

## Guidelines for Developing a Communications Strategy

### Introduction

A communication strategy helps an organization map out a series of activities and programmes that not only help it engage with key stakeholders (internal and external) in an effective and streamlined way, but also help reach the organization's core objectives.

PARIS21 developed a toolkit aiming at providing strategic guidance and outlining the practical steps and tools needed to develop an integrated communications strategy. It covers in detail each step of a five-phase strategy development process: scoping, research, analysis, drafting and launch.

The toolkit is meant to be very practical, a mix of instructions, tips and tools. Some organizations will find that this is all they need to proceed with strategy development independently. Others may find it necessary or valuable to engage external support for some or a large part of the analytical work. We would highly recommend however that at least all of the drafting is carried out by the National Statistical Office (NSO) to maintain voice and ownership over that critical phase of the process.

Along those lines, these guidelines are not only for use by communications specialists. In fact, we strongly advise that a multidisciplinary team be involved in the strategy development. It goes to creating broader institutional buy in as well as ensuring that a diversity of opinions is reflected in the choice of priorities and approaches.

Whether external support is employed or not, every organization using the toolkit will need to adapt its contents and approach to the particular circumstances it faces. In fact, the templates and guidance are all basic so as to allow application to a wide range of situations. The tools in particular are meant to be enhanced and refined based on the organizational needs, context and culture. These include factors such as overall objectives, timeline, resource availability and the situation in which the strategy is being developed. Nonetheless, these guidelines should be seen as a foundation upon which any strategy development process can be carried out.

The PARIS21's communications strategy guidelines revolve around five phases which are briefly described here below.

### **Phase I. Scoping the strategy exercise**

Before strategy development can begin, the parameters of the exercise must be clearly defined. This includes determining both the scope of the exercise and the process that will be followed in order to create a smart communications strategy. Getting this step right is essential because the information gathered will form the basis for the subsequent phases of the communications strategy development.

### **Phase II. Analytics and research**

Now that the groundwork has been laid for developing the strategy (the team has been appointed, the roadmap has been defined, the scope has been established), the next step is to conduct a series of audits, research and external stakeholder consultations. These

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processes will dig deeper into the impressions that came out of the initial brainstorming sessions, producing concrete evidence to support, modify or refute them. Eventually, during Phase III, they will help the team to make strategic and tactical choices that will be reflected in the strategy in terms of what stakeholder groups to target, where to prioritize efforts, what order to roll out the various activities, messaging, etc.

In summary, this phase will help make the case for what goes in the strategy and what does not. It will help whittle down and long list of possibilities to leave you with only those that feed directly into the objectives you will define. When in doubt as to what approach the strategy should take on a specific issue, your team should come back time and again to the results of these exercises.

## **Phase III. Synthesis and analysis**

The aim of the ensemble of the Phase III activities is to make a series of analyses and choices that will determine the focus of the strategy. It should be clear to the team after Phase III, what activities should be carried out, for whom, why and how those activities will help meet long-term objectives. If done well, this phase will lead smoothly into the drafting phase where all of these findings will be captured and worked into one coherent narrative.

## **Phase IV. Drafting**

The drafting phase, during which the strategy finally takes shape, can start with an initial phase of gathering information and background documents that are of interest to the strategy (i.e. current communications strategy if there is one, NSDS, organizational strategy, etc.). It is also important, at this stage, to develop an editorial calendar to track the progress of the strategy drafting. With both in place, the drafting of the strategy can begin.

## **Phase V. Strategy approval and launch**

Once the strategy has taken shape, there are only a couple of remaining steps to take before the start of implementation. First, the strategy document needs to be endorsed by senior management. Then, stakeholders and relevant actors who will help to ensure the success of the strategy need to be engaged in a launch event.

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