



## Practical Guide

To

## Communication, Negotiation and Dialogue

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## Introduction

In organizations, the ability to communicate is considered as one of the most important skills that any team member should possess.

To send out or transmit information however is only one part of the story. Communication is a two-way process. To be a good communicator requires two skills: the ability to transmit information and the ability to receive feedback and make sure that the information has been received and well understood by others.

When a piece of information is sent out, it is not always received as intended. How often have you told someone something which has been completely misinterpreted, or asked someone to do something, and stared in amazement as they went off and did the exact opposite?

In its journey from one person to another, information encounters a whole range of obstacles which can alter or completely block the actual message. These “barriers” are things like assumptions, distractions, discomfort, anxiety, language, accent, jargon or sometimes an unclear message. When messages are misinterpreted, the first question to ask is: “What did I do that caused the raising of a barrier?”

Communication comes in many forms. People communicate with each other by sending messages. These messages can be transmitted through words, voice intonation, or through our “body language” (signs and gestures, expression, posture and stance or eye contact). Of all information sent out, a surprisingly high percentage is through our body language (about 80%), voice intonation accounts also for a further 13% while spoken words make up only 7% of all the messages we sent out. Thus, body language and voice intonation are far more powerful than words. If what we say does not concur with the way we say it, then the message loses its credibility and impact.

These basics about communication need to be taken into consideration when engaging in a dialogue or a negotiation, when planning a communication campaign or when trying to develop partnerships with beneficiaries and stakeholders. Channels of communication should be chosen carefully to fit the listener. They can vary from one to one communication to direct mails, PowerPoint presentations, telephone calls, posters, TV interviews, etc.

This practical guide covers the main elements of communication and their practical applications while planning a communication campaign, negotiating an agreement or being engaged in a dialogue with people, organizations or communities. It is divided into 4 lessons including a step by step application on how to develop a communication plan:

## Content

- Lesson 1:** Communication: Content and Process
- Lesson 2:** Dialogue Skills
- Lesson 3:** Effective Negotiation
- Lesson 4:** Developing a Communication Plan

## Lesson 1: Communication: Content and Process

### Defining Communication

Communication is a process to build or enhance relationships between people, organizations and communities. This process aims at creating a common set of values between the parties involved.

In order to have effective communication, an exchange must not only rely on the content (messages, information) but also on the process (feelings, relationships). Every communication action tries to convince, attract and change other people's ideas, behaviors and skills.

In other words the communication process aims at influencing the other. However, effective communication does not only imply the capacity to influence others but also the aptitude to understand them and to be influenced oneself.

### What is the Difference between Information and Communication?

What characterizes information is centered on its content.

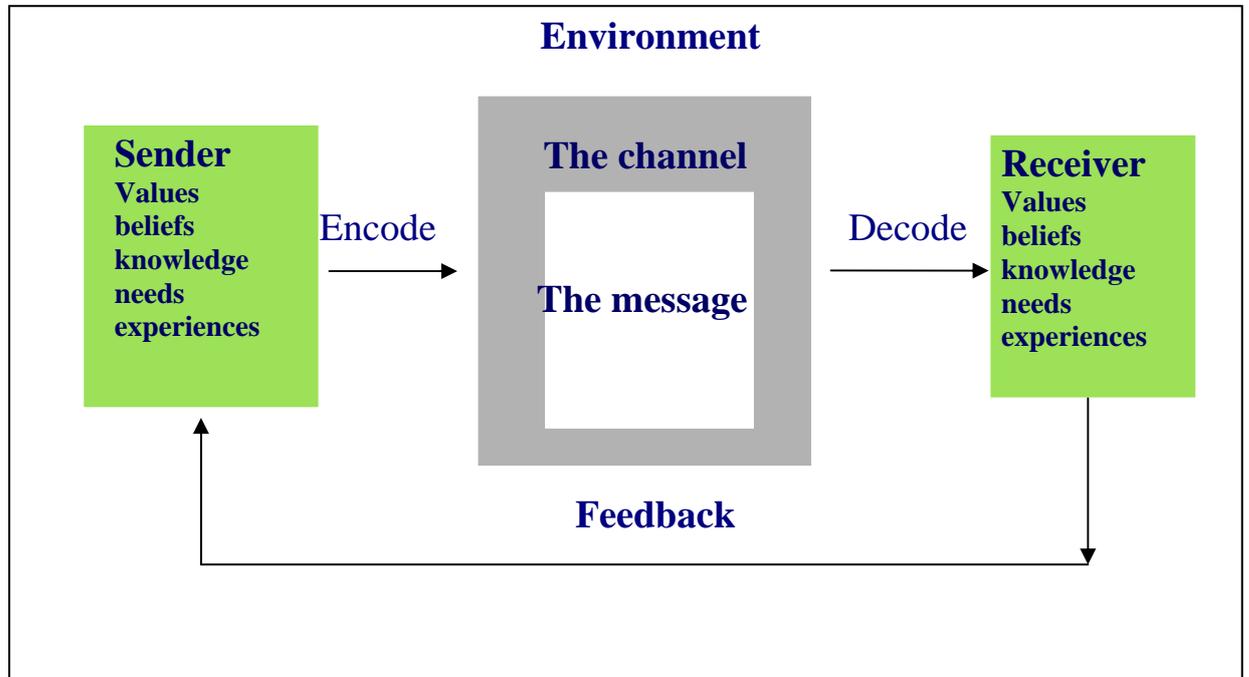
What characterizes communication is centered on relationship.

Communication rests on interaction(s) between one or several partners, while information rests on content.

**However, information and communication complement one another, provided that an equilibrium point between content and relationship is found.**

## The Communication Scheme

This scheme gathers the components of communication and shows the process of communication and how the message is transmitted between the sender and the receiver (persons or groups):



The four elements of communication are:

- A sender who sends a message through codes
- A message to be transmitted
- A channel through which the message is transmitted
- A recipient who receives the message and decodes it

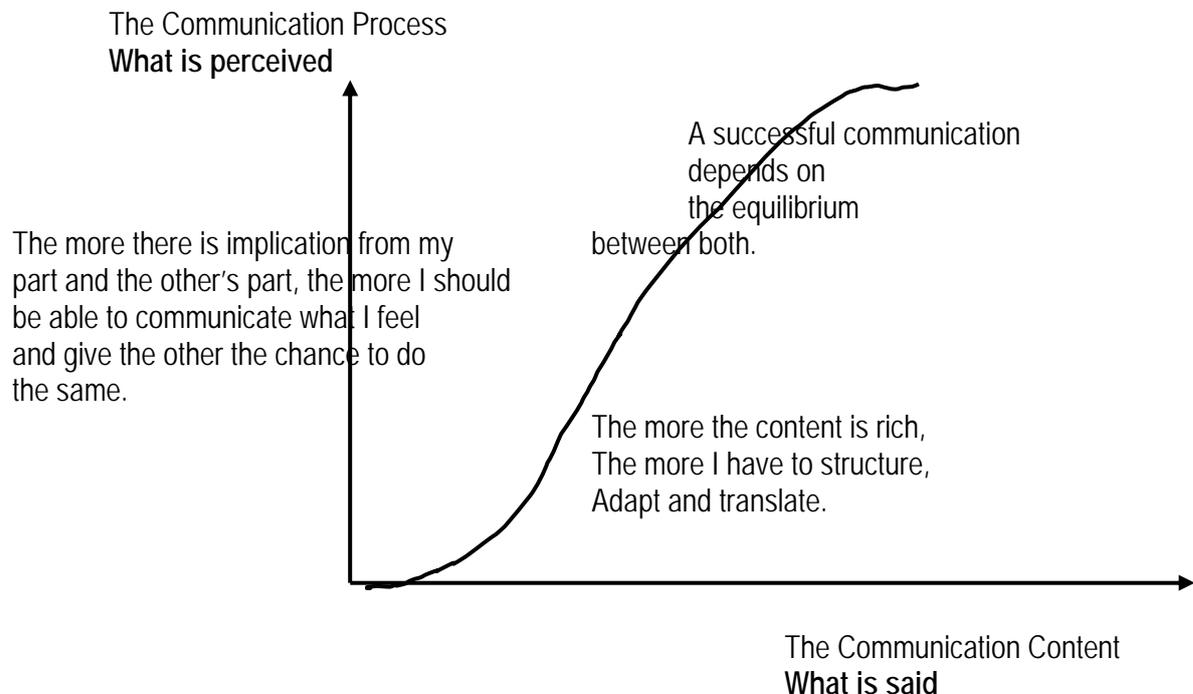
A communication process always unfolds in an environment that affects the whole course of action.

The Feedback undergoes the same procedure. The roles of sender and receiver are reverted.

## How Does Communication Work?

Effective communication implies that what is said (the content=what) should be treated simultaneously with what is perceived (the process= how).

### Content and process in communication:



It is a real exercise of equilibrium or of composition to maintain the exchange on a curve where the two aspects will be adequately addressed.

### The Three Principles of Effective Communication

- **The principle of coherence:**  
An effective communication implies that the recipient receives and understands the message in accordance with the sender's intentions.
- **The principle of permanent exchange:**  
To establish an effective communication between the sender and the receiver, there should be the possibility for feedback. It is also necessary that the sender takes the feedback into consideration.
- **The principle of holistic perception:**  
Communication is not just about the words that are being said. In a communication process, it is important to listen to each other's feelings and concerns.

## Types of Communication

There are three types of communication:

- Perceptible or imperceptible
- Direct or indirect
- Personal or formal

## Dimensions of Communication

1. The intellectual dimension of communication is influenced by:

- Goals
- Achievements
- Facts

2. The socio-emotional dimension of communication is influenced by the:

- Degree of sympathy or antipathy
- Emotional bonding between parties

3. The value-based cultural dimension of communication is influenced by:

- Different values
- Different norms
- Cultural differences
- Social class differences

## Guidelines for Improving Communication

1. The sender of a message must have a clear idea of what he/she wants to communicate. This means that one of the first steps to be taken is clarifying the purpose of the message and structuring a plan to achieve your intentions.
2. Effective communication requires that encoding and decoding be done with symbols that are familiar to the sender and receiver of the message.
3. The communication plan should be based on a participative approach in order to collect the facts, analyze the message and select the appropriate media.
4. It is important to consider the needs of the receiver. Whenever appropriate, one should communicate something that is of value to them not only in the short run but also in the more distant future.
5. In communication the tone of voice, the choice of language and the concomitance between what is said and how it is said influences the receiver's reaction to the message.
6. Information is too often transmitted without achieving the communication's goal because the message has not been understood by the receiver. Whether the message has been understood remains unclear, unless the sender gets feedback. This can be accomplished for example by asking questions, requesting a reply to a letter or encouraging receivers to convey their reactions to the message.
7. The function of communication goes beyond the mere transmission of information. It also deals with emotions that are very important in interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, communication is vital for creating an environment in which people are motivated to work toward the goals of the enterprise while achieving their personal aims.
8. Effective communication is not only the sender's responsibility but also the receiver's. Thus, listening is an aspect that needs special attention.

## Communication Objectives of NGOs could be:

- Product definition – who are we, why do we exist?
- Non-profit marketing
- Public relations
- Information for members
- Generate staff commitment
- Acquisition of new members
- Community awareness
- Lobbying
- Networking
- Monitoring and evaluation of progress
- Fund raising
- Advertising

## Lesson 2: Dialogue Skills

### Defining Dialogue

Dialogue is a key activity of NGOs' work. It is essential to the internal and external activities of organisations. Dialogue is crucial when working with clients, stake-holders and policy makers as well as in team settings.

Dialogue needs special personal and organizational skills.

When there is a conflict of interest between two parties, dialogue is necessary. While exchanging dialogue, all parties may not have the same goal or may have different perceptions of the subject. The result of a dialogue is to bring these different views to a common understanding.

Compromise is the essence of dialogue.

In the course of a dialogue, the intellectual dimension encounters factual problems which need to be solved. Every partner implied in a dialogue has their own subjective view of the problem or the issue, their own opinion, belief and attitude. These aspects determine the subjective reality of a dialogue. Emotions play a vital role in the decision or opinion making process. Intellectual and socio-emotional dimensions complement each other:

- The more facts match, the more likely it is for participants to feel sympathy for each other
- The more sympathy the participants have for each other, the more likely it is that the factual dimension matches

Values, beliefs, education and culture affect the dialogue habits and behaviors as well as the goals to be accomplished.

### Ideal Conditions for a Rewarding Dialogue

**Create an open and welcoming climate:**

- Respect others' personality
- Show appreciation for others
- Be tolerant
- Be trustworthy and build trust
- Be empathetic with different values

**When communicating with people from another cultural background, pay attention to:**

- What language barriers do the dialogue partners have?
- How do the partners think?
- What is the subjective reality of the partners?
- What are the values, beliefs and ideals of the partners?
- Focus on affinities rather than differences

## Personal Dialogue Skills

This is a list of major personal skills to be used in any dialogue setting:

- Motivate self and others
- Eliminate risks of negative inter-personal problems
- Set and achieve goals
- Keep meetings relevant
- Select effective decision making processes
- Accurately identify the intentions of others
- Gather information and quickly analyze the situation
- Purposefully and quickly establish rapport
- Maintain positive attitude
- Show flexibility and openness
- Be authentic and compassionate

## Active Listening – a Key Skill for Dialogue

Active listening helps guide the conversation through defining problems, facilitating common understanding and finding possible outcome. Active listening helps you understand the feelings behind the words and identify what is not said.

Active listening is an important skill for you to assess the problems of your dialogue partners, issues and disagreements.

## Ten Rules on Active Listening in a Dialogue Context

- Don't talk! You can't listen if you talk
- Show empathy
- Invite the partner to express his/her concerns
- Through your body language, show that you are interested in listening to what is said
- Keep the dialogue focused
- Listen to the emotional dimension of the message
- Reformulate answers to make sure you understood what is said
- Be patient
- Don't lose control if offended
- Ask questions to show interest

## Ten Rules on Active Questioning in a Dialogue Context

1. Ask important and relevant questions
2. Adapt the complexity of questions to the audience
3. Ask open-ended questions
4. Formulate clear questions and relate to knowledge and needs
5. Don't ask more than one question at a time
6. Give time to reflect
7. Don't answer your own questions
8. Don't ask questions that carry the answer
9. Give support

10. Take notes when necessary and after partner's approval

### Dialogue Techniques

These are some techniques that can keep a dialogue process attractive and fluid:

#### Confrontation

- The ability to confront someone is a vital ability and is necessary to draw the attention to your point
- Confrontation increases the interest of the opposite side to your point of view

#### Attention

- Focus on one message at a time in a statement
- Focus on the other rather on yourself
- Use clear, straightforward, simple sentences

#### Reformulation

- Reformulation blocks personal interpretation
- The partner shows that he understood what the sender tried to say

#### Confirmation

- Confirmation is a sign of understanding and convinces the partner that what has been said was grasped
- Without confirmation the partner cannot be sure whether the message was understood

## Lesson 3: Effective Negotiation

### Defining Negotiation

Negotiating is the process of communicating back and forth, for the purpose of reaching a joint agreement about differing needs or ideas.

It is an interactive process by which two or more parties who consider that they need to be involved together in an outcome, but have different objectives, seek to resolve their differences through argument and persuasion to reach a mutually acceptable solution. Negotiation implies acceptance by both parties that an agreement between them is required before a decision can be implemented. That is to reach a situation where both sides win something for themselves. To do that, negotiators need to be well prepared, alert and flexible.

### Levels of Negotiations

There are different levels of negotiation:

- Between individuals
- Between stakeholders
- Between communities and countries
- Inter-team negotiation

### Necessary Skills for Negotiators

A good negotiator should have:

- The ability to be well prepared
- The ability to behave assertively
- The ability to listen to and question other parties
- The ability to reach win/win solutions

### Key Advices for Negotiators

A good negotiator should pay attention to the following key advices:

- Know your partner
  - o If he is an authority person, get straight to the point
  - o If he is trying to convince you of something, don't let yourself get distracted by minor information
  - o If he is a very creative person, show respect for his ideas
- Hold back your emotions, don't get too excited about anything
- Have logical and clear thinking
- Being patient helps to find consent
- If you are in a rush you are disadvantaged
- Set yourself a high goal
- Know what you definitely don't want
- Set your own limits
- Know exactly what you are negotiating about
- Know your own strengths and weaknesses

### Why Parties Choose to Negotiate?

The list of reasons for choosing to negotiate is long. Some of the most common reasons are to:

- Test the strength of other parties
- Obtain information about issues, interests and positions of other parties
- Educate all sides about a particular view of an issue or concern
- Ventilate emotions about issues or people
- Change perceptions
- Mobilise public support
- Buy time
- Bring about a desired change in a relationship
- Develop new procedures for handling problems
- Make substantive gains
- Solve a problem

### How to Negotiate Successfully

In order to negotiate successfully, you have to consider the following:

- Do I have a solid knowledge about the subject?
- Do I have a clear understanding of what I intend to say?
- Do I have the ability to convince?
- Do I have enough psychological readiness?

### Preconditions of a Solid Negotiation

- Patience
- Motivation
- Empathy
- Balance of power

### Principles of Negotiation

- Present arguments not opinions
- Generate interest
- Avoid allegations
- Avoid exaggeration
- Do not demonstrate predominance
- Avoid unfair tactics
- Behave assertively
- Admit possible mistakes to help develop an open climate
- Win without prevailing the other party
- Be self-confident

## Preparing for the negotiation process

Before starting any negotiation process, be aware of the existence of an ideal position, a realistic position and of a withdrawal position. Reflect on the following issues:

- What could the other party want?
- Where are their limits?
- What can the other party offer?
- What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- What are their ideal, realistic and withdrawal position?
- How much power does the other party have in comparison to me?
- Check each argument brought by the other party:
  - o Ask for proofs
  - o Ask for examples
  - o Ask for explanations

## What to observe during negotiation

These are questions that can help you understand, evaluate and improve your negotiation skills:

### **Factual/intellectual dimension of negotiation**

- What facts and factual arguments have been used?
- Have the participants used mainly one sided or two-sided arguments?
- Which arguments have been the most convincing?
- Have the arguments been based on facts and knowledge?
- Have the facts played an important part in convincing other parties?

### **Social/emotional dimension**

- How was the relationship between the parties?
- Have emotions played a role during the debate? Have emotions had an impact on presented arguments?
- What is the degree of sympathy or antipathy?
- Could you detect emotional coalitions and emotional bonding between parties?

### **Value-based dimension**

- Have you detected conflicts of values and norms?
- How do different beliefs or social differences influence the arguments?
- How do different beliefs or social differences influence the negotiation?
- Have you detected any misunderstanding or gap between the different parties' values?
- Have existing differences in values and beliefs been respected by the negotiating partners?

## Lesson 4: Developing a Communication Plan

Exercise: Develop a communication plan for your organization

The following are eight steps required in developing a communication plan for an NGO:

- Step -1- Determine the Goal
- Step -2- Identify and Profile Audience
- Step -3- Develop Messages
- Step -4- Select Communication Channels
- Step -5- Choose Activities and Materials
- Step -6- Establish Partnerships
- Step -7- Implement the Plan
- Step -8- Evaluate and Make Mid-Course Corrections

### **Step 1: Determine the Goal**

To initiate a successful and effective communication plan, start with an assessment of your current organizational goals. Examine what your organization stands for - its mission, values and beliefs. Look closely at who your organization is serving. This process will help narrow and sharpen the focus for your communication initiative(s).

- ✓ What are your organization's main issues of concern?
- ✓ Who are the most affected people by the issues stated above?
- ✓ Who makes decisions in your organization about the issues?
- ✓ What is the overall goal you want to achieve (i.e. what change do you want to observe)? Be specific.
- ✓ What tangible outcomes would you like to achieve through the communication plan? Be specific.

### **Step 2: Identify and Profile the Audiences**

Once you have identified your key issues, it's time to identify and profile specific audiences you want to target through the communication plan.

The identification of your audiences is essential in choosing the most effective ways to communicate with them.

#### **Audience Definition Worksheet**

- ✓ Of the audiences listed in Step 2, whose knowledge, attitudes and behavior must be changed in order to meet your goal? (These groups are your primary audiences)
- ✓ Who else will be affected if you reach your goal? (Secondary audience)
- ✓ Are there other groups that can influence primary and secondary audiences (Tertiary audiences)? You may wish to design a communication plan to reach some of these audiences as well. You may identify a role for these groups as "allies" and/or "partners".
- ✓ Now you are ready to complete worksheets for each of the audiences identified above.

## Audience Segmentation Worksheet

- ✓ Audience:
- ✓ Describe what you know about this audience's knowledge, attitudes and behaviors in relation to your issues:
- ✓ What are the barriers that this audience will face if it supports or participates in reaching your goal? What are the benefits for the audience if they do support you?
- ✓ What are the characteristics of this audience? How do they spend their time? What are their gender, ethnicity, income and educational levels? What are the language considerations? What or whom are they influenced by? What makes new information credible to them? What or who could motivate them to change and act?

### Step 3: Develop Messages

Your messages are closely tied to your goal and objectives. They deliver important information about the issue and compel the targeted audience to think, feel or act. They can:

- Show the importance, urgency, or magnitude of the issue
- Show the relevance of the issue
- Put a "face" on the issue
- Be tied to specific audience values, beliefs or interests
- Reflect an understanding of what would motivate the audience to think, feel or act
- Be culturally relevant and sensitive
- Be memorable

The messages you develop by using the worksheets provided in this section can be used in many ways. First, they are a set of statements that you and your team agree upon to convey through your plan. They will not include all the details and supporting ideas and data that you may use in printed materials or other forms of communication. They could however become the underlying themes for your materials and activities.

Before turning to the Message Development Worksheet, take a few moments to read "Considerations for Message Construction."

### **Considerations for Message Construction**

Both the channel and the purpose of communication influence the message's design. Information may be designed to convey new facts, alter attitudes, change behavior or encourage participation in decision-making.

Some of these purposes may overlap and they are progressive. That is, for persuasion to work, the public must first receive information, then understand it, believe it, agree with it and finally act upon it. Regardless of the purpose, messages must be developed in consideration of the desired outcome.

Factors that help determine public acceptance include:

**Clarity**—Messages must convey information in a clear manner to assure the public's understanding and to limit the chances for misunderstanding or inappropriate action.

Clear messages contain as few technical/scientific/bureaucratic terms as possible and eliminate information that the audience does not need (such as unnecessarily detailed explanations), in order to make appropriate decisions. Readability tests can help determine the reading level required to understand drafted material and help writers to be conscientious about the selection of words and phrases.

**Consistency**—The set of messages on a particular topic should be formulated in a coherent way that avoids any possibility for misinterpretation.

**Main points**—The main points should be stressed, repeated and never hidden within less strategically important information.

**Tone and appeal**—A message should be reassuring, alarming, challenging or straightforward, depending upon the desired impact and the target audience.

Messages should also be truthful, honest and as complete as possible.

**Credibility**—The spokesperson and source of the information should be believable and trustworthy.

**Public's needs**—For a message to break through the "information clutter" of society, messages should be based on what the target audience perceives as most important to them and not what is most relevant or interesting to the organization.

Prior to final production, messages should be pre-tested with the target audiences (and in some cases with channel "gatekeepers") to ensure the public's understanding and other intended reactions.

### Message Worksheet (one for each audience)

- ✓ Audience:
- ✓ What are the barriers and benefits for your audience to think about, feel for or react to your issues?
- ✓ What change of attitude do you want to encourage in your audience in order to meet your goal?
- ✓ What change in the behavior (day-to-day actions) of your audience are you trying to bring about?
- ✓ Now, based on what you know about your audience's specific prerequisites to be able to change and act, what are the three most compelling sentences you could use to influence them? These are your messages.

#### **Step 4: Select Communication Channels**

Communication channels carry the messages to the target audiences. Channels take many forms and there are countless possibilities. Answering some key questions will help you to identify the most effective communication channels to reach your audiences.

#### **Sample Channels**

- Television stations
- Radio stations
- Newspapers
- Websites
- Community centers
- Street festivals
- Government offices
- Malls
- Parks
- Schools, colleges, vocational and language training centers
- Libraries
- Recreation centers (e.g. basketball courts or soccer fields)
- Non-profit organizations
- Supermarkets
- Fast food restaurants
- Literature Racks

#### **Channel Worksheet (one worksheet for each audience)**

- ✓ Audience:
- ✓ Where and/or whom from does this audience get its information? Who do they find credible?
- ✓ Where does this audience spend most of its time? Where are they most likely to give you their attention?
- ✓ Make a complete list of channels your team intends to use to reach this audience:

#### **Step 5: Choose Activities and Materials**

What are the activities, events and/or materials—to be used in your selected channels—that will most effectively carry your message to the intended audiences? In choosing these media, you should consider:

- Appropriateness to audience, goal and message
- Relevance to desired outcomes
- Timing
- Costs/resources
- Community's attitude toward the issue/activity
- Cultural appropriateness (including language)
- Environment—geographic considerations

## **Sample Activities**

Press conferences  
Editorial board meetings at newspapers  
Radio talk or call-in shows  
A benefit race  
Parades  
Web links  
Conferences  
One-on-one meetings  
Open houses  
Speeches  
Hotlines  
Information Fair

## **Materials to Support Activities**

Press releases and information press kits  
Fliers and brochures  
Opinion editorials  
Letters to editors  
Posters  
Public service announcements Bookmarks  
Video presentations  
Web pages  
A float in a parade  
Buttons, pins, and ribbons  
Promotional items and giveaways

## **Step 6: Establish Partnerships**

Individuals, groups, organizations or businesses may exist that would help you in reaching your goal by providing funds, expertise, support or other resources. Make a list of allies or partners who would support, work with your audiences and share your goals.

## **Step 7: Implement the Plan**

There are many tools for organizing yourself. You should use them while taking into consideration time, money and staff needed to implement an initiative. Of course, you should feel free to use your own tried and tested management tools.

Use the following steps to determine time, budget and staffing needs:

1. List all activities
2. Under each activity, outline the necessary steps that will lead to its completion
3. Assign an estimated budget for each step
4. Assign estimated staffing for each step
5. Review all steps starting from the activity completion point ("backwards" process) to assign a date for each step

## **Step 8: Evaluate and Make Mid-Course Adjustments**

- Specify times to take stock of progress in completing your communication plan
- Assess strengths and weaknesses
- Identify obstacles
- Create and implement new approaches for success
- Consult communication advisors for technical assistance

## Campaign Planning Worksheet

Finally, consider the following questions when planning a comprehensive communication campaign:

1. What are your short-term and long-term campaign objectives?
2. What is your timeline for the completion of the campaign?
3. Who are your target audiences?
4. What are the key communication messages?
5. What are your human and financial resources?
6. What materials and activities will best disseminate these messages?
7. What media have you chosen?
8. What specific roles have you identified for your spokespeople?
9. What role will consortium members, corporate partners and staff play?
10. How will you evaluate your campaign?