



# Writing a communications strategy

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# What is a strategy?

- A plan of action designed to achieve a vision.
- All about gaining a position of advantage over adversaries or best exploiting emerging possibilities.
- A detailed plan for achieving success in situations such as war, politics, business, industry or sport.

# What is a communications strategy?

- Written document – not just in people's heads
- Collaboration between the project leader(s) and the communications professional(s)
- A reference document against which to judge progress
- Contains clear and measurable objectives
- Identifies relevant audiences
- A plan of activities and a timetable
- Identifies resources – financial and people

# Why is a strategy important?

*“Why don’t we just get on with it?”*

- Taking time to agree what you want to achieve
- Plan ahead rather than last minute panic
- Exploit all the channels available to you
- Agree responsibilities
- Identify and seek resources
- Identify risks and plan how to deal with them
- A plan against which to measure success
- A process which helps you learn lessons for the future

# A comprehensive communications strategy

- Research
- Mission
- Vision
- Aims
- Objectives
- Audiences
- Messages
- Channels
- Timing
- Resources
- Risks
- Evaluation

# Background research

- What are your objectives?
- Your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?
- Learn lessons from previous projects
- Learn lessons from peers' and competitors' experiences
- Look at past media coverage, event attendance, web visits
- Speak to colleagues – experienced and fresh-faced
- Focus groups and surveys among your key audiences

# Mission (purpose) + vision (ambition)

## University of Oxford

- Oxford's mission is to provide excellent teaching and conduct excellent research
- Oxford's vision is to be world leading

# Aims

- Engage and persuade audiences of the value (for money) of an Oxford education and the personal and public benefit that flows from it
- Persuade audiences of Oxford's commitment to improving access and widening participation
- Demonstrate the impact of Oxford research and persuade audiences of the value of public funding for research



# Objectives need to be SMART

- **S**pecific, significant, simple
- **M**easurable, manageable
- **A**chievable, agreed, assignable
- **R**elevant, resourced
- **T**ime bound, trackable

# Objectives need to be smart

Not SMART:

*“We need to raise more money.”*

SMART:

*“We want to raise £5million to set up a fund to create an extra 20 graduate scholarships from October 2014.”*

There can be one or more objectives

# Audiences

- HEFCE, research councils, charities, NHS etc
- UK government, local council
- Your colleagues, the wider University
- Alumni
- Donors
- Future applicants
- Local community: residents, businesses, groups
- Media: local, national, specialist

# Audiences

## Two considerations...

- Who holds the keys to success or failure?
- And who influences those people?

## And...

- Don't forget the internal audience – e.g. students and colleagues in your department or college, people in your division

# Categorise your audiences in relation to your situation and your objectives

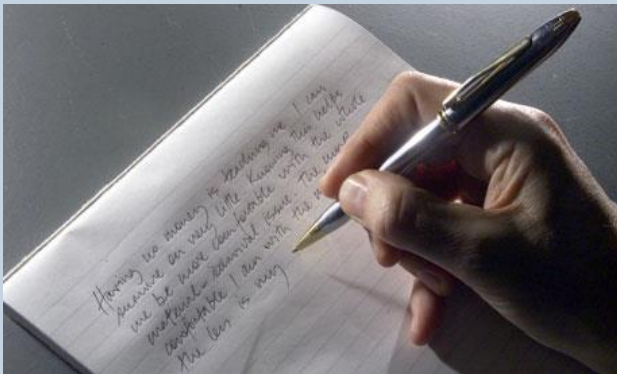
- Power/influence + interest + supportive – your partners in achieving your objectives
- Power/influence + interest + opposed – use persuasion and dialogue; accurate coverage of your objectives/views; correct their claims
- Power/influence + not interested – capture their attention; enlist the help of your partners
- Use third parties to help persuade and create interest

# Messages

- What do you want them to know?
- What do you want them to think?
- What do you want them to do?
- Why should I care? How does it affect me?
- Tailor them but avoid contradiction and false promises
- Statistics and case studies
- Third party endorsements

## Make people sit up and listen

“Oxford offers the most generous bursary package to undergraduate students from the least well off households”



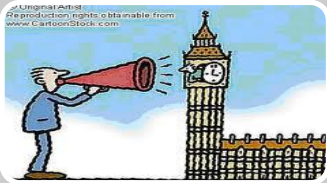
## Inspire action

“We need 5,000 signatures on our petition to the local council to save our library”

# Channels of communication



Media: local, national, international; print, broadcast, web, social



Lobbying: local and national government, funding bodies, special interest groups



Marketing: brand, website, advertising, brochures, fliers, video



Events: conferences, launch events, public speeches, tours of building sites



# Timing

- Work backwards from your deadline
- Accommodate long lead-in times
- Exploit ‘hooks’ to attract interest
- Availability of spokespeople and venues
- Coordinate **who** is told **what** and **when**
- Create a timetable of activities
- Monitor timetable and adjust as necessary



# Timetable

	<b>September 2012</b>	<b>October 2012</b>	<b>November 2012</b>
<b>Lobbying</b>	<b>Ask local MP to book venue</b>	<b>Send out invitations</b>	<b>Event in parliament</b>
<b>Media</b>	<b>Identify key messages and spokespeople</b>	<b>Propose an interview</b>	<b>Issue press release</b>
<b>Publications</b>	<b>Design invitation and display boards</b>	<b>Print the materials</b>	<b>Distribute the materials at the event</b>

# Resources: people and money

- Who do you ideally need to assist you?
- Who is actually available to assist you?
- What funds do you need?
- What funds do you have?
- Do you need to bid for extra? From whom? When?
- Are there conditions attached to the funding?
- Prioritise, and manage people's expectations

# Risks and mitigation

- Identify risks that could prevent you achieving your objectives
- How you will deal with them?
- Identify options – a plan A and a plan B
- Prepare ‘lines to take’ – anticipate audiences’ reaction

Risk	Mitigation options
A student protest could threaten the success of your event.	Plan A: Meet with the students in advance to discuss issues.  Plan B: Change the event date/venue.

# Evaluation: did you succeed?

- Often neglected
- Did you change understanding, opinion and behaviour?
- How will you measure – and will it cost anything?
- Quantitative
  - Event attendance, website visitors, donations, column inches
- Qualitative
  - Feedback forms, focus groups, key messages in the media
- ‘Wash-up’ with the project team

# The written strategy

- Introduction: summary; emphasise added value
- Mission and vision, aims and objectives
- Audiences, messages, channels
- Timetable
- Resources
- Risks and mitigation
- Means of evaluation
- Approvals process

# The essentials

- One or two clear objectives
- List of key audiences
- Summarise the key activities and dates
- Agree who is doing the work and who will pay
- Still write it down, even if it's just a side of A4

# And finally...

- Keep a record of the communications strategy
- Electronic and printed copies of material produced
- Record of quantitative and qualitative evaluation
- Minute the wash-up; record lessons learned
- Keep a contacts list
- Share best practice with peers
- Publicise your success
- It's good PR for our profession!





# Questions?