

Institutional communication strategy

Communicating the work of public research institutions to a wide variety of audiences is a complex task. What can be done to develop a comprehensive communication strategy for these institutions? This is the most important question for any institutional communications officer.

The key to developing such a communication strategy is to match the specific needs of individual researchers with the organisation's overarching communication objectives, which are defined in such a way as to best serve the institution and help it achieve its strategic goals. This requires institutions to interact closely with their researchers in order to understand their communication needs and to provide information about the institution's communication objectives. This is not always trivial, as researchers might have specific ambitions that may not appear to align with the institution's overall communication goals.

Another challenge is that institutions have to interact with a diverse group of stakeholders, such as members of the public, the research community and government officials. Each of these groups has unique needs and expectations for how information is conveyed, and institutions must be able to adapt their communication methods and tactics to accommodate these differences to suit the needs of each audience.

Establishing clear and consistent messages is essential for effective communication. This includes developing key messages that convey the institution's mission, its research and findings, as well as its impact on society. These messages should be aligned with the overall goals of the institution and communicated consistently at all levels, both inside and outside the organisation.

To reach different stakeholders, it is essential to consider the various communication channels that will be used. These include traditional methods such as press releases and media relations, as well as digital platforms such as social media, the institution's website and e-newsletters. Each channel needs to be chosen based on its effectiveness in reaching the target audience and the type of message that needs to be communicated.

Communications officers need to build and protect a brand – and ensure that researchers are on board. It is therefore important to empower scientists and researchers to communicate effectively on behalf of the institution. This may include providing training and resources, such as advice and guidelines on communicating with the media, to ensure that they can contribute to the institution's key messages.

For any scientist working for an institution: If you want to engage in science communication towards people outside your institution, it is always a good idea to contact your institutional communications manager for advice and support, or just to inform them. And always bear in mind that the institutional context makes your personal communication more complex because of the various aspects that need to be considered.

