

Techniques and channels for communications and engagement

Introduction

Once you have identified your engagement objectives, the audiences / stakeholders you want to reach, and your key messages, your next task is to identify the best tools to reach them.

There are lots of tools available and your selection will be based on a few key factors:

- What will work best for the audience (email, meeting, document / case study, video or podcast etc.).
- Your budget (for example if you want to organise an event or produce a video).
- Your time and (if you're not working in a communications role) the support available from your organisation's corporate communications and engagement team.

To be effective your channel selection needs to be based on knowledge / insight about your audience.

If possible, speak to someone from the target audience, but if you aren't able to, try and put yourself in their place and think about how you would like to receive the information.

Consider the following questions:

- Format – how would they like to receive the information? What format works best for your message – are you just providing a quick update, or do you need to try and get the stakeholder on board with a new idea or project?
- Length – how long should the message / communication be? For example, it's not worth sending a busy clinician a 30-page document or 15-minute video unless they're expressly asked for it.
- Frequency of communication – there is a fine balance between sharing useful updates and bombarding busy people.

The following page lists some of the tools that we use – note this isn't an exhaustive list, we have selected these as they work for us, and they are split into two categories:

1. Targeted and personal techniques – these work best where the stakeholder is key to the success of a project, building awareness and buy-in at project development / launch stage.
2. More general techniques – these can be useful to remind people, or keep them on board.



1. Targeted and personal techniques

- Personal emails (to an individual or group of recipients).
- Personal phone calls.
- Meetings – 1-2-1 or small groups.
- Graphics and data visualisation packs ('size of the prize')
- Personally addressed letters and documents.
- Invitations to events – as participants but most effective for roundtables and / or opportunities to contribute as speakers.
- Invitation to submit guest blogs, submit joint awards submissions.
- Ad hoc opportunities (for example where the stakeholder attends a meeting you are also taking part in).
- Host in-person or virtual showcases (for strategic leaders / VIPs

2. More general techniques

- Updates in newsletters, websites etc.
- Social media messaging (LinkedIn, X / Twitter etc.).
- Invites to events and workshops.
- Sharing useful resources – case studies, 'how to' guides etc.
- Promoting digital content – videos, podcasts etc.
- Media relations (print, online publications, broadcast media etc.).
- Hosting your own events or exhibiting at others' events.
- Cascading information via partner networks and communications channels.



Appendix – summarising your audiences, messages and channels

Where your plan seeks to engage more than one audience, using a simple grid / table may help summarise the different messages and the most appropriate channels to reach them.

The example below is from an engagement plan that supported HIEM's implementation of a pain management programme delivered in community settings, called [ESCAPE-Pain](#).

Note that listing all your audiences will not necessarily mean you have the capacity / resource to engage them all, but it can help you to prioritise – in the example below the additional audiences identified (listed below the table) could not be engaged due to resource constraints.

Audience (objective)	Message	Possible channels
NHS organisations and GP practices (secure support to implement)	This intervention is more cost effective than existing care plans, and generates savings in primary and secondary care with a return on investment of £5.20 for every £1 spent.	- Targeted email campaign 1:1 discussions - Case study / summary video - Newsletter / web news story / social media - Infographic 'size of the prize' - Posters in GP practices.
Local councils (secure support to implement)	- Valuable local services for older people. - Savings for overall care system.	- Targeted email campaign 1:1 discussions
Charities / community groups supporting older people (secure support to implement)	- Valuable local service for older people. - Helps manage their condition and supports social interaction.	- Targeted email campaign. - Local media / social media.
Service users and family members / carers (build awareness and sign up service users / create demand)	- ESCAPE-Pain could help manage your joint pain - An effective way to manage long-term joint pain - Delivered in friendly/social spaces – meet others with common experiences	- Local media - Posters in GP practices / community spaces.

Other audiences considered for this plan were:

- Sports clubs and leisure centres.
- Large employers.
- Supported living environments / care homes.
- Criminal justice system / prisons.