieved, i.e. what was the effect?
- What worked well?
- What didn't work so well? What will you think about for next time?
- Which aspects need to be followed up further?

The evaluation can be simple or extensive depending on the time available and your requirements. You can make evaluations in direct connection with the communication activities or retrospectively. If the effect is a change in attitude, you must also make an evaluation before the activities start – a so-called "zero measurement".



Ways to evaluate a communication initiative include:

- Dialogue with groups and interviews with individuals from the target group.
- Workshops with everyone, or a selection of people from the target group.
- Surveys of everyone, or a selection of people from the target group.
- Analysis of what is written in printed and digital media.
- Measurement of the number of visitors in connection with the activities, or the increase in the number of followers to social media linked to the activities in relation to your objectives.

If the evaluation gives rise to new initiatives, you need to review your activity plan. The communication planning process then starts again from the beginning.

Always summarise the outcomes of your initiatives to make planning easier each time. If you then add the plan and follow-up to DINA, you'll contribute to the learning process within the secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

# About this publication

## COMM OUT

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## Nordic co-operation

*Nordic co-operation* is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

*Nordic co-operation* has firm traditions in politics, economics and culture and plays an important role in European and international forums. The Nordic community strives for a strong Nordic Region in a strong Europe.

*Nordic co-operation* promotes regional interests and values in a global world. The values shared by the Nordic countries help make the region one of the most innovative and competitive in the world.

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