

Lesson 4 - Science communication and dissemination: framing the message

Keywords

- Defining engagement goals
- Key communication principles
- Communication plan
- Dissemination plan
- Exploitation strategy
- IP management
- EU obligations and acknowledgment

Learning Objectives

⑥ ⑫ ⑭



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Go to video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTGtrIHdQPY&t=36s>

For any public engagement activity or strategy, defining the **key message**, how to deliver it, in what ways and to whom is a crucial task that can make or break the success of the research impact plan.

Framing the message

Looking at public engagement in a coherent and transversal way throughout the project's lifecycle, different stakeholders should be engaged with key messages at different stages: from research objective definitions to the outreach of project findings.

Framing these key messages correctly is paramount. In the [Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science](#), framing is defined as *making certain considerations salient as a way to **simplify or shape how an audience understands** a particular problem and its potential solution*. In other words, framing involves emphasising certain elements of an issue over others, shaping the way the issue is understood. Different frames must be defined to reach distinct audiences and to meet separate goals.

Module 4 - Research Impact and Public Engagement

In all cases, some **key communication principles** should be followed:

- **Messages should be clear, simple, and easy to understand** - appropriate for the target audience and jargon free.
- **Messages should be tailored to the different audiences** - know your audiences, what drives them and what pre-concepts/underlying assumptions on the subject influence them.
- **Messages should be correct** - using simple messages does not mean sacrificing content.

Defining engagement goals and directing knowledge

In a research project, the following plans must connect to **specific engagement goals**.

1. **Communication:** how to make a wider audience aware of the **project**.
2. **Dissemination:** how to reach target audiences with the **project's findings**.
3. **Exploitation:** how to empower potential users in **using the project's results**.

	COMMUNICATION	DISSEMINATION	EXPLOITATION
OBJECTIVE	Reach out to society and show the impacts and benefits of EU-funded R&I activities	Transfer knowledge & results with the aim to enable others to use and take up results	Effectively use project results through scientific, economic, political or societal exploitation routes → aim to make a concrete value and impact for society
FOCUS	Inform about and promote the project AND its results/success.	Describe and ensure results available for others to USE → focus on results only	Make concrete use of results (for scientific, societal or economic purposes)
TARGET AUDIENCE	Multiple audiences beyond the project's own community (incl. media and public)	Audiences that may take an interest in the potential USE of the results (e.g. scientific community, industrial partner, policy makers, etc.)	Project partners (individuals or organisations) and groups outside the project that make concrete use of the results

Figure 60 - Overview of communication, dissemination and exploitation activities
(Source: European Commission)

Let us look closer at each of these plans.

Communication



The **communication activities** of a project are a **transversal task** throughout all projects.

Figure 11 - Communication (Source: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/coordinators_day_communication_dissemination_exploitation.pdf)

The [EC Research & Innovation Participant Portal Glossary/Reference Terms](#) provides the following definition:

Communication on projects is a strategically planned process that starts at the outset of the action and continues throughout its entire lifetime, aimed at promoting the action and its results. It requires strategic and targeted measures for communicating about (i) the action and (ii) its results to a multitude of audiences, including the media and the public and possibly engaging in a two-way exchange.

Since the targets are **multiple audiences**, reaching beyond the project's community, including the media and the general public, communication actors must choose **clear and simple language** to make goals and meanings of the project understandable for all.

Typical **communication activities** include:

- **Visual identity development** (logo, templates, brand guidelines, tone of voice, etc.)
- **Press & Media mapping**
- **Social media posts**
- **Website animation**
- **Blogs**
- **Newsletters**
- **Promotional materials** such as leaflets, posters, factsheets, etc.
- **Audio-visual products, etc.**

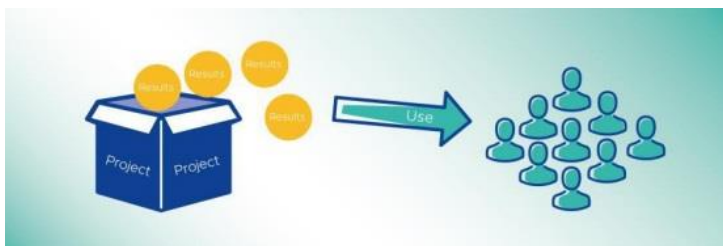
To design a communication plan, the researcher, supported by the RMA, must answer the following questions:

- What does the **public need** to know about?
- How can I describe the project (goals/key findings/expected impact) to a **non-specialist audience**?

- What **channels can be targeted**? Social media, blogs, press releases and news articles.

In a collaborative research project, the communication resources, channels and teams of each participating institution must be brought into this task. This and other **tips and guidelines** are described in the [EC Communicating EU research and innovation guidance for project participants](#).

Dissemination



Dissemination is about **transferring knowledge and results**.

Figure 62 - Dissemination (Source: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/coordinators_day_communication_dissemination_exploitation.pdf)

The [EC Research & Innovation Participant Portal Glossary/Reference Terms](#) provides the following definition:

The public disclosure of the results by any appropriate means (other than resulting from protecting or exploiting the results), including by scientific publications in any medium.

The goal of dissemination is to **promote the effective use of project results**, turning them into concrete value and impact on society. Thus, the target audiences are stakeholders who may have an interest in the **potential use of the results** (e.g., the scientific community, industrial partners, policymakers, etc.).

Dissemination activities include:

- **publications**
- **media releases**
- **policy briefs**
- **training and workshops**
- **demonstrations**
- **online repositories**
- **events (exhibitions, demo days, cluster events, guided visits), etc.**

To design a dissemination plan, the researcher, supported by the RMA, must answer the following questions:

- What are the **main project findings**?

- Who are the **target audiences**?
- How can I communicate the project's main findings to each **specific audience**? What are the adjustments necessary?
- What **channels** and communication strategies are appropriate for each audience?

Exploitation



Exploitation is about **empowering potential users with tangible project results**.

Figure 632 – Exploitation (Source:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/coordinators_day_communication_dissemination_exploitation.pdf)

The [EC Research & Innovation Participant Portal Glossary/Reference Terms](#) provides the following definition:

The utilisation of results in further research activities other than those covered by the action concerned, or in developing, creating and marketing a product or process, or in creating and providing a service, or in standardisation activities. Thus, the target audiences are people or organisations who make concrete use of the project results (not restricted to commercial use).

Exploitation activities include:

- market identification
- business models
- product concept
- stakeholder mapping
- strategic grant planning

To design an exploitation plan, the researcher, supported by the RMA, must answer the following questions ([from the European IPR Helpdesk](#)):

- What are the (expected) **key exploitable results** of the project?
- How is the **value for further use** assessed?
- Which **IP protection** and **IP management** measures have been laid down for expected results?

Module 4 - Research Impact and Public Engagement

- How will project partners address the issue of (joint) **ownership of results** and the **management of exploitation activities**, especially for jointly owned results?
- How are the results going to be used to a) address the call topic challenges and expected impacts, and b) for **further uses**?
- Who are the **main innovators**, within the consortium, to drive commercial exploitation?
- Which **(other) results** will be produced and could be exploited by people or organisations outside the project and under which terms and conditions?
- What are potential **additional application areas** (even outside the project's field of research) that could benefit from its developments?
- What impact do results have on **everyday life**? How would society benefit from this research? What would be the consequences for **future policymaking**?
- What are the **markets' needs and customers' expectations**?

Communication, dissemination and exploitation plans: some examples

Communication, dissemination and exploitation activities are developed to maximize the impact of the R&I activity or project and must be understood as **intertwined** since one activity drives and feeds the other, and vice versa. Often, the same type of activity, approach or product may be employed in more than one of these three actions; for example, a press release, or even a magazine article, can address multiple actors and goals. What is more useful to distinguish these three separate but interconnected levels of action is to **differentiate the goal, the focus and the target groups addressed**.

Concrete examples are provided below:

- [Open Data Incubator Europe Deliverable on Communication and Dissemination](#).
- [60-minute Comms Workout](#): video of **lessons learnt** from different EU research projects, with tips and Q&As.

General tips an RMA can provide

- **Start from the beginning: study and plan** - know your project, set your goals and design your communication, dissemination and exploitation plans in a clear and simple way.
- **Design SMART activities**: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-Bound activities.
- **Set Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for each activity** - build in some simple **evaluation measures** with clear KPIs to assess if you are succeeding with your

objectives. A KPI is a measurable value that demonstrates how effectively an activity is achieving its key objectives (for example, number of followers on social media).

- **Set out your key messages in clear, accessible language** - frame your message, avoid jargon.
- **Test your messages in different media** - try out and select the most effective media for presenting certain types of messages.
- **Draw up an overall project plan** - including all the activities will make it easier to envision their **interconnections**, as well as to achieve a feasible plan with deadlines, responsibilities and costs.
- **Don't underestimate the time and money needed** - **budget it!** Including human resources, equipment, specialized services, materials, etc.
- **Make sure you fulfil the EC obligations** - Developing (at the pre-award stage) and implementing (at the post-award stage) a communication, dissemination and exploitation plan is a **contractual obligation** that comes with the EU R&I funding.

EU obligations and acknowledgment

Here are the most important **obligations to acknowledge**, most of them already included in the [Annotated Model Grant Agreement](#) (AGA):

1. Each beneficiary must – as soon as possible – **disseminate results** by appropriate means, including **scientific publications** (Art. 29.1, [AGA](#)).
2. All **peer-reviewed publications** must be accessible either by **green or gold open access** (Art. 29.2, Model Grant Agreement, see [Guidelines to the Rules on Open Access to Scientific Publications and Open Access to Research Data in Horizon 2020](#)).
3. Each beneficiary must – up to four years after the end of the project – take measures to **ensure exploitation** of results (art. 28.1, AGA).
4. Each beneficiary must **promote the project**, and its results, by providing targeted information to multiple audiences in a strategic and effective manner (Art. 38.1, AGA).
5. All Communication, Dissemination and Exploitation activities, as well as all equipment, infrastructure and major results financed by the project, need to **acknowledge EU funding** by using the wording and criteria specified in the AGA (Articles 27, 28, 29, 38).

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