

Writing a communications strategy

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What is a strategy?

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



Sainsbury's

- To be the most trusted retailer where people love to work and shop.

Cancer Research UK

- To accelerate progress and see three-quarters of people surviving the disease within the next 20 years.

National Trust

- To combat issues such as climate change and safeguard these special places for future generations.

University of Oxford

To lead the world in research and education in ways which benefit society on a national and a global scale.



The screenshot displays the University of Oxford's website. At the top, there is a dark blue navigation bar with the university's crest and logo on the left, and a search bar on the right. Below the navigation bar is a large, high-resolution aerial photograph of the university's historic campus, showing numerous stone buildings, courtyards, and green spaces. Overlaid on the bottom left of the photograph is a white box containing the text 'Strategic plan 2013-18'. To the right of this box is a vertical list of links under the heading 'STRATEGIC PLAN', including 'Priority', 'Research', 'Education', 'Wellbeing & Engagement', 'Partnership', and 'Building Strategy'. At the bottom right of the page, there is a section titled 'RELATED DOCUMENTS' with a link to 'Download the Strategic Plan 2013-18.pdf'.

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

ABOUT ORGANISATION FACTS AND FIGURES OXFORD PEOPLE INCREASING ACCESS INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPING OXFORD JOBS

Home | About | Organisation | Strategic plan

Strategic plan 2013-18

STRATEGIC PLAN

- Priority
- Research
- Education
- Wellbeing & Engagement
- Partnership
- Building Strategy

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Download the Strategic Plan 2013-18.pdf

Exercise:

What is your
mission or
vision?

Take a few moments to
consider the mission or
objective of your
department/college, event or
project...

What is a communications strategy?

- A **written** reference document against which to judge progress
- Collaboration between the business/project leader(s) and the communications professional(s)
- Identifies:
 - clear and measurable **communications** objectives with evaluation
 - relevant audiences and available channels
 - a plan of activities and a timetable
 - **communication** risks and mitigation
 - resources – financial and people



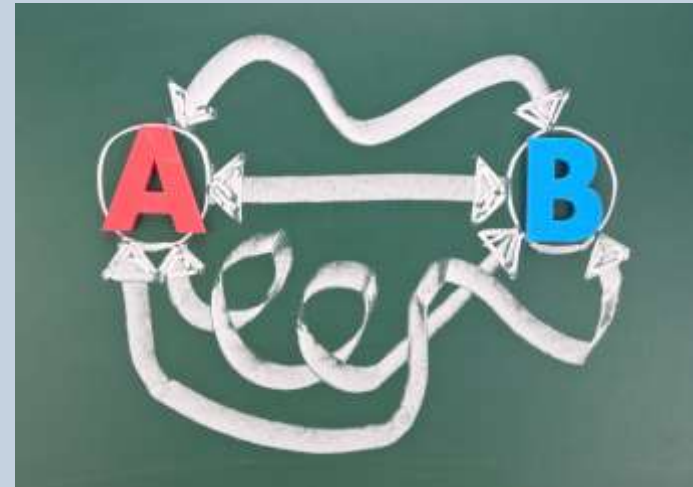
Type of communications strategy

- Organisation – ideally reviewed annually
- Major, complex, long term project – eg innovation
- A major announcement – eg new endowment which will fund a scholarship programme
- A big event – eg a conference
- Building and opening a new building



“Why don’t we just get on with it?”

- Taking time to agree what you want to achieve
- Plan ahead rather than panicking at the last minute
- 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 that helps you learn lessons for the future



Do your research....

- What are your organisational/project/event (non-communications) 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



Make sure your objectives are....



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 2017.”



You can have one or more objectives

Consider your audiences carefully

Are you talking to the right people?

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**

- Influential + interested + supportive = your **partners**
- Influential + interested + opposed = use **persuasion**
- Influential + not interested = capture their **attention**

Use third parties to help persuade and create interest

More than just 'the public' or 'the media'

- 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



Exercise:

Thinking about
your objective,
who are your
2-3 main
audiences?

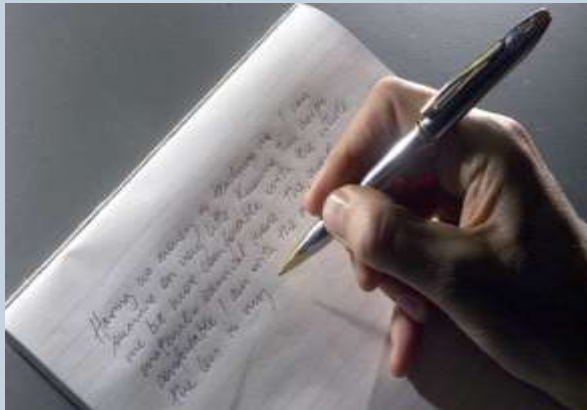
Now think about your messages

- What do you want audiences to **know, think** and **do**?
- AIDA model: awareness, interest, desire, action
- Be clear, honest and consistent
- Answer those inevitable questions:
 - “Why should I care?”
 - “How does it affect me?”
- Tailor your messages to your audiences: the content and the tone
- Use evidence: statistics and case studies
- Consider two-way engagement



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
- Create a timetable of all activities
- Coordinate who is told what and when
- Exploit 'hooks' to attract interest
- Availability of spokespeople and venues
- Accommodate long lead-in time and sign-off
- Monitor timetable and adjust as necessary



For example...

	September 2015	October 2015	November 2015
Lobbying	Ask local MP to book venue	Send out invitations	Event in parliament
Media	Identify key messages and spokespeople	Propose an interview	Issue press release
Publications	Design invitation and display boards	Print the materials	Distribute the materials at the event

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.

Don't neglect evaluation: did you succeed?

- 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



Summary

Write it all down, even if it is just a side of A4

- Introduction: summary of project; emphasise added value
- Mission and vision
- One or two clear objectives or aims
- Key audiences, messages, channels
- Timetable of key activities with dates
- Resources – who will do the work and who will pay
- Risks and mitigation
- Means of evaluation
- Approvals/sign-off process

And finally....

- Keep and manage versions of your strategy
- Electronic and printed copies of material produced
- Record of quantitative and qualitative evaluation
- Keep a contacts list
- Share best practice with peers
- Publicise your success
- It's good PR for our profession!

Internal resources

- The Public Affairs Directorate website has lots of information:
www.ox.ac.uk/public-affairs
- Consider the Communications Officers Network, Social Media Network, divisional networks and resources, and the College Communications Network
- Check the Style Guide, Digital Style Guide and Branding Guidelines to make sure your comms execution meets brand standards and best practice recommendations



External resources

- Chartered Institute of Public Relations resources and training:
www.cipr.co.uk
- CASE (Council for Advancement and Support of Education):
www.case.org
- LinkedIn groups and discussions
- Books, industry publications and journals

