

# THE JOURNALISM MINI-GUIDE

How to communicate effectively?



Are you working in the communication field but did not major in communications? Don't worry. This short guide will give you the key elements you should take into account when communicating an Interreg story.

**Interact**



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# THE JOURNALISM MINI-GUIDE

How to communicate effectively?

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# Before we start...

Communication is a very complex task. If you find yourself in this line of work, you will know exactly what I'm talking about. Each communication officer has to adapt the message constantly to the product, the communication objectives and the audience; audience; on top of that, social media and all the bursting digital forms make that our message has to compete with thousands of others every single day. And let's face it: we are not Nike or Coca-Cola. These are the main crosses that communicators bear:

**1**

## **Everybody can communicate; good orators/writers are born.**

Fact: Many studies done by psychologists and sociologists state that even language related skills are not something one is born with but they are qualities shaped by culture, education, environment and time.

**2**

## **Communication is a cake-walk.**

Actually, it's far more difficult than any other technical job. The work required to prepare a communication product that interests our target group is really challenging.

**3**

## **Communication is a disposable.**

We often hear that communication is not at the core of an organization so during 'lean times' this department is the first to be dismantled. However, the fact is that an organization does not exist without proper communication.

The truth is that, in order to communicate in a very effective way, we should be trained. And that's why we study communication, marketing or journalism, we attend courses or we read about new trends and communication methods. In this mini-guide my only aim is to share all the great tips and techniques I was taught when being within the formal academic world, as a student, or working for the media, as a journalist. I really hope these tips help you in your daily (communication) work. Enjoy and good luck!

**Laura Belenguer**



# 01

Some basic journalism  
principles



# 01 • Some basic journalism principles

## The News Relevance Elements

The first step to make the local/regional frontpage is your piece of news. Let's adapt to the way journalists write to hit success!

**Carl Warren**, main exponent of modern journalism, made the most widespread list of the elements that make a piece of news, newsworthy --meaning, attractive to journalists. This is the news relevance elements.



Any piece of news/article should have, at **least, 3** of these features:

- **Hot/breaking news** (novelty, unknown facts)
- **Proximity** --not only geographical but also emotional or cultural.
- **Relevance of the fact**, the people described (public notoriety), the place (such as New York), the situation (for instance, Christmas time).
- **Curiosity, peculiar fact**: something rare, unusual, difficult to see or encounter.
- **Conflict**: wars, political fights, sports and competitions, among others.
- **Suspense, mystery**: events that have certain mystery around them or that have not all the answers solved.
- **Emotion**: human interest. Stories that somehow touch our heart, that move us (about kids, animals, lost and found lovers...)
- **Consequences, impact**: Transcendence or importance of what we are telling. Things that affect everyone or a wide range of people.

# Some basic journalism principles

## Key features of an article or press release

### Regarding the content:

**A** **ccuracy:** language must be precise in order to express only what is intended to be said and not leave room for misinterpretation.

For instance, we must avoid, whenever possible, vague expressions regarding quantity, such as: several, some...

**B** **revity, shortness:** the most effective way to convey an idea is short and direct sentences in an active voice.

For instance: 'many good ideas were presented in the seminar...' can be replaced by 'the speakers presented many good ideas during the seminar'.

**C** **larity, simplicity:** simplicity in the message. What we say must be understood by anybody, also outside the Interreg world, so we should use easy, simple sentences, no jargon, not too much technical language.

These 3 features are considered the

**ABC of effective communication**

and they apply to any type of communication, not only articles.

- **Use of action verbs:** the verbs that express action attract more attention and usually express more precisely what we need to communicate. In other words: let's avoid static verbs (mainly the verb to be) if the same idea can be expressed with an action verb.

**Example:** 'In the end, the project was key to tackle the Covid crisis...' We could say instead: 'The project turned out to be key to tackling the Covid crisis'.

- **Informing in a positive way:** the message is much clearer if it's constructed in a positive way. For the same reason, positive verbs are preferred.

**Example:** 'reject' instead of 'not admit', or 'prohibit' instead of 'do not authorize'.



# Some basic journalism principles



## Regarding the form:

We should follow the so-called '**Inverted pyramid**':

- The most important info (the most important W's) in the beginning.
- Then, other important details in the body.
- And the least relevant info (background, general information, context) at the very end.

## Inverted Pyramid

+ important

**Most Newsworthy Info**  
Who? What? When? Where? Why? Whom?

LEAD

**Important Details**

BODY

- important

**Other General Info**  
(Background Info)

TAIL

# Some basic journalism principles

## Regarding the structure:

These are the **main elements** composing a press release:

- **HEADER:** short title above the headline. It usually gives background information, some context (geographical or thematic context). It can depend on the headline (in the sense that we might not understand the piece of news by only reading this header).
- **HEADLINE:** short sentence summarizing the most important facts. No more than 30 words. Completely independent: only by reading it, we should know what the story is all about. The best headline has no punctuation marks but we can see the use of a comma more and more often.
- **SUBTITLE:** below the headline. It provides another fact of the story: a curious fact or simply a less relevant fact. Short sentence.
- **SUMMARY LEAD:** sometimes we think it's a long subtitle but it's not. It's longer because it's more descriptive. As the name hints, it's a summary in only a paragraph of the most important 6 W's (what and who are mandatory!)
- **BODY:** we start by repeating the idea highlighted in the headline. And then we include the most relevant info in the first and second paragraph.



There's no need to include all these elements in a press release, we can choose the ones needed.

The most common structure is: **Headline, subtitle, body** (and the inclusion of a picture)

# Some basic journalism principles

## EXAMPLE 1 (common structure)

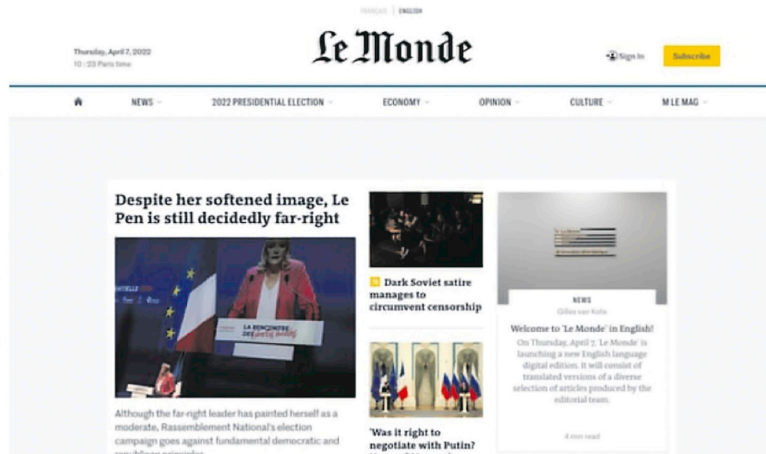
### Headline

Le Monde launches digital English language edition, partly translated by AI

### Subtitle

French daily newspaper's initiative is part of its mission to double its subscriber base by 2025

### Picture



Le Monde's digital English edition. Photograph: Le Monde

One of **France's** leading newspapers, Le Monde, has launched its first English-language digital edition with articles **translated in part by artificial intelligence**.

### Body

The paper said it would start releasing a large range of English-language content as part of a mission to double its subscriber base to one million by 2025.

The articles will be primarily translations of its French articles done “by international agencies, with the help of an artificial intelligence tool”, though editing would be in the hands of English-speaking journalists.

# Some basic journalism principles

## EXAMPLE 2 (inclusion of the summary lead)

### Headline

### Mapping the state of women's equality region by region

### Summary lead

The regional gender equality monitor features two indicators which reveal the EU regions where women achieve the most and where inequality holds them back. Interactive charts allow for easy exploration of the information.

more



The background is a solid red color. In the center, there are two overlapping speech bubbles of a darker red shade. The number '02' is written in large, white, bold font inside the top bubble. Below it, the text 'How to deal with the media?' is written in a smaller, white, bold font. At the bottom of the page, there is a white horizontal bar with a speech bubble tail pointing to the right. Inside this bar, there are three small, light red circles arranged horizontally.

**02**

**How to deal with  
the media?**



## 02 • How to deal with the media?

Some communication officers are not very fond of journalists because they never publish their stories or seem little interested. Even if the decision to publish is not entirely up to them, here are some features of their personality that you should be aware of when approaching the media.

Hi, I am a journalist  
-Well, nobody is  
perfect

Journalists are:

- **Skeptical:** don't expect them to swallow your messages.
- **Inquisitive:** be prepared for tough questions.
- **Impatient:** so get to the point.
- **Stressed:** don't waste time with non-stories.
- **Generalists, not experts:** don't assume knowledge. Be clear. Simplify.

They want news (check the news relevance elements by Carl Warren).  
What does not make news:

- Internal processes or procedures
- Weak messages
- Over-complex information stuffed with jargon

# How to deal with the media?



## Journalists ask. They want to know:

- What's new here?
- Why does this matter?
- What does it change, what's the impact?
- How much does it cost?
- Give me a practical example
- SO WHAT?



## What's your hook?

- Major events
- Anniversaries
- National or world days
- Surveys, polls
- New twists on current news
- Report launches
- Exclusive interviews

## Pitch perfectly!

- Explain why it should interest journalists and their readers/viewers
- Don't over-exaggerate or make ridiculous claims
- Pitch by email and on time

## Be active on social media

- Position yourself as an expert -journalists need credible sources, not bigmouths.
- Engage -retweet others, follow key players, be civil, avoid pointless posts.
- Flatter -most journalists are on Twitter or Instagram. Follow, flatter them



# How to deal with the media?

## Pitching to the media

- 1 Always contact the right journalist -is your press list up to date?
- 2 Call a journalist and quickly introduce yourself
- 3 Ask the journalist if they have time to speak
- 4 Tell the journalist why you are calling
- 5 Make it short and to the point:
  - a. Under 30 seconds
  - b. Include your message (with a news angle)
  - c. Say why they should be interested
  - d. Be clear about what you want from them: attend an event?  
Write a feature or article?
- 6 If the journalist is interested: send more information
- 7 Confirm with the journalist what you both agreed: 'so, as we discussed, I will send you a photo and press release of this event...'
- 8 Follow-up with the journalist. Be as helpful as possible.
- 9 Send the journalist what you said you would. At least, cover these elements:
  - a. Article
  - b. Background info / factsheet
  - c. Photos (good quality)
  - d. Contact details
- 10 If you actually get press coverage, say thanks! If not, don't harass them. There's always a next time.



## When the media calls...

“

1. Find out exactly which media the journalist represents
2. Get their name and phone number
3. What story are they working on?
4. What angle are they taking?
5. What information do they want from you?
6. How will that information be used?
7. If an interview, how long will it last?
8. If broadcast, is it live or pre-recorded?
9. When will it be broadcast or published?
10. What is their deadline?

”

# How to deal with the media?

## The elevator pitch

It's a slang term that refers to a brief way of introducing yourself, **outlining the idea for a project/service and making a connection with someone.** It has become key because of the 'noise' of information and lack of time we have nowadays. There's so much information bombarding us all the time and we just don't have time to process everything! An elevator pitch gets its name because it takes roughly the amount of time you'd spend riding an elevator with someone. Therefore, the speech should be short: **30-60 seconds long.**

Legend has it that it was elevator pioneer Elisha Otis himself, founder of the Otis Elevator Company, who gave the first true 'elevator pitch'. It was in 1853. He invented a safety device that prevents elevators from falling if the hoisting cable fails; and while many buildings were already equipped with elevators at the time, they were considered dangerous, and only as stable as their weakest rope. So Elisha Otis talked about the effectiveness and reliability of this invention while riding his own elevator.

# How to deal with the media?

## The elevator pitch template

Also known within the Interreg community as **the 'Charl lie's pattern'**, this short script is a very good way to briefly present your project to someone and get their interest. Be concise and clear, get to the point and use short sentences. Then, you will succeed.

### **INTRO + PROBLEM**

The big picture/context

### **PROBLEM SPECIFICS**

We focus on the problem/challenge

### **SOLUTION**

How our project fights the problem

### **HOW THE SOLUTION WORKS**

Short explanation of the main features of the project (3 max.)

### **PROOF IT WORKS**

The impact of the project (main results, figures, people reached...)

### **VISION AND BRAND**

The last "touch", the closing sentence summarizing what Interreg/the project does

# How to deal with the media?

## Example

### INTRO + PROBLEM

The Mediterranean region is one of the world's leading tourist destinations but it's facing some challenges during the last decade.

### PROBLEM SPECIFICS

Concretely, this destination has demonstrated symptoms of a slowdown because of the growing competition and deterioration of the political and security situation. Therefore, the recovery of this sector is an economic priority.

### SOLUTION

And that's how the project 'Wrapped up in blue' appears to be a perfect solution to these challenges. Furthermore, it presents an opportunity to transform the tourism model into a sustainable and competitive one.

### HOW THE SOLUTION WORKS

It works this way: it designs and tests routes and itineraries that offer improved adventure tourism products. By doing so, it contributes to job creation and income for local communities in the medium and long term.

### PROOF IT WORKS

Thanks to 'Wrapped up in blue', 5 countries have created and adopted 3 common cross-border adventure tourism routes and itineraries. Also, more than 130 municipalities have now a marketing strategy in place which establishes relationships with tour operators and travel agencies.

### VISION AND BRAND

And this is what Interreg does: it puts regions together to tackle shared challenges. Tourism slowdown is only one of them, but give me a bit more of your time and you won't be disappointed.

# 03

## The reality of media: key figures



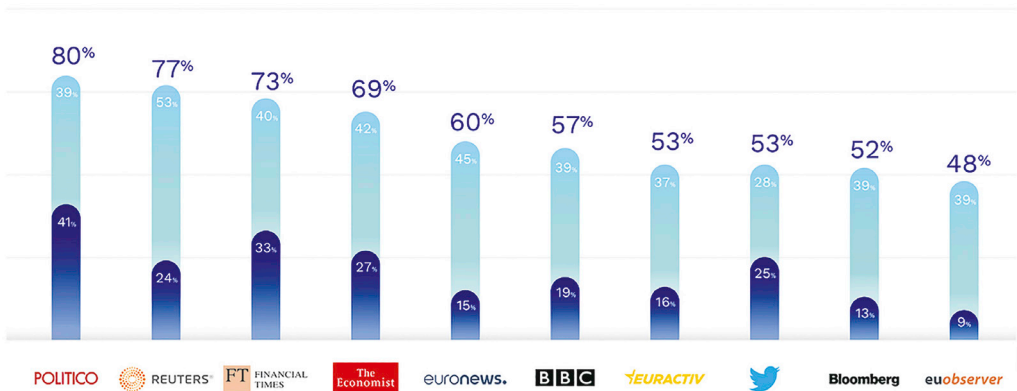
# 03 • The reality of media: key figures

## EU Media Poll 2022

Source: 2022 edition of the survey by BCW Brussels and Savanta ComRes

### Most influential news sources

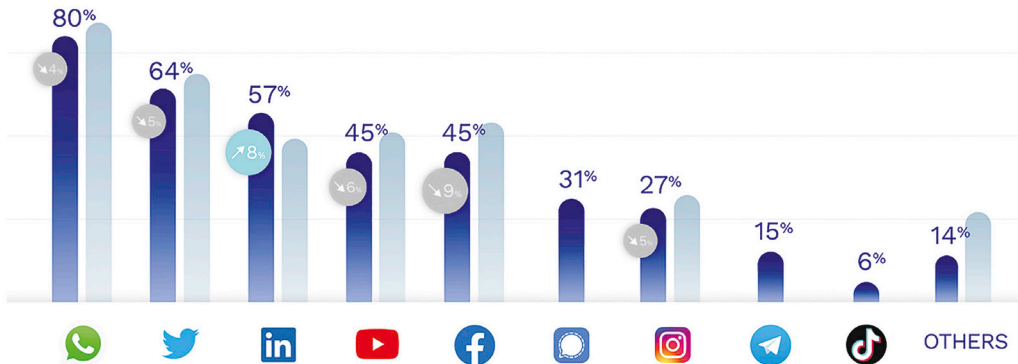
● Fairly Influential ● Very Influential



# The reality of media: key figures

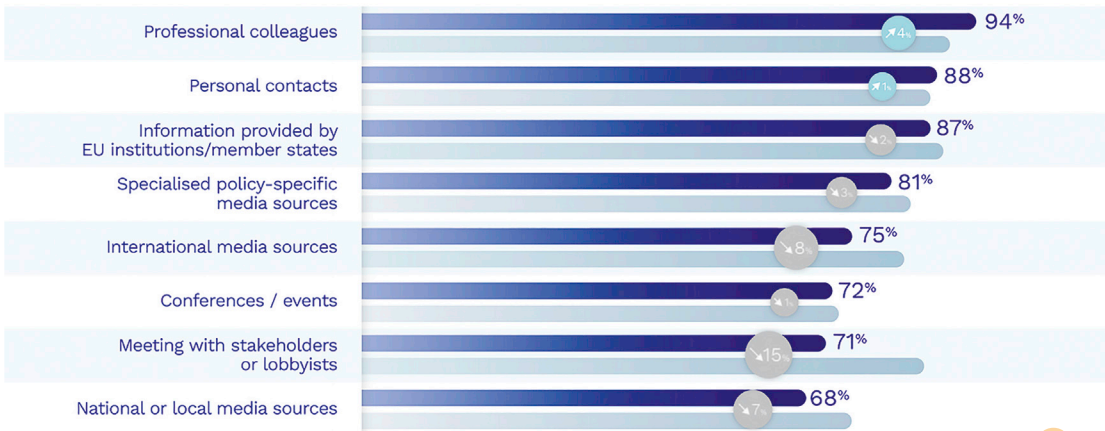
## Most used social media apps

● 2022 ● 2020



## Other forms of influence

● 2022 ● 2020



# Digital News Report 2022

Source: Reuters Institute

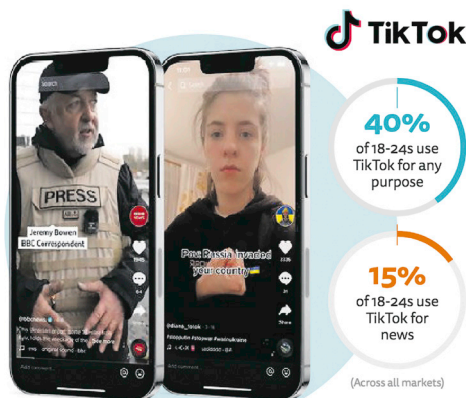




# The reality of media: key figures

## Key findings

- **Interest in news** and overall news consumption **has declined** considerably in many countries while trust has fallen back almost everywhere.
- There's **news fatigue around politics**, with a number of people actively avoiding news increasing markedly.
- Consumption of **traditional media, such as TV and print, declined** in 2022.
- Meanwhile, the proportion of **news consumers who say they avoid news has increased** sharply across countries.
- Despite increases in the proportion **paying for online news** in a small number of richer countries (Germany, Australia and Sweden), there are signs that overall growth may be **leveling off**.
- The **smartphone has become the dominant way** in which most people first access news in the morning.
- Facebook usage for any purpose (60%) is down five percentage points since its peak in 2017 and is now at a similar level to YouTube. Instagram, **TikTok and Telegram are the only networks to have grown** in the last year.
- In this sense, **TikTok has become the fastest growing network** in this year's survey, reaching 40% of people aged 18-24, with 15% using the platform for news.



# The reality of media: key figures

## Disconnection with the news

People are becoming disconnected from the news. At the same time, we find that the proportion that says they are very/extremely interested in the news has fallen sharply. How can this be explained? The data suggest the emergence of a minority of people who are active online has become disconnected from the news because they don't feel it's relevant for their lives (usually younger or less educated people). Separately, the more generalised decline in news interest affects a bigger group which may not like the structural changes in the way news are distributed, such as the shift to online or the nature of the news cycle itself.



**43%**

say there is too much politics



**36%**

say news has negative effect on mood



**29%**

say they are worn out by amount of news



**29%**

say the news is untrustworthy or biased



**17%**

say it leads to arguments I'd rather avoid



**16%**

say there is nothing I can do with the information

# The reality of media: key figures

## Less 'paying for news': subscription fatigue

Subscriptions are being reduced. A striking finding is that the vast majority of those paying subscriptions to news are older, with an average age of 47. Persuading younger people to pay remains a critical issue for the media industry.



## Reading the news or watching videos?

Respondents say they prefer reading online because it is quicker (50%) or gives them more control (34%). Around 35% say they do it to avoid a poor video experience -they don't like the pre-rolls ads that sometimes appear ahead of videos. By contrast, people who prefer to watch news online say that it's because they find it easier and a more engaging way to access the news.

# 04

What EU journalists shared  
about how to communicate  
Interreg



## 04 • What EU journalists shared about how to communicate Interreg

Many programmes (not only Interreg) struggle when trying to attract the media to their stories. The truth and nothing but the truth is that it's very difficult to 'sell' Interreg as such because of the own nature and structural features of the media industry. Journalists have too many things to write about and too little room for that, even in digital media.

Against these dynamics, we cannot fight. However, we can play with other elements or we can apply the **'brand journalism'** using our own social media channels and websites to produce stories and engage readers. It's pretty much like an organization (in this case, an Interreg programme) thinking of itself as a newspaper.

In 2022, my colleagues Eva Martínez, Mercedes Acitores and myself tried to respond to these questions: How to reach the media with Interreg stories? What are the elements of a good story? And the best way to do it was to set out to get answers from the journalists themselves. As a result, three interviews were produced in the form of short videos (that you can find on the Interact YouTube channel). This pilot project was so much fun and we learned a lot! Find here their main ideas and tips summarized.

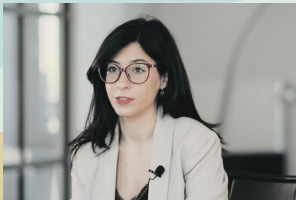
# What EU journalists shared about how to communicate Interreg



**Sigrid Melchior**  
Swedish correspondent in Brussels



**SMiriam Burgués**  
EURO-EFE Unit Manager (EFE-Euractiv)



**Beatriz Ríos**  
Spanish correspondent in Brussels

# What EU journalists shared about how to communicate Interreg

## General tips when communicating Europe

- **Communicating Europe is not an easy task.** Usually, the media are more interested in European crises or conflicts.
- However, we can obtain better results if we **personalize our stories.** European articles with actual people in it are more interesting and touch journalists more.
- It's not necessarily about how an Interreg project works or how Interreg funds work. It's about how people are benefitting from that. This **impact of a project is not just one element, it's the key.**
- We have to **translate Interreg** (or any EU policy) **into practical examples** that touch on the citizens' daily lives.

## Lessons learned in Interreg

- Move away from Brussels correspondents! You will not sell your story in EU media. **Focus on regional, national and local media,** always highlighting the European angle.
- Provide reliable **data, figures, practical examples, stories** that people can relate to.
- What a journalist wants is basically a **phone number.** They want to easily find someone who can answer their questions, as simple as that.

# What EU journalists shared about how to communicate Interreg

## When communicating a project...

- This is not a report! Focus on **what makes your project unique**, special, different from the rest.
- Do a **background meeting**: invite local reporters and connect them to the actual people on the ground.
- **Avoid general labels such** as 'climate change' and be more specific. Find out the novelty within the idea you want to disseminate.
- Find a **different angle** for the project.

## Elements of a good story

- It has to be new and be interesting.
- It should create empathy and connect with people.
- It has to be engaging and informative.
- It has to be relatable for as many people as possible.



# 05

## Evaluation of your communication activities



# 05 • Evaluation of your communication activities

## The GCS Evaluation Framework

Evaluation is an essential part of effective communication. It needs to be outcome focused and answer the question 'did we achieve what we set out to do?' There are many evaluation methods available online but personally, I like the GCS Evaluation Framework because it's simple and provides a guide to the data and evidence we need to collect and report on, depending on what communication activities we are undertaking.

## When planning your evaluation

1. Set **SMART objectives** - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time bound.
2. **Identify your target audience/s.** Use available insight to understand your audience in terms of demographics, media habits and current attitudes.
3. **Work through the metric categories** (inputs, outputs, outtakes, outcomes) selecting the key metrics from each that are relevant to your communications activity. Select the relevant metrics, you don't need to select every one.

# Evaluation of your communication activities

- 4. Do not choose metrics just because they are easy to collect.** You must check that the measures you are selecting relate to the desired outcomes and are linked to the objectives' set.
- 5. Select a mix of qualitative and quantitative evidence** to help ensure robust and credible evaluation. The quantitative evidence is the numbers, percentages, etc. The qualitative evidence cannot be expressed as a number but may be information derived from focus groups for example, or anecdotal feedback.
- 6. Where possible, use benchmarks or baselines** so that targets can be set and progress can be measured against these. Baselines or benchmarks may be derived by conducting research prior to the start of your activity or from evidence based on previous activity that you have conducted.
- 7. Don't simply report back the numbers, add context** (for instance, are you reporting an increase or a decrease? Is it in line with what you expected?) and consider answering the question why this has happened. Qualitative feedback can be helpful to add context to the numbers.
- 8. Track and review performance regularly,** in relation to the communication activity. Feedback on performance can be rapid with digital comms and can help to inform optimization of the activity. Some data can take time to become available, especially outcome data.

# Evaluation of your communication activities

## The Evaluation Model Implementation Matrix

### Stages in strategic communication

1

#### Inputs

What is needed to plan & prepare communication

##### STEPS

- Planning and preparation

##### Examples:

- Research
- Budgeting
- Resource allocation
- Strategic planning

2

#### Activities

What is done to produce & implement communication

##### STEPS

- Production
- Distribution

##### Examples:

- Writing (press release...)
- Media relations
- Website & social media development
- Event management or checklist

# Evaluation of your communication activities

3

## Outputs

What is put out (or done) that reaches and engages the target audience

### STEPS

- Exposure
- Reception

### Examples:

- Publicity
- Web and social media content
- Newsletters
- Brochures, publications
- Videos
- Events

4

## Outcomes

**Short term** → **outtakes**. What the target audience take out of communication.

### STEPS

- Attention, awareness
- Understanding, learning
- Interest and engagement

### Examples:

- Web visits, page & video views
- Social media discussions, shares
- Registrations, subscriptions

**Long term** → the sustainable effects that communication has on the target audience.

### STEPS

- Attitude change
- Trust, preference
- Intention
- Advocacy

### Examples:

- Feedback
- Satisfaction levels
- Joining
- Strategic relationships

5

## Impact

What quantifiable results are caused by the communication activity

### STEPS

- Target audience's action/behavior in line with the comms objectives
- Social/political change
- Organization change

### Examples:

- Revenue
- Costs reduction
- Customer loyalty
- Social benefits (for instance, public health improved)
- Reputation
- Policy change

# Evaluation of your communication activities

## How do we measure each stage?

### 1. Inputs

**Metrics and milestones** that can apply → targets, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), baselines and benchmarks, audience needs, channel preferences identified

**Methods** that can be used → database statistics, SWOT analysis, surveys, polls, market research, pre-testing

### 2. Activities

**Metrics and milestones** that can apply → number of media releases issued, number of events, interviews, videos; awards

**Methods** that can be used → activity reports, peer reviews, distribution statistics

### 3. Outputs

**Metrics and milestones** that can apply → reach, impressions, share of voice, event attendance, views, unique visitors

**Methods** that can be used → media metrics, web statistics, media monitoring, social media analysis

### 4. Outcomes

**Metrics and milestones** that can apply → likes, follows, shares, awareness levels, comments, subscribers, satisfaction ratings, reputation score, endorsements,

**Methods** that can be used → social media analysis, polls, surveys, interviews, focus groups, database statistics (number of enquiries, registrations...)

### 5. Impact

**Metrics and milestones** that can apply → costs savings, public support, positive public opinion, policy approval

**Methods** that can be used → database records, surveys, cost benefit analysis, Return of Investment (ROI)

## Summary





