# Communications Toolkit for National Ecosystem Assessments

BESNet
Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network

NATIONAL ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT INITIATIVE

# CONTENTS

# 1. Aim of this toolkit and how to use it

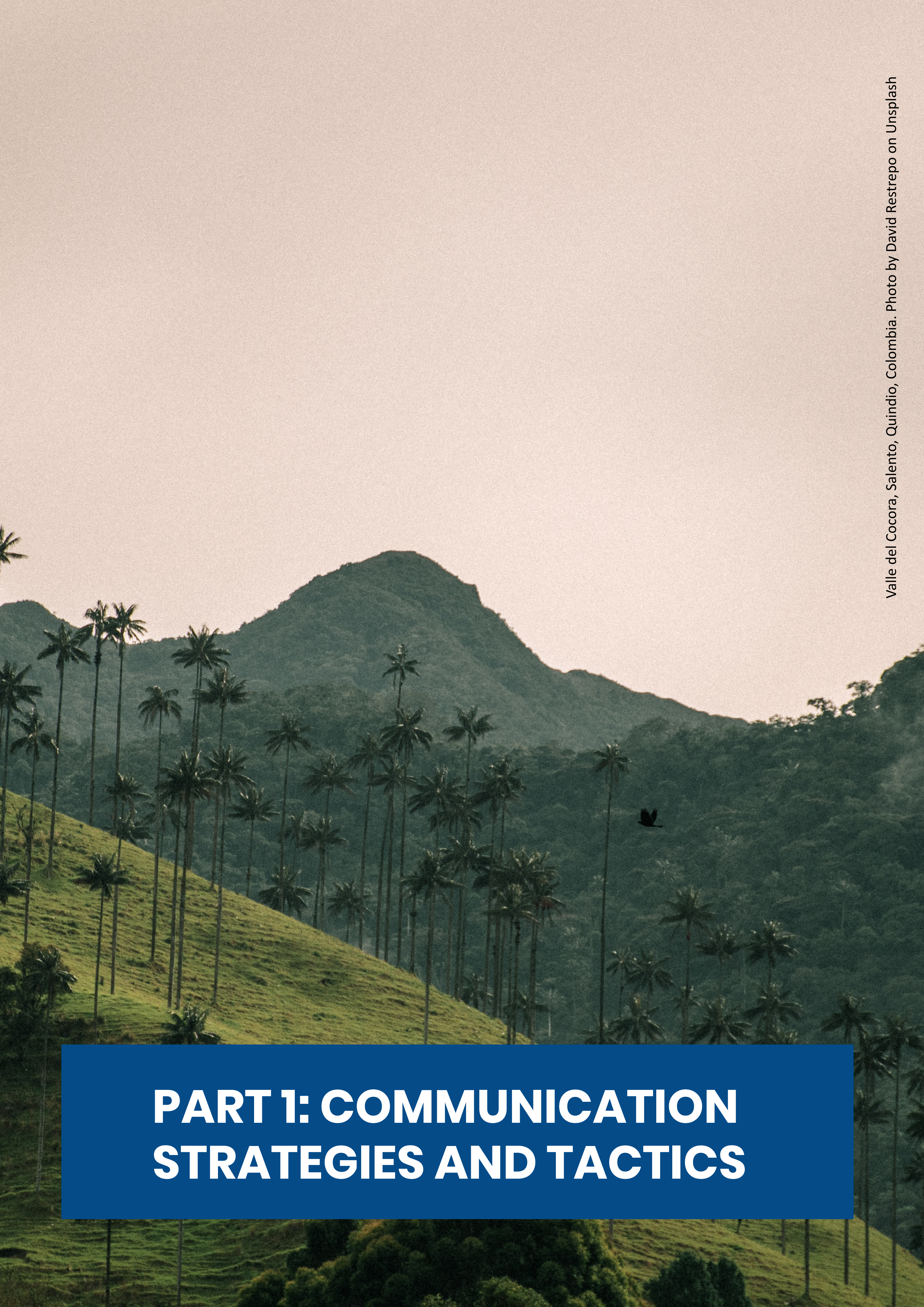
This toolkit contains guidance to support capacity for communications, specifically on planning and implementing communications activities that support the goals of a national ecosystem assessment. This toolkit can be used by anyone involved in planning and implementing communications-related activities as part of a national ecosystem assessment.

First refer to the brief guidance on Developing a Communication Strategy here. Then refer to this toolkit and use the templates included to fill out the different components of your *communication strategy and communications plan*.

Part 1 of the toolkit provides detailed guidance to help you develop or strengthen the assessment's communication strategy. It also highlights several tactics that could be considered and included in the strategy.

Part 2 of the toolkit helps you put this strategy to action by developing a communications plan. This includes detailed guidance on turning the strategy into a plan of communications activities, including setting realistic timelines and allocating sufficient resources to implement the plan.

Great egret photographed near Lake Awassa in Ethiopia. Photo by Solen Feyissa on Unsplash



# PART 1: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Valle del Cocora, Salento, Quindio, Colombia. Photo by David Restrepo on Unsplash

# PART 1: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

## 2. Setting communications objectives

When developing a communication strategy, it is helpful to start by setting clear objectives. These objectives will be aligned with the overall aim of the national ecosystem assessment and will guide the planning and implementation of communications activities. The following two steps will help you through this process.

### STEP 1: UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Tip: the assessment team can try coming up with these objectives as a group, keeping in mind the overall goal of the national ecosystem assessment.

Use the guiding questions below when trying to frame your communications objectives:

- Who are you hoping to communicate with through the assessment process? And what do you hope to achieve from communicating with them?
- What are some of the short-term and long-term changes you hope to achieve through the assessment process?
- Think of the different behaviour changes you want to promote. What changes are you hoping to encourage in your audiences and in your community/organization through the assessment process?
- Do you aim to raise awareness or increase visibility of certain issues related to the assessment process to specific audiences?
- Do you want to promote any actions, recommendations or solutions related to the different stages of the assessment process?
- Do any of your audiences need to understand or "learn" anything through the assessment process or its outputs?
- Do you need to build an identity for the assessment team or for the assessment process as whole?
- Are there specific groups of audiences that need your support to participate in the assessment process?
- Do you wish to build a community, a network or a group of people surrounding the assessment who can be supported to contribute or take the assessment forward? What do you hope to achieve?

## STEP 2: SET YOUR OBJECTIVES

Use the template below to capture the assessment's overall goal, the corresponding communications goals and a set of objectives that help to reach each goal.

**1. What is the overall goal with the assessment?**

*Example: Gather the best available knowledge that can be used to support decision-making on biodiversity and ecosystem services.*

**2. What is a corresponding communications goal with the assessment?**

*Example: Engage key stakeholders and knowledge holders throughout the assessment process to ensure their participation and contribution to the assessment and its outputs.*

**3. What are the step-by-step communications objectives to reach this goal?**

*Example: Ensure regular communication between the assessment team and stakeholders within the assessment process on a quarterly basis.*

**REMINDER**

Check that your objectives are SMART:
S: Specific
M: Measurable
A: Achievable
R: Result-oriented
T: Time-bound

# 3. Identifying your audiences

Once your objectives are clear, you can identify and map the audiences you hope to engage with throughout the national ecosystem assessment process. These target audiences should be clearly presented in the strategy document. You can follow the steps below to guide you in this process.

## STEP 1: BRAINSTORM

Building on the objectives that were set in the previous step, use the boxes below to brainstorm all potential audiences for the assessment. Consider the following questions:

- Who needs to be informed about the assessment process and its outputs?
- Who needs to be involved in producing the assessment report?
- Who will implement the findings of the assessment?
- Who will be supporting actors in implementing the findings of the assessment?
- Whose work runs in parallel to the assessment?
- Whose field of work will the assessment findings touch upon/influence?
- Who else will be interested in the findings of the assessment for their own work?

**Use the boxes below to list any groups, organizations and individuals that are potential audiences.**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
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## STEP 2: IDENTIFY INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL AUDIENCES

Determine which of the audiences you identified are "internal audiences" and which are "external audiences", then list them below:

**Internal audiences**

- Directly involved in the assessment process
- May be responsible for delivering the assessment's outputs
- Help promote the importance and benefits of the assessment
- May require regular and consistent communication

**External audiences**

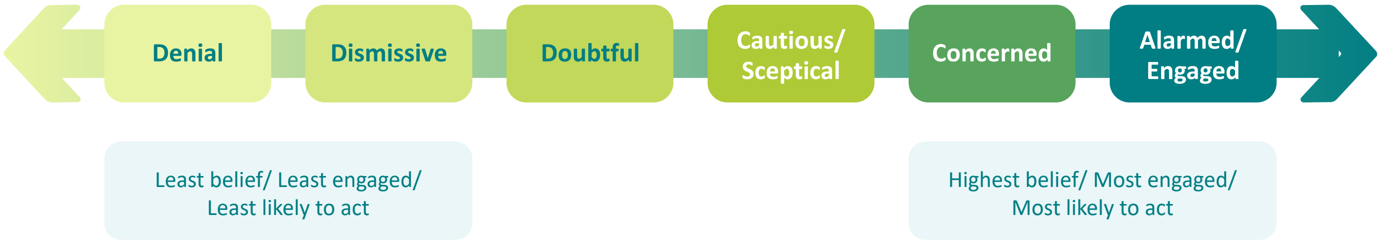
- Not directly involved in the assessment process
- May be potential users of the assessment in the future
- May have some influence or impact in the future
- May require more background information

| **INTERNAL AUDIENCES**<br>E.g. Technical support unit; assessment authors and reviewers; key stakeholders and knowledge holders; national biodiversity platform members; government partners etc. | **EXTERNAL AUDIENCES**<br>E.g. Media; general public who are not stakeholders or knowledge-holders; decision makers who may be future users of the assessment etc. |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |

- Once you have identified a number of different audience groups, consider putting them in order of priority.
- Who will be the most critical audiences to the success of the assessment and its impact? Mark them as the primary audience.
- Who are likely to be opinion leaders and influencers for the assessment to gain traction and pick-up among primary audiences? Mark them as the secondary audience.
- Who are likely to be other audiences whose work intersects with the assessment and can be useful collaborators? Mark them as your tertiary audience.

## STEP 3: MAP ATTITUDES

If extra time and resources are available to your team, benchmark the audiences' current levels of attitudes and perceptions about the assessment process and its themes on the line below. The more specific, the better!




Strengthen your understanding of priority audiences by assessing their levels of knowledge, awareness and influence.

| Questions for analysis | [PRIORITY AUDIENCE 1] | [PRIORITY AUDIENCE 2] | [PRIORITY AUDIENCE 3] |
|---|---|---|---|
| What are their socioeconomic profiles? Do you have any demographics (age, gender, level of education etc.)? | | | |
| What are their current levels of knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding the themes of the assessment? | | | |
| What are incentives for audience members to adopt and promote the messages? | | | |
| Who/what are the most trusted and accessible sources of information for this audience group? | | | |
| What are the most trusted and accessible mass media (social media, television, radio, community radio, community theatre etc.) for this audience group? | | | |

# 4. Developing key messages

Your master key messages can focus on the basics of the assessment.

## STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE MASTER KEY MESSAGES

Start by answering these questions:

- WHO: Who is implementing the assessment process? And who else is engaged in the assessment process?
- WHAT: What activities are being undertaken as part of the assessment process?
- WHY: Why is the assessment process taking place?
- WHERE: Where is this impact focused?
- INTENDED RESULT: What's the intended end result of the assessment and its focus?

## STEP 2: APPLY KEY MESSAGES TO TARGET AUDIENCES

Once you have answered these questions, tweak the key messages to fit each audience you have identified. Using the matrix below, identify a key point or two that you want to emphasize for each stakeholder group across all the messages.

| Master key messages | Primary audience | Secondary audience | Tertiary audience |
|---|---|---|---|
| **WHO** | | | |
| **WHAT** | | | |
| **WHY** | | | |
| **WHERE** | | | |
| **INTENDED RESULT** | | | |

## STEP 3: PREPARE A TOOLKIT

Now, it's time to put your key messages to use. While you will have to regularly prepare ad hoc communications and new stories, it is always good to have a set of tools that ensures consistency across the team.

### Tagline

The tagline aims to succinctly convey what the assessment is all about in a single, catchy sentence. Keep it high-level and focused, using eight words or less.

### Facts and stats

A list of interesting facts or statistics can be put to effective use in reports, infographics and videos. Include information such as membership, usage stats and success outcomes, in addition to key information about the assessment team, contributing authors and organizations involved.

### Elevator pitch

To promote consistency and help the assessment team spread the right message about what you do, create an easy-to-remember, accurate and concise description (it should be delivered in 30 seconds or less) of what your organization does and the benefits you create for stakeholders.

### Boilerplate

This is a brief description of the national ecosystem assessment and the implementing agency. It is an invaluable tool that can be included in items such as media releases. Describe who you are, what you do and why in 100–150 words.

### Media release

Prepare a template with a logo and desired header information, headline placement, text placement (what should be included in each paragraph), an indication the content has ended, the boilerplate and where to include the primary contact information related to the release.

### Email signature

While an email signature might not be classified as a message per se, it is still an opportunity to reinforce the assessment's identity and convey a key message. Include contact information but also consider adding links to social media, a current campaign hyperlink or the organization's mission/tagline.

# 5. Choosing the right channel

After setting communications goals, identifying target audiences and outlining key messages, it's time to **choose and set up the channels you will use to reach target audiences**. 'Channels' refers to the different ways that information can reach its intended audiences.

### Choosing channels

Communications channels are diverse; each one can serve a specific purpose to deliver specific impact. When comparing different channels, consider the following:

- What are your audiences' characteristics (size, location, age, literacy, social networks and behaviours)? Are they internal or external audiences?
- What type of messages/information do you want to disseminate?
- What is the budget and what other resources are available for activities?
- What is the timeline for planned activities? Which of these channels will require more time when developing content, and which will require less time?
- Are these channels easy to access by most people? Are there barriers (cost, language, culture etc.) to accessibility?
- Are you expecting feedback from audiences via the channel? What kind?

Communicating effectively means working with a combination of different channels, each playing to its strengths and bringing a new element of visibility to the assessment.

## DIFFERENT KINDS OF CHANNELS

### Mass media/broadcast

Mass media like television, news (print and digital), radio, film and magazines offer opportunities to highlight the value of the assessment for policymaking and shape policymakers' perceptions about the assessment. Mass media channels typically have broad reach; however, it may be expensive to develop materials in broadcast quality, and it may require effort to build trustworthy relationships with media. For more information on engaging with the media, go to Section 7: Media Outreach. These channels are good for broader messages/public service announcements. Television production and airtime costs can be high, unless we rely on talk shows or television debates or live call-in shows on the themes of the assessment.
Online and digital media

Digital media is one of the most widespread channels today. Establishing a digital presence could serve many purposes for the assessment (make information about the assessment easily available, invite feedback and reviews, engage stakeholders and knowledge holders in the process etc.). Consider setting up a website for the assessment, even if just a single web page, to host the latest public reports, announcements, events, video recordings and more.

Investing in social media could be a cost-effective way to build momentum throughout the assessment process, raise awareness on key issues and strengthen engagement with specific audiences such as youth and Indigenous and local knowledge holders. More information about this can be found in Section 8: Digital Communications. Other digital channels to leverage include mobile and messaging applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram.

### Print materials

Printed publications, infographics, policy briefs, brochures/leaflets are common channels to communicate with target audiences. Printing provides direct options for distributing materials to audiences, especially when digital tools are not available or preferred. Some of the assessment's key materials include the scoping report, technical report and summary for policymakers. Use clear and targeted language to tailor these materials to intended audiences. Include visual aids such as icons and infographics to help clarify information. Consider translating relevant publications or print materials into local and Indigenous languages to reach specific stakeholders and/or knowledge holders. Print materials do not offer many opportunities for audience interaction, so consider combining with digital platforms like social media and websites to increase engagement.

### Community outreach

Tapping into local channels by way of community radio or local folk theatre, music, concerts, social audits and social mobilizers is an excellent way to make the assessment relevant to local and Indigenous contexts, using highly customized messages and evoking almost instant feedback. These channels can reach remote, rural and Indigenous communities. It is crucial to ensure they are culturally sensitive and conscious of any power dynamics depending on each context. Your team can work with social mobilizers that use face-to-face communications to build trust within communities and can be their main point of reference for information about the assessment process.

### Interpersonal communications

We often use interpersonal communications as a channel, sometimes without realizing it. Meetings, conferences, personal emails, training, workshops, dialogues and presentations all constitute forms of interpersonal communications. Prepare and adapt the list of key messages when meeting with different audiences. Develop targeted presentations that clearly highlight the problem, solution and impact of the assessment. Remember that you can better engage with audiences' emotions by using storytelling techniques (see Section 9: Storytelling).

Tip: for channel effectiveness, regularly think about how the chosen channel can help people to understand and retain key information, participate actively and take action based on the information shared. Tailor and adapt key messages to target audiences and to the channels chosen to communicate with them. Always go back to the initial goal and consider the available channels accordingly.

## STEP 1: BRAINSTORM

As a group, look at the different audience segments and consider the following points when thinking about communications channels, then use the table below to capture relevant communications channels.

1. Scale of reach: what is the scale of the audience segment I'm trying to reach? Are they:
    - Mass audiences (e.g. general public)
    - Mid-sized targeted audiences (e.g. community members, universities)
    - Small, targeted audiences (e.g. policymakers in a specific department, specific journalists)
2. Audience characteristics: age, level of literacy, language, urban/rural
3. Type of message to disseminate: is it a detailed story? Is it a slogan? Is it a call to action? Is it a specific data point?
4. Interactivity: what action is expected from the audience member? Do we want them to respond right away, learn something, like, share, subscribe?
5. Cost and cost-effectiveness: what is the budget available?

| 1. Communications channel | 2. Scale of reach | 3. Audience characteristics | 4. Type of message | 5. Interactivity | 6. Cost |
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## STEP 2: MATCH CHANNELS TO AUDIENCES

Using the boxes below, capture your main communications channels on the left side and make a list of relevant key audiences, messages and goals on the right side. Using arrows, match each channel to the relevant audience/message/goal.

*Note: the boxes below are filled out to provide examples. Please replace the text below as necessary.*

| | |
|---|---|
| Television | **Audience/message:** public intellectuals, activists calling for their participation in ecosystem decision-making and outlining the need for more sound data and evidence on the country's ecosystems. |
| Community radio and consultations | **Goal:** get media coverage for the launch of the assessment |
| Website | **Message:** image of a particular species of bee that is vulnerable in the region along with a call to action to adopt bee-friendly practices |
| Social media | **Audience:** Director for the Bureau of Agriculture and Forestry within the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, seeking endorsement of the assessment |
| Video/film | **Audience:** aged populations and elders in local and Indigenous communities in remote locations, with varying levels of literacy |
| Mobile application | **Message (type):** relevance of the assessment/presenting expertise building on the assessment in the context of an upcoming national bill on biodiversity and conservation, making the need for urgent action widely known |
| SMS / WhatsApp /Telegram | **Message (type):** showcase the rapid destruction of wetlands and the impact on native species and local and Indigenous communities |
| Posters/billboards | **Goal:** solicit citizen's feedback and crowd-source data on the state of urban forests that can complement the ongoing assessment |
| News op-ed/article | **Goal:** have an online address for all things assessment-related, including upcoming consultations and review dates |
| Social mobilizers and community members | **Audience:** young conservationists, youth between the ages 18–25, young activists, Indigenous youth |
| 1:1 meetings or consultations | **Audience/goal:** engaging farmers in three districts to survey and understand their needs |
| Press conference/media release | **Audience/goal:** engage local and Indigenous women to participate in the assessment |

## STEP 3: REFLECT AND PRIORITIZE

As you finalize your list of priority communications channels, consider the following questions:

- Were there any channels that could meet multiple audiences/goals?
- Which of these channels are most essential in the earlier stages of the assessment and which are of importance at a later stage?
- Which of these channels are most cost-effective and easy to manage?
- Which of these channels present hidden risks if not managed well?

# 6. Branding and visual identity

Being recognizable can be an effective way to strengthen audience interaction. As the national ecosystem assessment's message becomes clearer and starts to follow certain patterns in communication, it is more likely to capture the interest of the audience, encouraging them to engage.

The visual identity of the communications and outputs related to the assessment develop recognizable patterns and build consistency across all interactions with stakeholders and wider audiences.

## Components

Brand identity is the overall experience that stakeholders and wider audiences have when interacting with assessment-related communications and includes the style of all outputs, from written articles and reports to merchandise and banners. This can continue to evolve with the assessment process.
Visual identity is a subset of the brand identity, including all the visual elements that communicate without words in any given context.

## Forming a brand and visual identity

Developing branding and visual identity guidelines is one way to help ensure that all assessment team members create and deliver consistent communications, even when not directly working together.

**Define the audience**
Determine the target audience by characteristics such as relation to the NEA, age, gender, education level, region, social media platform or type of document.

**Define the mission**
Determine the overall goal of NEA communications and make all written materials, even short slogans and small logos, communicate a snippet of it.

**Build the visual identity**
Design and designate the elemtns that all communications will use, working one element at the time to ensure cohesiveness.

**Focus on emotional appeal**
Keep engagement by providing enough variety to arouse curiosity and enough emotion to engage the audience on a personal level.

**Identify a brand personality**
Tone and attitude matter; consistently write with a tone that matches the NEA's message and use visuals that reinforce positive attitudes toward it.

**Stay consistent**
Create a guide outlining the proper use of the established branding and visual identity when writting or designing any communications materials.

### Brand identity

- All components of communications style
- Tone and grammatical style
- Mission and vision statement
- The assessment "story"
- Catch phrases and slogans
- The visual identity

### Visual identity

- "What you see"
- Logos
- Colour schemes
- Font style and size
- Website design
- Data visualization styles
- Photography style

## CHARACTERISTICS TO INCLUDE

**Distinct and memorable:** make the branding and visual identity unique.

**Flexible and scalable:** prepare variations in the developed style to be appropriate for different situations, including those that may arise in the future.

**Cohesive:** ensure that different elements of the brand and visual identity work well together and look consistent across different channels and platforms.

**Easy to use:** remember that different team members will be applying the brand and visual identity in many contexts, meaning that the developed guidelines should be easy to understand and follow.

## STEP 1: BRAINSTORM

Use this chart to brainstorm ideas for the overall goals and characteristics of your branding and visual identity.

| Brand personality | Visual identity | Emotional appeal | Consistency |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Questions** | | | |
| • What tone and attitude best match the national ecosystem assessment process?<br>• Try to find and maintain a balance between being serious and inviting. Remember to consider what is most appropriate to your cultural context. | • What overall visual design would highlight the assessment's message and make it stand out from the crowd?<br>• Think of colours, images and symbols that are easy to associate with the project and the country. | • Is it appropriate to use emotional appeal when communicating with specific audiences? If so, when and how?<br>• What elements of the national ecosystem assessment and its goals can stakeholders, knowledge holders and decision makers connect with on a personal level? Will the project have positive effects on their lives or communities?<br>• Think of visuals that complement the overall story you want to tell. | • How will you maintain consistency across all communications?<br>• Consider using a style guide or having templates for different materials.<br>• If reaching many audiences or using many channels, consider that the branding and visual identities should be versatile enough to fit them all with only minor modifications for each. |
| **Brainstorming** | | | |
| | | | |

## STEP 2: DEFINE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS

If your team would like to take this further, use the ideas from step 1 above and begin to consider the following specific elements of the branding and visual identity:

| | Considerations and possibilities | Assessment team preferences, ideas and decisions |
|---|---|---|
| **The visual identity** | | |
| Logos | • Should give some hint of what the assessment is about<br>• For example, it might focus environmental aspects, such as flora and fauna and natural colours<br>• Or it might use natural and/or cultural elements of the local and Indigenous culture | |
| Colour schemes | • Colours used for the logo, font, tables, graphs, charts and any physical objects<br>• As with the logo, consider local factors and assessment goals; look for colours that connect to the project and the area it's working in | |
| Font style and size | • It's best to pick a fairly simple font that does not distract from the assessment messages<br>• There may be more than one to fit different contexts (for example, tables may use a smaller font than body text, or the website may use a different font than formal documents)<br>• But avoid having too many; aim for consistency, especially within channels | |
| Website/landing page | • Create a professional website that offers a user-friendly and aesthetically pleasing experience<br>• Use the colour scheme and logo in prominent areas of every page<br>• Include photos, images and data visualizations when possible | |
| Data visualization style | • When any communications material needs to use charts, graphs, tables etc., ensure that they always use the same style<br>• Incorporate the established colour schemes, fonts and logos if appropriate | |
| Photography style | • Consider the type of photography that the national ecosystem assessment wants to showcase<br>• For example, should the tone always be positive, or should it raise awareness and concern? Should the focus be on people? Or should the focus be on the project and its work and results? Or a mix? | |

| Extras | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Tone** | • Decide if the tone should be strictly formal, casual or in between<br>• Might vary depending on the audience, media, channel or platform<br>• Create a style guide that clearly outlines the requirements | |
| **Catch phrases and slogans** | • Short phrases that are useful for social media, the website, events and physical materials such as banners and fliers<br>• Establish the usable phrases and specify them in the style guide | |

# 7. Media outreach

### Why does media outreach matter?

Getting the national ecosystem assessment out to the larger public is critical during certain stakeholder engagement stages as well as after its launch. Engaging with media focal points and journalists can help (1) bring much needed visibility to the assessment's findings, (2) capture the attention of policymakers and other partners who may be essential to the use of assessment findings and (3) reach new audiences and establish the credibility of the assessment and its process.

### Cultivating relationships and partnerships

Engaging with the media is not a one-way street, centred around pitching. Treat the media as a useful stakeholder in the process, inviting them to key events and milestones. Research and understand what kinds of stories each editor/journalist is looking for. Time is a limitation, and timing is everything when interacting with journalists, so think carefully about when to engage them and for what end. Keep an eye out for the news and current developments and see how the assessment can fit within the ongoing news cycle, as this will increase chances for media coverage. Be conscious of the lead times that different media outlets take. Some freelance journalists who are doing a long piece may take a couple of weeks or more to research and write, while other outlets may get an article out in a couple of days. Know how to judge, ask and adjust your own response to meet these shifting timelines.

In addition to targeting specific media outlets, start cultivating relationships with press associations, journalism schools, photographers' and photojournalists' collectives and more in your specific country. These can often be a good space to meet, network and even find resource people for events.

Choose your media outlet based on geography (global or regional focus), theme (is their reportage mainly focused on finance or politics or science, for example) and reputation (seek out journalists and media houses who are noted for their credibility, integrity and rigour).

### Different types of articles and thought leadership

What is an op-ed? It is a short, succinct narrative essay that outlines a specific point of view on a relevant issue. Its aim is to raise awareness about the importance of the issue, advocate for a particular stance or persuade readers to adopt a particular solution/approach. Over time, op-eds have come to mean sharp, incisive articles that are used to express an opinion. They are particularly useful to establish expertise of the author. These are different from feature pieces, which are more descriptive and longer in word count, less about presenting an argument, backed up by facts and freer to use anecdotes and different perspectives.

Articles like these could be an important way to establish thought leadership from the organizations leading the assessment as well as the authors' expertise. When writing an article, consider these key questions: what are we saying? Why is it important? Why should people care? What unique perspective are we bringing to the issue? All of these considerations contribute to how the assessment's voice is developed and identify relevant gaps that can be addressed by the assessment team.

Here are two examples of op-eds and articles for the media: Example 1, Example 2. Articles like these are usually pitched to the editor of the media house.

Here are some tips on how to write an op-ed: https://www.theopedproject.org/oped-basics, https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2020/05/04/writing-submitting-opinion-piece/

### Media trips and locations

With broadcast media, inviting them to a field visit to demonstrate how ecosystems are changing can be a good way of building visibility for the assessment. Here are some considerations when planning a media trip/ field visit:

- Target a few journalists who you know will cover the issue and with whom the organization has a good rapport to begin with
- When organizing the field visit, keep in mind what the overall message is (the more specific the better), which kinds of ecosystems/locations you would want to be filmed, and whether there will be anything visual that journalists can see (remember, their time is precious!)
- Plan the trip meticulously (locations, interviewees, logistics, permissions)
- Provide any other relevant information (data, statistics, studies) that may help the journalists produce the story
- Follow up to see how the story is published, secure a copy and continue to remain in touch with the journalists after

When interacting with multimedia journalists, the story may take the form of a video, an interview or perhaps participation in a panel. In each of these circumstances, continue to prepare thoroughly and seek out what the agreed message of consensus will be.

### Media training

Training workshops for members of the media or other learning opportunities are also a good way of engaging and building relationships with journalists. Identify a topic that is new and interesting to them (or, alternately, something that connects with the ongoing news cycle) and pitch a webinar for journalists. These webinars need to be short, succinct, engaging, offer opportunities to network and not clash with editorial schedules. Choosing topics that journalists may have reached out for information about in the past is also a good approach, as is recruiting other journalists as trainers to support the training.

### Tools

When planning media outreach for a specific publication or event, here are some elements that could support your efforts:

- An ongoing database of media contacts: this could be set up from the start of the assessment process. Keep a running database of editors of major publications, channels, digital media outlets in your country and journalists (including local and Indigenous journalists) who report on environment, nature conservation, human rights, climate issues and Indigenous and local knowledge. Beyond editors, reach out to bureau chiefs, producers etc. This will help you target specific media outlets and build relationships with them over the course of the assessment.
- Press release: a press release is a 300–400-word article that is written in the style of a news piece about the assessment/event/study/policy change. The press release could include pre-approved quotes from dignitaries, a suggested headline and sub-headline, pre-approved photos and links to the study, and contacts. A press release is a summary of what we expect to be published about our work in the media. Press releases are usually shared or published 1–2 days prior or on the day of the launch/event.

- Media advisory: a media advisory is a short 150–200-word invite to an event (in this case, a launch or a national meeting) providing an overview of what the event will entail, information about the study etc. It is meant to act mainly as a description or a news flash. A media advisory is usually issued 5 days prior to the event.
- Overall package: in addition to the press release and advisories, you should keep in an easily stored manner adequate photos, videos, summaries, contacts, extra quotes from authors and policymakers, and information about any website or social media channels that journalists can refer to, if needed.

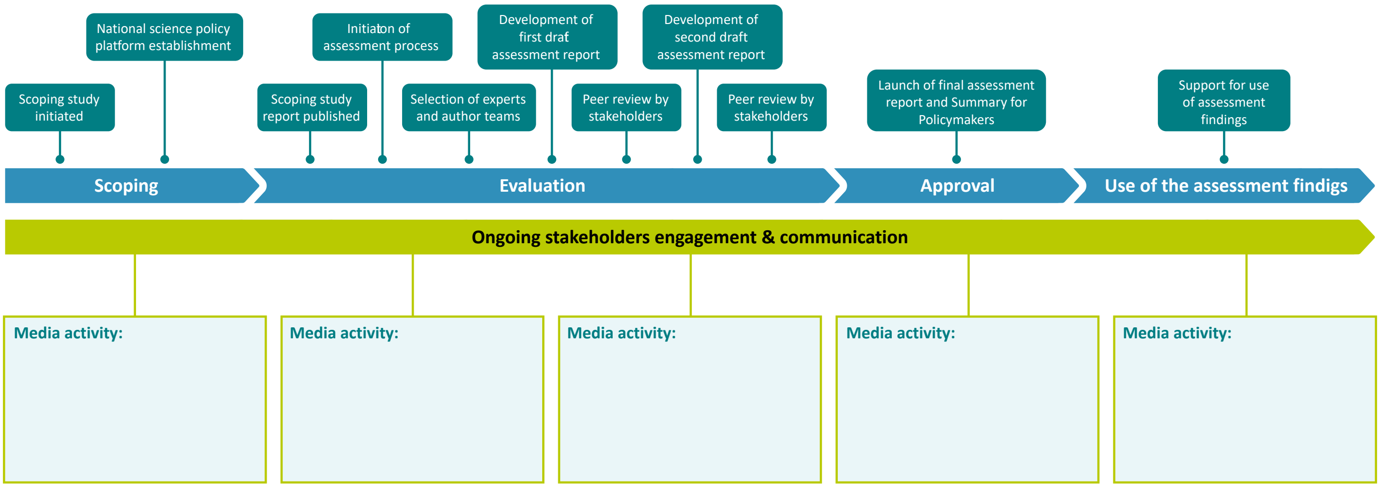
### Indicators

Some handy indicators to measure media outreach are:

- Number of mentions in the media
- Number and types of partnerships developed
- Number and types of distribution channels accessed
- Views, shares and comments on online articles and videos
- Timing and potential reach of broadcasts

## STEP 1: BRAINSTORM

Consider the timeline of the assessment below and fill in the blanks to match a media activity to a suitable time in the assessment. Add any ideas for media engagement that you may have or refer to some suggestions below the diagram.




### Here are some examples of media activities you could use:

- Create a media outreach plan
- Start developing a database of media contacts in the country covering ecosystems, conservation, climate issues, and Indigenous and local knowledge
- Write a press release
- Organize a high-level event where media representatives are invited
- Issue a media advisory ahead of an event
- Organize a webinar to train journalists on the latest ecosystem issues and ways to report them
- Set up a media interview with the lead author of the assessment
- Hold a press conference to discuss the policy recommendations emerging from the assessment
- Organize a field visit to an area that was featured in the assessment
- Set up a media partnership with the national association of radio/television broadcasters to encourage a regular half-hour programme on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services

## STEP 2. DRAFT A PRESS RELEASE

Write an imaginary short press release for either of the two situations below:

1. Establishment of a national biodiversity platform
2. Launch of the technical report and summary for policymakers report

Follow the structure below to frame the press release and use clear, concise language.

| | Lead (main message): what | Follow-up: when, where, who | Substance: why does it matter? | Quotes from two people (specify who and what they will say) | Contact information/ additional info |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Establishment of a national biodiversity platform | | | | | |
| Launch of the technical report and summary for policymakers | | | | | |

# 8. Digital communications

Digital and online channels of communications have become widespread across the globe, even in many of the most remote communities and environments, making them vital for reaching target audiences.

### Channels

Each channel is a way to reach an audience with a message. Using them in conjunction can help reach a wider audience at a deeper level.

### Multimedia

Multimedia is the use of text, graphics, audio and video sent over digital networks. Using multiple media types can widen the reach of your communications by catering to the preferences of as many people as possible. For example, producing a brief explanatory video to replace or complement a post or article will capture visual learners' interest.

### Websites or landing pages

A website or landing page provides a "home base" of information and resources for target audiences to explore. A website can include the goals, context, activities and challenges of the ecosystem assessment and the people working on it. It is a more passive form of communication as it does not actively reach out to the audience. Nonetheless, it is often the first impression that an audience member will have of the assessment, so it would benefit from being visually appealing, user friendly and informative.

### Social media

The main social media platforms are Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and LinkedIn, although social media usage varies by country. Social media provides the opportunity for direct interaction with audience members in a more casual, everyday context. They could also be useful for regularly reminding the audience of assessment's messages and activities without requiring them to take any actions other than their regular social media usage.

### Digital outreach

Apart from social media, other useful digital media include texts/chats (e.g. WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram), email (e.g. newsletters), radio, video chats and other apps and services. Many of these options are not limited by internet access and availability, making them ideal for reaching more remote areas and isolated communities that fall under the scope of a national ecosystem assessment.

## CONTENT STRATEGY

Digital communications are usually not ideal for heavy, technical content. They can be useful for increasing widespread engagement in non-scientific communities, which is vital for improving awareness of and attitudes towards the assessment. Digital content benefits from:

- Taking a **storytelling approach** to engage audiences on a more personal level
- Focusing on the **bigger picture**, avoiding details that cannot be disclosed until launch
- Including **strong visuals**, such as photos or graphics that help deliver the message
- Being **short and concise**, avoiding jargon and unnecessary technical language

## FORMS OF COMMUNICATION VIA DIGITAL CHANNELS

### Social networking

Social networking allows people to have conversations, share content and publish their own ideas. This form of communication has expanded beyond only networking among peers; it is now frequently used for exploring trends, topics and influential people not necessarily within the personal network. Therefore, national ecosystem assessments can use social networking to both gain new perspectives for activities and share progress with the audience. Social media and digital outreach platforms are the most useful for these networking exchanges.

### Publicity

Publicity is the immediate image of the national ecosystem assessment in the media. News stories, articles, blogs and events can help gain public attention and awareness, temporarily providing an opportunity to extend the assessment's reach and influence. These publicity stories could then be featured on the website/ landing page and linked on social media and other outreach communications.

### Public and media relations

These regular communications involve building a relationship over time with the media, local governments, the public and other target audiences. Many of these will happen behind the scenes via personal or interagency emails, calls and texts.

### Digital marketing

The purpose of digital marketing is to publicly promote the benefits and goals of the assessment through digital advertizing, search engine marketing and email marketing. Paid digital advertizing can raise awareness of the assessment's overall goal and timeline or specific events and activities. Search engine marketing can be paid or use unpaid search engine optimization design tactics that increase the relevance of online material for certain search terms. Email marketing promotes engagement by providing nuggets of useful information, announcements and updates. E-newsletters via email and search engine optimization are ideal low-cost options for increasing awareness of and participation in the assessment's activities.

| Channels | Multimedia | Websites/ landing pages | Social media | Digital outreach |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Platforms and media | • Text<br>• Audio<br>• Video<br>• Graphics | • Home base of information and resources | • Twitter<br>• Facebook<br>• Instagram<br>• LinkedIn<br>• TikTok | • Texts/chats<br>• Email<br>• Radio<br>• Video chats<br>• Search engines<br>• Local apps and services |
| Advantages | • The use of various types of media opens communications to wider audiences | • Everything in one place | • Direct interaction<br>• Frequent and low-cost<br>• Highly popular in many regions | • Versatile for different budgets and target audiences<br>• Allows personalization to local context |
| Constraints | • Can be more complex, time-consuming and costly to produce | • Passive communication<br>• Requires ongoing maintenance | • Typically very short content or links to external resources | • Can be complex to coordinate<br>• Can require research to determine the most locally relevant platforms |

## STEP 1. BRAINSTORM

List potential goals, audiences and types of content that are most suitable for each digital communications tool. Think about advantages and constraints.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Overall goal of the communications channel** (e.g. building public relations, growing publicity, raising assessment awareness, influencing actions and participation) | | | | |
| **Target audiences** (e.g. organizations, government, Indigenous and local communities, the public, businesses, schools) | | | | |
| **Type of content** (e.g. formal, informal, technical, informative, interactive, announcements) | | | | |

## STEP 2. FRAME COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVES

Each digital communications tool has advantages and limitations to examine when crafting content and messaging to further the goals of the assessment. When writing material for a website, social media post, mass text, radio show, email or any other digital communication, consider the following:

Use the following questions to frame digital communications objectives and strategies:

- Which **digital communications tools** would be most useful for your national context? List those with the greatest national accessibility, participation and influence.
- Within those tools, which specific **platforms and media** are the most useful in the national context? List the most popular platforms and media.
- Will it be difficult to **establish a presence** on these channels and platforms? List actions that can help start these digital communications if they are not already in use.
- Of the less-useful digital communications tools, is it possible to **overcome their limitations** in the local context of the assessment? List actions that may make these tools more useful.
- Are there any **target audiences** that are challenging to reach via digital communications due to isolation, poor infrastructure or other factors? If so, detail ways to potentially increase their connectivity and participation through targeted campaigns.
- Does **awareness of the assessment** already exist in some target audiences? Distinguish which audiences have which level of awareness and think of ways to tailor communications to those levels.
- **Which of the assessment issues are best suited** to digital communications? List issues that are non-technical as well as technical issues that can be simplified through storytelling and the use of informative graphics.

# 9. Storytelling

Using storytelling techniques can increase understanding as well as motivate and engage audiences. Here are some basic elements of storytelling and how they can support communications around the national ecosystem assessments process.

## STORIES CAN INCREASE UNDERSTANDING AND PROMOTE ACTION

A story presents and connects a sequence of events with people and places, helping audiences to understand what happened, when and why it happened, and who is involved. A story is different from an informational account, which can describe facts without connecting them to a sequence of events.

Structuring information as a story (i.e. in the context of specific events) can make it more understandable and practically relevant to audiences, stakeholders and knowledge holders. Research has shown that putting information in stories can influence audience engagement, as well as their willingness to act and to take decisions[1]. Information that is presented in story form can be easier to remember and understand[2]. Information about a national ecosystem assessment can be structured as a story to make it easier to process and generate more attention and engagement in the assessment's stakeholders.

## ELEMENTS AND STRUCTURE OF A STORY

While stories can take many different forms depending on social and cultural contexts, this document focuses on common elements that are usually part of a story and common ways used to structure a story.

### Elements to include in a story

The following elements are known as the "eight Cs of storytelling"[3] and can be considered to better engage audiences using storytelling techniques:

1. Characters: people who are relevant to the story that is being told. This can include stakeholders, knowledge holders or other people who were/are/will be important to the assessment process. The target audience may also be the main characters (or "heroes") of the story that it is being told.
2. Circumstance: when and where a story takes place and why the characters are there. Descriptions of time and place can better engage audiences through the five senses: sight, sound, smell, touch and taste.
3. Conflict: the problem that is at the heart of a story. What is the problem facing the characters in the story? How do they feel about it? How are they affected by it? Descriptions of feelings can better engage audiences.
4. Cure: the solution that can help solve the conflict/problem. This could describe the role of the character(s) in applying the cure to the conflict. What cure did your characters apply to the conflict? And how did you help them?
5. Change: what change happened after applying the cure/solution? How did your characters feel different afterwards? What are the benefits to them?

1 Downs JS. Prescriptive scientific narratives for communicating usable science. PNAS. 2014

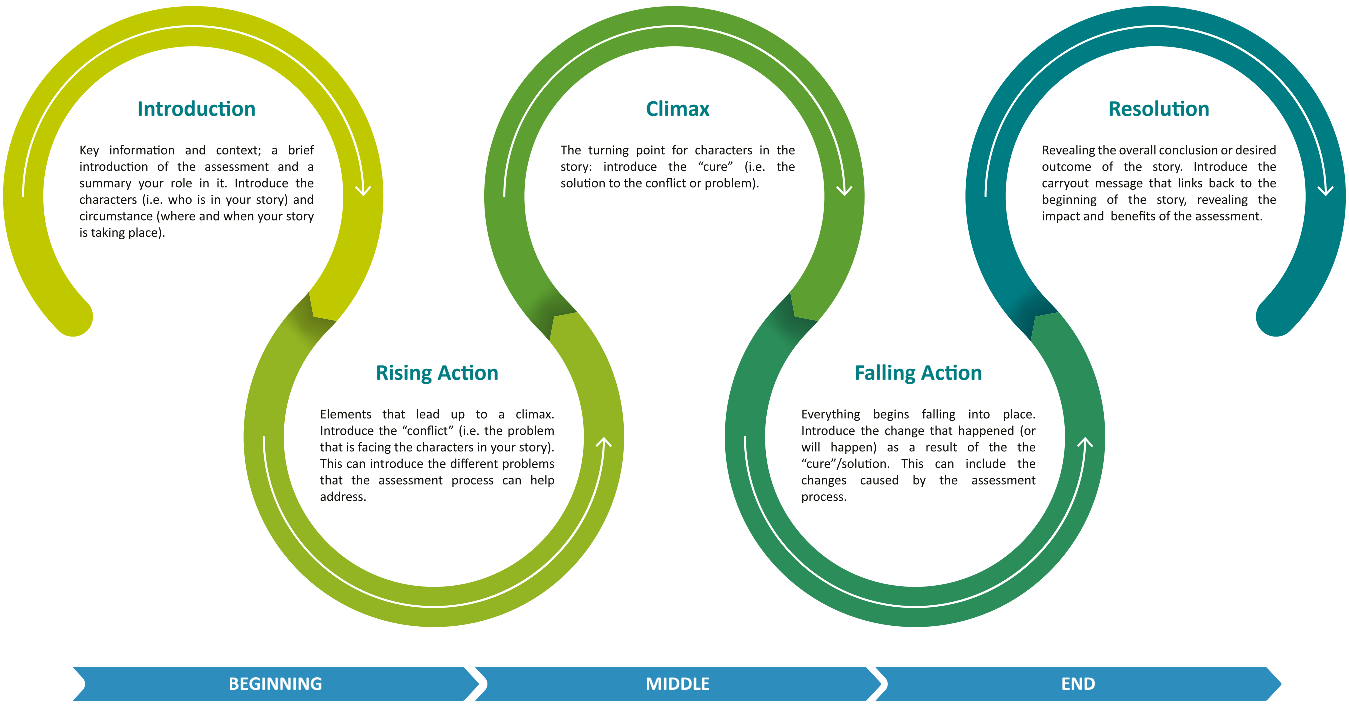
2 Dahlstrom MJ. Using narratives and storytelling to communicate science with non-expert audiences. PNAS. 2014

3 Furlong, Paul. Rule the World: the Art & Power of Storytelling

6. Carryout message: the overall conclusion or desired outcome of the story. This could be an opportunity to link back to the beginning of the story, to summarize how the audience got from the beginning to the end.
7. Conversation: including dialogue between people can better engage audiences in a story, especially when included at the most emotive points. This can include quoting stakeholders and knowledge-holders.
8. Curiosity: Carefully build up a story to keep your audiences curious, without giving all the details away from the start.

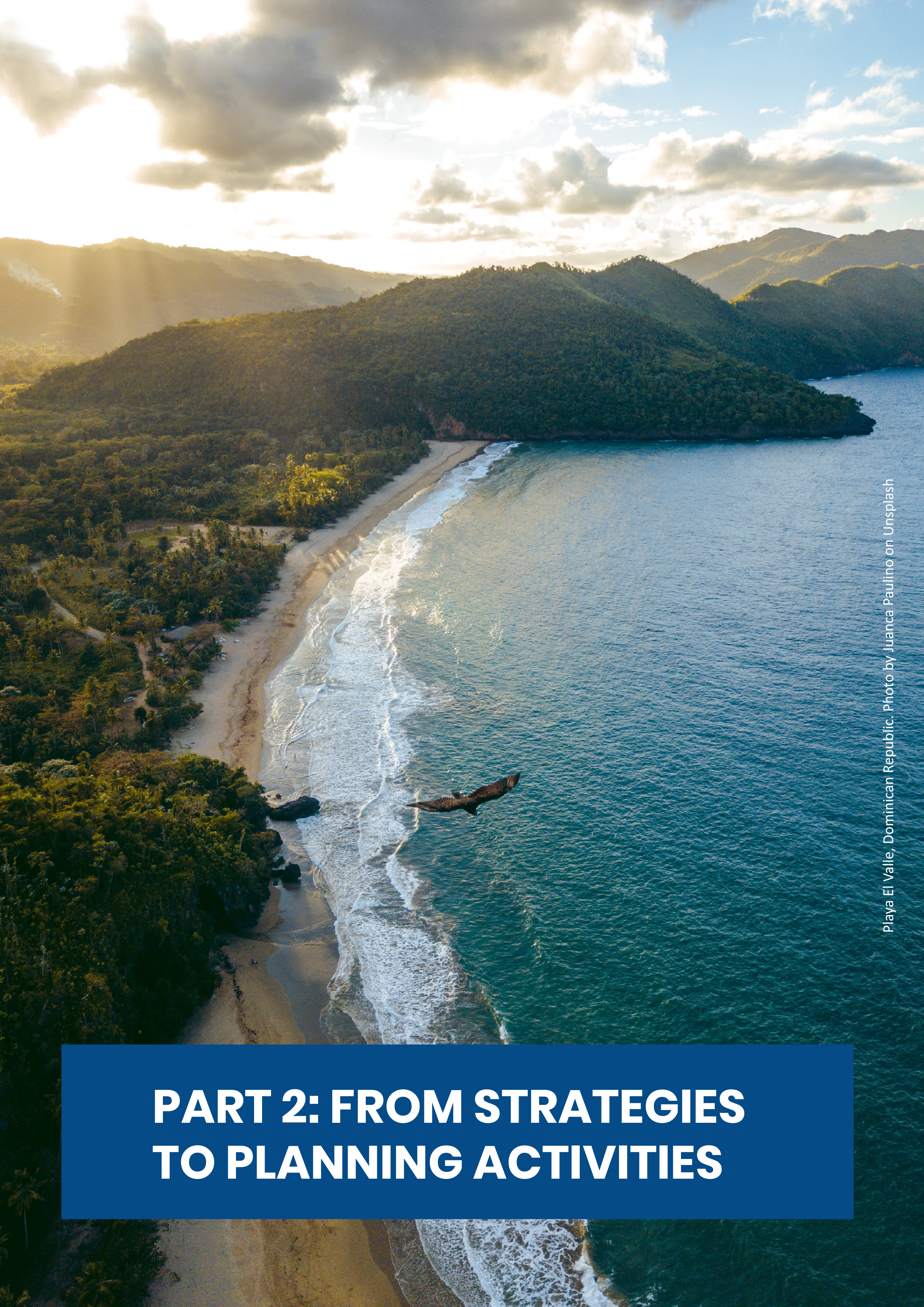
## STEP 1. STRUCTURE A STORY

The structure of a story can influence how you engage audiences. While there are different ways to structure a story, one of the most common structures is the “narrative arc”[1]. The diagram and template below can help you structure your story and the elements from the previous section.




| INTRODUCTION | RISING ACTION | CLIMAX | FALLING ACTION | RESOLUTION |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Context, characters, time, place (who, where, when and why)* | *“Conflict”/problem, how it impacts audiences/stakeholders* | *Turning point; “cure”/solution to the “conflict”/problem* | *“Change” resulting from the “cure”/ solution to the problem* | *“Carryout message”; overall conclusion/ desired outcome* |
| | | | | |

4 Boyd et al, 2020, The narrative arc: Revealing core narrative structures through text analysis



Playa El Valle, Dominican Republic. Photo by Juanca Paulino on Unsplash

# PART 2: FROM STRATEGIES TO PLANNING ACTIVITIES

# PART 2: FROM STRATEGIES TO PLANNING ACTIVITIES

## 10. Developing a communications plan

Using the communications objectives you have captured in Section 2, you can now determine specific communications actions and activities that you will help you implement the communication strategy. Click here to download an online copy of the template.

| | | | | | TIMELINES | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Communications Objective #1** | **Deliverables** | **Budget** | **Responsible Party** | **Partners** | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | June | July | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec | INDICATORS |
| Communications activity 1.1 | Corresponding deliverable 1.1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Communications activity 1.2 | Corresponding deliverable 1.2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Communications activity 1.3 | Corresponding deliverable 1.3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Communications Objective #2** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | INDICATORS |
| Communications activity 2.1 | Corresponding deliverable 2.1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Communications activity 2.2 | Corresponding deliverable 2.2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Communications activity 2.3 | Corresponding deliverable 2.3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Communications Objective #3** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | INDICATORS |
| Communications activity 3.1 | Corresponding deliverable 3.1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Communications activity 3.2 | Corresponding deliverable 3.2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Communications activity 3.3 | Corresponding deliverable 3.3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

# 11. Setting realistic timelines

Communications is a creative and often experimental process. Creativity and innovation both demand time and diverse perspectives; a fresh pair of eyes can always help re-frame the message or think of a new way to attract audiences. Planning and executing strategic communications needs to allow for sufficient time so it can be clear, concise and effective.

### WHAT SHOULD YOU SET TIME FOR?

**1: Preparation**

- Prepare a creative brief/outline for whatever output it is (story, publication, event, campaign, social media, digital/multimedia etc.)
- Make budget available

**2: Research**

- Research for the output or activity, particularly on the message

**3: First draft**

- Produce a first draft/script
- In the case of visual/multimedia outputs, prepare a storyboard or illustrations

**4: Editing**

- Edit iterations of the output until final

**5: Review**

- Organize reviews by all stakeholders/larger teams
- Secure additional assets for the output (photos, social media, logos etc.)

**6: Permissions/approval**

- Finalize permissions/approval process (e.g. to confirm the use of partners' logos)

**7: Dissemination**

- Set a dissemination time plan
- Implement final dissemination

## AVERAGE TIMELINES

Below are some suggested timelines for different communications outputs. Please note that these are only indicative; depending on length, topic, partners involved and resources available, these timelines could be longer or shorter.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Written story** | 10 days in total<br>(1–2 days for any interviews, subject to availability of interviewees; 5 days for drafting and writing; additional days for review and rewriting) | **Live action video** | 25–30 days in total<br>3–5 days to shoot<br>3–5 days to script<br>3–5 days for voiceovers<br>7 days to edit<br>5 days extra on review<br>Additional days for language versions |
| **Social media copy (text and photo)** | 1 hour (1–2 days for detailed messages) | **Stock footage-based video** | 15 days in total |
| **Social media card** | 3–4 hours on average | **Animated Video** | 30–45 days in total |
| **Social media video** | 1–2 days | **Campaign** | 3 months in advance at the least |
| **Infographic** | 2–14 days (depends on size and level of detail to be captured) | **Event** | 1–2 months in advance at the least |

# 12. Planning resources for communications

Resources are important to consider when developing a communication strategy and turning it into a plan. The impact and effectiveness of actions and activities determined by a communication strategy and plan will depend on the availability of resources to support their implementation.

## TYPES OF RESOURCES NEEDED FOR COMMUNICATIONS

There are a range of resources to consider when planning and implementing communications activities, including staff time and skills, tools and technical resources and financial resources.

### Staff time and skills

Staff time and skills are very important to consider when planning and implementing communications activities. Consider the following questions:

- Is there a **dedicated communications specialist** who is responsible for planning and/or implementing communications activities?
- If not, are there **members of the team** who have previous experience or are keen in leading or supporting communications activities?
- Can **existing partnerships and networks** provide support with time and skills for communications (e.g. NEA Initiative, BES-Net, SGAN etc.)?
- Are there opportunities for **interns and volunteers** to support with the implementation of the communication strategy and plan?
- Do you need a **graphic designer, video editor** or someone with relevant skills to help produce printed materials, publications and videos?
- Do you need a **specialized facilitator** or someone with facilitation skills to help host and facilitate events throughout the assessment process?

### Tools and technical resources

When planning communications activities, it is also crucial to consider the tools and technical resources needed to implement them. Consider the tools in the following questions, their cost and how easy they are to use:

- Do you need specific **hardware** to implement activities (e.g. computers, laptops, cameras, voice recorders, audio equipment, mobile/satellite phones, wireless modems etc.)?
- Do you need specific **software/applications** to implement activities, such as word-processing, graphic design, video-editing, videoconferencing (e.g. Zoom), instant messaging (e.g. WhatsApp) etc.?
- Do you need a subscription to **online platforms and social networks** (e.g. email accounts, social media accounts, cloud storage to save and share files etc.)?
- Do you need to set up a **website** for the assessment? Will you use a free service online or will you pay for a customized template? Will you set up the website yourself or will you hire a web designer?

### Financial resources

It is important to consider what financial resources are available when planning communications activities. Consider the following questions:

- Are there funds available to bring in a **dedicated communications specialist** to lead the planning and implementing activities? Consider part-time/joint contracts with staff working on other projects within your organization.
- Does your organization currently **have access to skilled staff and/or the necessary tools** (e.g. hardware, software and digital tools)?
- Have you explored **open-source software and publicly accessible tools** that can support with communications activities?
- Do you need to re-budget and/or raise additional funds to cover the necessary financial costs for communications activities?

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Doi Inthanon, Ban Luang, Thailand.Photo by Hannah Tims on Unsplash

BESNet
Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network

NEA
NATIONAL ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT INITIATIVE