

Scoping

Evaluation

Approval

Use of the assessment findings

DEVELOPING A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

WHEN in the process should this strategy be developed?

It is recommended that the communication strategy for any national ecosystem assessment (NEA) is developed as early as possible during the scoping stage, and then kept under review and updated as necessary throughout the NEA process.

For example, Colombia developed a communication strategy early on in their assessment process which supported the production of key outputs for Colombia's assessment, including a visual identity for their NEA, a web page, videos, podcasts, articles and digital pieces highlighting key information about the NEA. This benefited the assessment process as it helped the team develop public awareness on Colombia's NEA. Colombia's communication strategy included the participation of a communication expert in the Advisory Group, delivering strategic advice throughout the process. The communication strategy also identified methods to make sure the call for assessment authors and reviewers was disseminated as widely as possible. This included coordinating with the communication offices from other institutions to disseminate open calls. This strengthened the NEA process with a diverse team of authors and reviewers, increasing the credibility, legitimacy and relevance of Colombia's assessment.

WHY is it important to include this aspect in a National Ecosystem Assessment?

Communication strategies set out the rationale and approach to communication and engagement decisions that will be made throughout the assessment process. A communication strategy does not necessarily include detailed activities and outputs as it should be complemented with another document, a communication plan: this plan includes more specific details on approaches, timelines, activities and budgets. A communication strategy will address internal and external communications and engagement. Internal communications focus on improving communication and collaboration within the assessment team and with key stakeholders. External communications focus on wider stakeholders and other audiences that are not yet engaged in the NEA but may have an interest in the process and its outputs, either now or in the future.

NEAs synthesise and assess information from a variety of knowledge types (e.g. scientific, policy, indigenous and local knowledge, etc) into a policy-relevant output, so that it can be used during decision-making processes. Thus, developing a communication strategy at the start of an NEA increases opportunities for engaging with relevant knowledge holders, opinion leaders, public personalities and those positioned to increase its impact at the right time,

via the right media. It does so in the following ways:

- **Understanding how to engage and communicate with the target audience.** Identifying key partners, target audiences and the best means to communicate with them from the start allows for a more effective communication throughout the assessment process. This includes identifying and collaborating with partners who can help us communicate and relay important information (i.e. the communications offices of stakeholder institutions).
- **Mitigating communication risks.** Recognising potential communication risks early on in the process can allow designing a communication strategy and plan that will avoid or mitigate these risks. For example, insufficient communication with key stakeholders during the selection of key policy questions may result in their limited interest and engagement in the overall NEA process. This could jeopardize national ownership of the assessment and its subsequent impact.
- **Enabling adaptative management of communications.** Monitoring and evaluating the impact of the communication strategy throughout the lifetime of the assessment can provide valuable insights for adapting the initial plan and increasing its impact. The communication strategy should be a live document that is regularly updated and adapted to respond to each stage of the assessment and its corresponding needs.

WHO does this stage relate to?

The communication strategy should be created and managed by the Technical Support Unit (TSU), bringing in relevant communication experts, as they are coordinating and overseeing the whole assessment process. It should be directed at both internal and external audiences fitting their different needs.



TOP TIP

Input from internal and external stakeholders is critical, and communications should be designed to meet their needs.

TOP TIP

Seeking support from specialised communication professionals (e.g. translators, writers) could enhance the reach of communications, supporting the future impact of NEAs.

Hiring media consultants, translators, trained science writers will require resources, but can strengthen communications.

Target Audiences

Internal Communications

Internal communications focus on people/groups that are more closely related to the assessment and currently involved and engaged in the NEA process. They are the people who can ensure the successful implementation of the assessment process.

For example: the country assessment team will be part of your internal audience, including the Technical Support Unit, the Steering Committee, and the assessment authors including Assessment Co-Chairs, Lead Authors, Contributing Authors, Fellows and Reviewers.

Internal audiences can also include key stakeholders in government and civil society who are critical to the NEA throughout the entirety of its process.

Internal communications aim to ensure that those who are most closely involved in the assessment are well informed and can effectively communicate and contribute to the assessment process, whether from a technical or administrative perspective.

External Communications

External communications focus on those who are not directly involved in the assessment process but can have an influence on its impact at some stage. This includes decision-makers that are potential users of the NEAs findings in the future but are not currently engaged in the NEA process.

External audiences may not have detailed information or knowledge of the NEA process as internal audiences. They may require more background information to better understand your key messages.

Remember that some people/groups may start off as external audiences, and as the assessment progresses, they may become more engaged in the process and shift to being internal audiences.

One key goal of external communication is to inform external audiences and the wider public of important messages about the assessment, to ensure that the basic knowledge about the NEA process is widely disseminated, and to encourage wider engagement.

TOP TIP

Consulting with key stakeholders and the wider assessment team on the communication strategy can extend the assessment's reach and amplify key messages.

TOP TIP

Social media can be a useful tool to enhance the visibility of the national ecosystem assessment.

HOW to develop a communication strategy?

A communication strategy aims to support the credibility, legitimacy and relevance of the NEA process and its outputs by outlining the following: how to identify and engage stakeholders throughout the assessment process; how to ensure effective communications between members of the country assessment team; and how to present findings and knowledge gaps to a wide range of audiences.

Who are your target audiences?

How will your communications support your project objectives?

What strategies & channels will you be using?

Why have these choices been made?

Here is a general outline of the key elements which could be included in a NEA communication strategy. This should be adapted to suit national contexts:

1. Introduction

- Contextualise the strategy by outlining the assessment and describing the overall impact it is working towards.

2. Outcomes of Strategy

- Create vision statements for what a successful outcome of the assessment will look like.
E.g. "The assessment outputs are successfully communicated to, and utilised by policymakers"

3. Communication Objectives

- Establish which objectives the communications are aiming to achieve, as statements of intent.
E.g. "To communicate the assessment outputs in a way that is accessible and relevant to policymakers"

4. Target Audiences

- Identify the main audiences that will be targeted by communication efforts. (i.e. internal audience and external audiences)

5. Key Messages per Target Audience

- State the key messages you are trying to convey to each of your identified target audiences.
E.g. To policymakers: "This is what we know about the status of our key ecosystems"

6. Communication Channels per Target Audience

- Determine which communication channels may be appropriate for conveying key messages to each audience.
E.g. The general public: social media, videos, infographics

TOP TIP

It may be appropriate to use reports to convey key messages to policymakers, whereas the public may respond and engage better with a video or infographic.

7. Activities and Outputs

- Outline the timeline of the communication activities throughout the project.

TOP TIP

Aligning communications with awareness days can create a good hook and generate interest.

8. Branding Guidelines

- Define branding guidelines.
E.g. Logos and disclaimers.

9. Monitoring and Evaluating

- Define a way to monitor, evaluate, and potentially improve the impact of communications efforts.
E.g. Peer review and social media analytics

TOP TIP

Think about the feasibility of delivering communications during the planning stage.

RESOURCES

1. Examples of communication strategies will be uploaded to the Case Studies section of the NEA Initiative's website.

Visit: www.ecosystemassessments.net/resources

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