Our Future, Our Voice:
A Guide to Designing, Developing and Evaluating Public Interest Communication on a Budget

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What is public interest communication?

In short, it is the art and the science of changing the world. **Public interest communication** is an emerging discipline which uses research-informed and evidence-led communication interventions to generate structural social change. Public interest communication draws from multiple academic disciplines, including behavioural science, psychology, marketing, public relations, neuroscience and journalism. The purpose of public interest communication can be to raise awareness, change attitudes, perceptions and behaviours, and/or motivate people to take political action. The end goal is to influence policy, allocate resources, or move social norms and other structures, in order to advance issues that are in the public interest.

A public interest **communication campaign** is a planned sequence of communication activities and other interactions which use a compelling narrative over time to deliver a defined and measurable outcome among a defined audience. This is why it's important to start any public interest communication campaign with a clear picture of your intended outcomes.

In the past, **public interest communication** approaches have often required a lot of resources such as finance, staff time, expertise, and data. However, we want to show in this guide that these approaches can also be used by more resource-constrained organisations and communities, including those who have never before run such a campaign. In this brief guide, we will cover topics including the phases of developing a public interest communication strategy, how to use principles learned using research methods to enhance your campaign, and how to use change models to keep track of the big picture.

How do we build a public interest communication strategy?

Even though you might already know what you want to do, there are four steps worth taking up front to build a strategy that you can go back to, as well as help anchor your work.

1. Identifying **goals**
2. Defining **outcomes**
3. Designing communication **activities**
4. Incorporating **measurement and metrics**

1. Identifying goals

Activity 1

Ask yourself what you're hoping to achieve. Write it down. Then ask yourself *why*. Write that down too. Ask yourself *why* again and keep asking until you can't realistically ask why anymore. This should indicate that you have reached your end goal.

What do I want to achieve?	
Why?	
Why?	
Why?	
Why?	

Example 1

Let's take climate change legislation as an example. You want people to understand that climate change legislation is urgent. *Why?* Because you want them to take action to demand faster change from their governments. *Why?* Because you want the government to enact climate-sensitive policies. *Why?* Because you want to save the planet. *Why?* Because…and here is where you may have reached your **goal**.

2. Defining outcomes

Activity 2

Now that you have your **goal**, write down everything that is in the way of success when it comes to your goal. What are your barriers? Where among these barriers are things we can hope to change with our interventions? What are the barriers we can influence with communication? Highlight and circle the things you can change, and rephrase them from negative barriers to positive intended **outcomes**.

Barriers	Outcomes

Example 2

In our example goal, saving the planet, what is in the way of that being a reality now? The fossil fuel industry, carbon intensive agriculture, overfishing and other overexploitation, deforestation, lack of climate finance, ineffective corporate sustainability reporting and ratings, geopolitical rivalry, polarised public debates … the list goes on! But write down the full list, and identify what you can change. It'll most likely give you more insight into other things you can do with public interest communication.

Perhaps from these examples, we might decide that we have some control over the polarisation of the debate, maybe some control over raising demand for effective climate financing, raising awareness and objection to overfishing and other exploitation. If so, these become our intended **outcomes**. We need to: create a more balanced public climate debate; raise public demand for climate financing, raise public awareness about overfishing and its impact, educate public audiences about the link between ocean health and planetary health etc.

3. Designing communication activities

Now that we know which outcomes we intend to focus on, what does this tell us about our required communication activities? Perhaps we need communication interventions simply to balance the climate debate (finding ways to tell effective climate stories across the political spectrum), to generate public demand for climate financing (demonstrate ways the public can demand this of their leaders), to change public understanding of the value of ocean health (educational campaign to inform), to generate knowledge and action among decision-makers (grow and show public support for these things among decision-maker audiences, and amplify the perceptions of those that demand change).

Activity 3

What communication interventions might we need to produce the outcomes you defined in your last activity? Write down some ideas next to each outcome. Do we need a public campaign? A decision-maker advocacy effort? Voter outreach efforts among

the residents of specific electoral areas? Town halls? All of these are parts of public interest communication which uses different approaches to more effectively and efficiently contribute to our desired outcomes.

Outcomes	Communication activities

Example 3

Perhaps we decide to run a public interest campaign on social media to reach younger audiences who are more likely to take visible action on social media. Perhaps we also decide to target the seat of the Environment Minister who lives in a suburban seat with lots of young families. Should we consider outreach among schools, to develop curriculums or ask children to submit posters for a prize-giving, to which we invite the Minister for that area? Perhaps the Environment Minister lives in a rural location with lots of residents over the age of 65. Maybe we plan some events in local shops or doctors' offices, where those older residents might see and engage with our work, causing the Minister to take notice? This is the time to be creative with your strategies, turning them into relevant **activities** for each audience.

4. Incorporating measurement and metrics

This is an important step that many people either deprioritise or miss altogether, but is worth doing up front. It's likely that some of your measurement efforts will require an understanding of the situation both before and after your intervention, in order to see what changed.

Activity 4

For each of our intended outcomes AND for our required activities, how will we measure what we've done? For the latter, these are usually easy measurements. Did we produce a campaign? Did people see it? Did the Environment Minister notice, or take minor action in some way to confirm they noticed (perhaps they posted something on social media)?

For the former (our outcomes) these may be harder to measure, but they are often even more important. Did we improve public perceptions? Did we increase public demand, or effectively amplify their views? Did the Environment Minister take legislative action?

Now think about how you might measure each of those things. Set up methods now to measure these outcomes. Establish **baselines** before you begin to effectively track your achievements. (A baseline is an initial measurement used for later comparison, so you can see what difference you made.) Also list some of the types of uncertainty that may affect different measurements. If you have two different metrics, and one is much more reliable than the other, that may be useful information.

Outcomes	Outcome measurements	Communication activities	Activity measurements

Example 4

For the public communication campaign for young people on social media, there are plenty of digital tools available to us to measure our impact. For the school's outreach, we could count the number of schools, posters and prize-giving events, and measure whether or not the Environment Minister attended. We could also monitor the Environment Minister's social media accounts to see if they started posting more about the climate emergency. We could even monitor political activity in the elected house, to see if the Environment Minister made a political comment or statement to their colleagues, or perhaps mentioned the need to do more in the news. Was legislation drawn up, was there a vote, did it succeed? Through measurement planning you can see very clearly how public interest communication can contribute to very real and very important public interest outcomes.

How can we use public opinion research to inform our campaign?

An important tool of public interest communication is **public opinion research.**

We use public opinion research to:

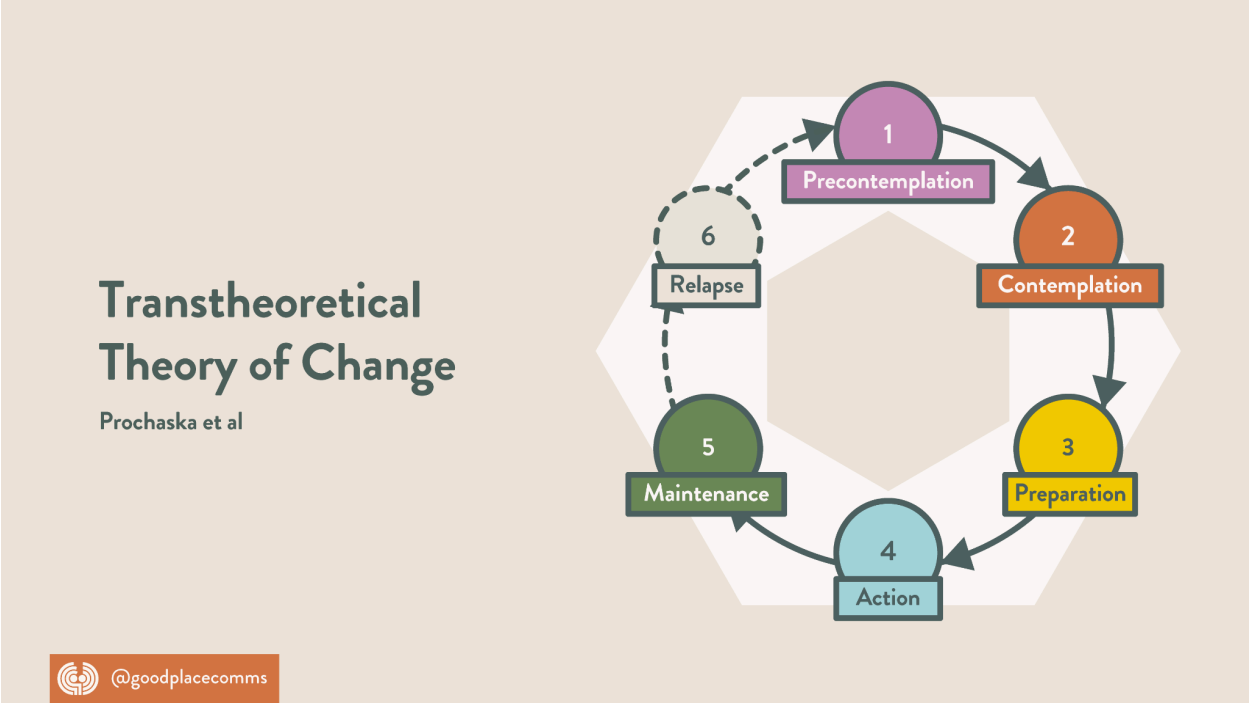
1. Better **understand our audiences**
2. Assess whether our **messages and messengers** will be effective
3. **Access our audiences** through different targeting methods
4. **Evaluate** our impact and **learn**

Organisations sometimes spend lots of money on conducting something called an “audience segmentation” for these purposes. These segmentation analyses allow you to ask questions of your proposed audience(s) about the issue at hand, as well as anything to help identify more about their personalities and preferences (including shopping or media habits). The purpose of gathering this kind of data is to help make informed decisions about partnerships you might pursue, voices you might highlight or values you might lean into. Once you can identify who is interested in your issue, or not interested, or unaware of your issue, you can start to cut the data by different groups to see how they differ demographically (age, gender, ethnicity etc.) as well as a range of other markers that give you insight into who they are.

These guidelines aim to reduce the need to spend money on audience segmentation research, by providing data-driven principles for public interest communicators to adopt. These are principles developed through years of studying public opinion, and conducting audience segmentation analyses to inform communication interventions around the world. Examples are provided of ways to use those principles in your practical work.



1: Understanding audiences



In Prochaska et al.'s **Stages of Change Model**, individuals progress through several phases. First, in the "pre-contemplation stage," we are not even considering change. Next, during "contemplation," we recognise a problem and start thinking about solving it but haven't committed to action. In the "preparation stage," we are exploring taking action soon and may begin making small changes to prepare. The "action stage" involves actively changing our thoughts or behaviour. During "maintenance," individuals work to sustain the new behaviour over the long term and prevent backsliding. Finally, there is either "relapse" or "termination," where the new behaviour faces challenges in sustainability, or it is so fully integrated that individuals are confident they won't return to their old behaviour.

This model is often used for public health interventions (e.g. smoking cessation or healthier eating). But it's useful for all elements of public interest communication, irrespective of the topic. Where our audiences sit on the stages of this change model helps us think about what sorts of messages they might need to move them into the next stage. According to this model, it is usually possible to advance an audience from

one stage to the next. But it is difficult or impossible to move them two or more stages, e.g. from a lack of awareness to a specific behaviour. The full journey usually takes time and several interventions.

This model allows us to group our audiences (and our outcomes) into categories which will best address people at different phases of engagement. Is our audience oblivious to our issue? Is our audience aware of the issue but unwilling to act? Are they aware and willing, but don't know how to act? Depending on where our audiences sit on this change model, it's worth mapping them out and thinking about different messages we might use for different groups of people.

This mapping will also help us identify the **type of change** we need to see. If audiences don't know about our issue, do we need to educate them? Is our goal to raise awareness or increase knowledge? If our audiences are aware of our issue but unwilling to act, should we try to persuade them why acting on our issue is important? Or should we accept certain things we might not be able to change? If our audiences want to act but don't know how, can we provide them with simple ways of making their voice heard, or other actions they can take to ensure they are part of the change effort? Take some time to map audiences to understand where they currently sit on this model, and how we can realistically move them to the next stage.

Activity 5

Thinking about the stages of change our audiences might sit at, list some audiences you think might be at each stage of change. For example, if we want the public to understand some aspect of climate transition better (for example, the role of insulation, or heat-pumps), and to make demands of their governments, what sorts of people would you expect to see at each stage of change?

Stages of change	Example audience	Example audience
Pre-contemplation		
Contemplation		

Preparation		
Action		
Maintenance		
Relapse		

Example 5

Audiences that might be unaware that climate change is urgent might be older, because they might engage less with social media content that tells them of the urgency. Other audiences might not believe in climate change or have a particularly political viewpoint. Which of these two audiences are we more likely to be able to move? Probably older audiences, by making our communication visible to them outside of social media. Audiences that might know climate change is urgent, but are unsure how to act might be younger. They might simply need more information to help them understand how to act: how to use their voice or access their political leaders. Audiences that might already be acting are our existing audiences. We might decide we don't need to communicate with them because they are acting already, and communicating with them would be an unnecessary use of our resources. In this way, we can understand how best to spend our resources, and what sorts of messages will be needed for different people.

2: Messages and Messengers

For each of our audiences, we now have a general idea about what to say, but how can research methods help us understand more about how to say it?

Sarah Dillon and Claire Craig explain in their book *Storylistening* how analysis of narratives can provide insights into public reasoning, and strengthen and complement scientific evidence. They argue that both scientific and narrative evidence should be incorporated into policy design and public engagement programmes. They propose a conceptual framework that we might apply to study existing stories and narratives in order to understand what the audiences are already hearing, and use that knowledge to build more effective communication interventions. You can read more about it here.

Principles for framing what we say

The University of Florida's Center for Public Interest Communication conducts multidisciplinary literature reviews to understand more about how we can frame what we say to our audiences, and what makes certain interventions successful. They compiled five principles for more effective communication that we can think about using across all our messages, with all of our audiences.



Center for Public Interest Communications' Five principles for more effective communications:

1. **Join the community.** Identify a group whose change in behaviour could make a profound difference for your issue or inspire others to take action. Figure out how to bring that group value.
2. **Communicate in images.** Use visual language instead of abstract concepts to help people connect with your work.

3. **Invoke emotion with intention.** Think about what you're trying to get people to do and how they would feel if they were doing it. Then think about stories that would make them feel that way.
4. **Create meaningful calls to action.** Review your calls to action to make sure they ask communities to do something specific that will connect them to the cause and that they know how to do.
5. **Tell better stories.** Go beyond simple sharing messages - tell interesting stories with a beginning, middle, and end.

These principles are important because they give us data-driven insight into how we can best interest and inspire our audiences by meeting them where they are, communicating visually, using emotions intentionally, giving audiences useful information where it's necessary, and telling interesting stories. Many of us live in a messy information environment where we are inundated with messages every day. These principles can help us cut through the noise to ensure our messages will be interesting to our audiences, which will increase our visibility, and ultimately our impact.

Some other principles we've learned about developing effective messages includes:

1. Make the **message memorable**. For generations we've imparted knowledge by telling stories: think about the protagonist, a beginning, middle and end, a tension and resolution, in order to draw audiences in and maintain their attention.

2. Make the **message stick**. We've also imparted knowledge by using proverbs and metaphors: designed well, these can be useful ways to build recognition and resonance with audiences through the messages you use.

3. Make the **message informative**. Humans are thirsty for knowledge: can you tell a story in a way which explains something they don't know, or adds value to their experience of the world?

4. Play on **emotions people WANT to feel**. Instead of shaming them, or generating fear and eco-anxiety, how can we move people using awe, joy, or surprise? Outrage can be a useful emotion to move people to take action on a specific issue, but it can also turn people off. Invoke outrage sparingly and with care. Of course, it's complex — there is a lot of research looking at hope vs. fear in climate communication, and the results aren't always clear cut — but playing on emotions people WANT to feel is a good rule of thumb to draw them into your message. See also point 7, below!

5. Provide **templates and examples** for action. If audiences clearly see what they might do, they can sometimes come up with their own ways of feeling about it, and their own reasons for doing it (before, during, and after).

6. It can be useful to **connect to things your audience already cares about.** This could take the form of partnerships or placement of your messages in locations where you expect them to be (digital or otherwise). It may also help you to think about ways to connect your issue to other issues to demonstrate adjacency, or to pique their interest. You may have to strike a balance though, and not allow this to draw you too far from your core messaging. More on this later, in “identifying emergent opportunities”.

7. Consider in advance **what feelings and dialogues might emerge,** and how you might respond. Communication is almost always best when it is not just one-way. Depending on the nature of your campaign, opportunities to interact with your audience might be plentiful (for example, at live events) or more limited (for example, if you receive a few comments on social media). Listening openly and honestly, and being prepared to deepen your understanding of the issues, should be your first priority. At the same time, it can be helpful to think about how people might feel about your message, and how you can turn negative or ambiguous responses into positive ones. In the context of climate change communication, Adam Corner writes, “People rarely feel just one emotion, and the simultaneous experience of different emotions may have unpredictable interactive effects, particularly with respect to promoting long-term, sustainable shifts in behavior.

Instead of artificially trying to evoke a particular emotion, a better way might be to focus on the emotions that people already feel about climate change, to understand their motivations and reasons for feeling those emotions."

Principles for choosing who should say it

In addition to *how* we talk to our audiences, we can also learn from research methods about *who* should talk to our audiences. These are often known as "**messengers.**" A messenger could be a protagonist in a story, or a voiceover that explains a concept, or even a celebrity who wants to help us get our message out. Some principles we've learned about selecting effective messengers includes:

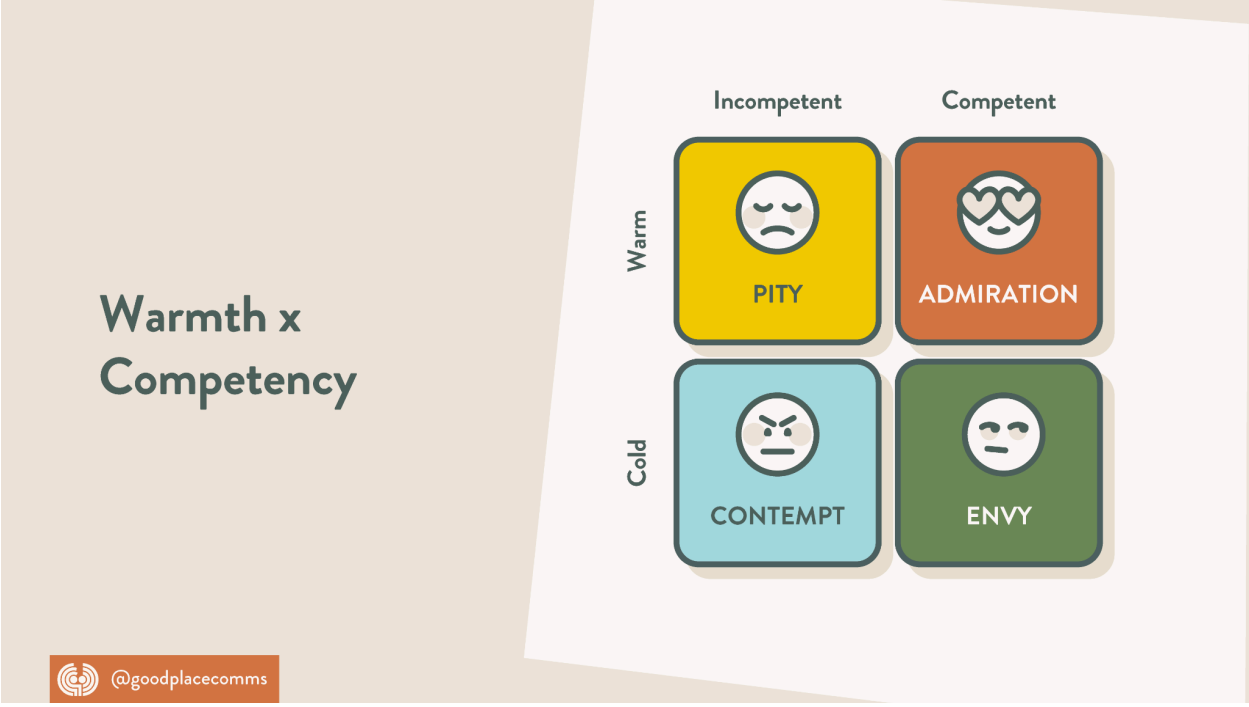
1. Messengers are as important as the message. Think about your target audience, what you want them to know and understand/do, and **who would best encourage them to do that**. Who would older audiences want to hear from? Who would younger audiences want to hear from? Align your messenger with your specific audience, and ideally ask individuals representative of your audience for their view. In the absence of a focus group with older audiences, simply asking older people you work with could provide useful insight.

2. Don't let inauthentic messengers take the space of **authentic messengers** with lived and/or generational or technical expertise. For many years, wealthy, white and Western voices have dominated public interest communication, as the majority of funding for many projects emerged from the whiter, wealthier West. This has meant that over the years, many messages have failed to resonate appropriately with important groups of people - or at worst, they have actively alienated their participation.

3. Think about where messengers sit in terms of **warmth and competence**. A combination of warmth and competence has been found to be most effective in making audiences pay attention and respect the information given. Not every messenger will fit both, but can we pair our messengers to make sure they demonstrate to audiences that they are both warm (share universal human

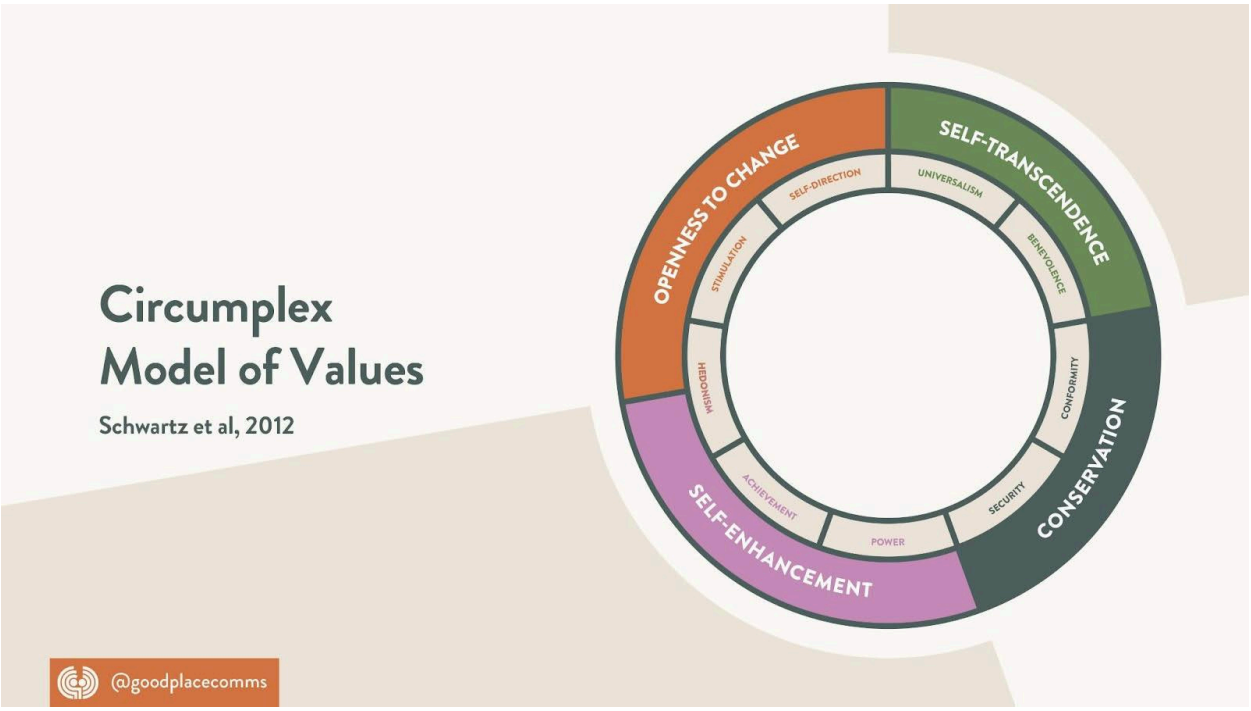
values and can be a trusted voice in this space) and competent (know their subject matter or are solutions-focused?)

4. In the same way, some messengers are more effective at **drawing attention** to an issue (e.g. celebrities or politicians), while others are better at **persuading people to care or take action** (someone credible, with subject matter expertise or lived experience). Think about your intended outcomes and perhaps select messengers to do both.



We talk a lot in public interest communication about our **values**, and those of our audiences, so it's worth exploring in more detail here. Thanks to public opinion research, scientists have increasingly found that human values are a more significant predictor of perceptions and behaviour than traditional demographics, "social status" and wealth. What can we understand about our audience's values? What drives them in their daily lives, in how they think about the world, in what topics they're interested in, who they listen to? Public opinion research can help us develop profiles of our

audiences to help us think about the best ways to reach them, with our messages, our messengers, and our media targeting.



In a survey setting, most people in most countries report prioritising benevolence and justice values, while some people prioritise conformity and security, or protection from harm. They will perceive messages differently and may require different approaches in your messaging. Think about your various audiences and imagine what sorts of values you think they'd be most likely to prioritise, and apply these values to your messages and messengers.

One note of caution: in today's often polarised world, we should use caution using values which might divide our audiences. To win the support of one group, while alienating another, may not be helpful to us. Attempts to use "coded language" which speaks mostly to a particular political audience may be seen by all, and could cause your integrity to be doubted, and your issue to become unnecessarily controversial.

You might avoid unnecessary polarisation by applying common-sense principles to **why something is important**, or finding ethical values which speak to **universal human nature** as well as matter-of-fact logic to why we think a particular approach will be

effective. However, it's worth being aware that overtly moralising an issue - a common mistake made in public interest communication - can also backfire.

This is often due to where people sit on the stages of change model (see 'Understanding Audiences'). If our audience already knows the moral argument, but doesn't know how to act, reiterating only the moral argument can come across as condescending. Think about using moral language *as part of* the message, but not the whole message. What is the "so what?" We may want to save the planet because it's the right thing to do, but also *why?* How will it also benefit the lives and livelihoods of our audiences and those around them?

Also keep in mind that appeals to universal human nature or experience can easily marginalise or silence those who don't neatly fit the template — while amplifying the voices that are already loud and clear. Think about who you're speaking to, as well as who you might NOT be speaking to (who you might have overlooked), and decide whether you need to make some changes.

3: Accessing audiences

Research and data can also help us understand more about our audiences' media habits, commercial interests (e.g. where they shop) and other information that can be useful to know for crafting messages, selecting messengers and partners, and in accessing your audiences through the media as well as more offline methods (e.g. in supermarkets). In communication, this is often called "targeting" or "reaching" our audiences, or how we think about "placement" of our messages. Approaches for accessing audiences can be as important as the messages and messengers themselves: crafting a perfect piece of creative content doesn't mean much unless people get to see it.

Activity 6

Next to each of your audiences, write down some things you expect to be true for your audiences. Younger audiences are most likely to be active on social media apps, so accessing them there is probably a good idea. Older audiences might be more likely to

watch traditional news on television, so are they ways we can access them there? Perhaps we can develop partnerships with local TV or radio stations, or put notices in local newspapers. What are some of the ways we can reach other audiences?

Audience	Ways to reach them	Ways to reach them

Example 6

If access via traditional news media seems too difficult or expensive, can we think of other, creative ways we can access older audiences in their daily lives? Perhaps through leaflets in their homes, or adverts in local shops they might visit, or greater emphasis on physical presence and word-of-mouth. This is a time to be creative with your message placement.

4: Evaluating impact

Earlier, we mapped out our intended outcomes and required activities, and talked about measurement plans to measure both activities and outcomes. We also talked about principles to help us craft effective messages, as well as ways to ensure they are seen.

Our activity measures might include whether we produced creative content, whether people saw it, whether they liked it or engaged with it. Our impact measures might include whether their knowledge increased, or their perception changed, or their behaviour changed. It might also be whether these changes were visible to decision-makers, and whether those decision-makers made a change as a result. It can be useful to map these indicators into a linear form of engagement logic model, as below.

Indicator 0	Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Indicator 3	Indicator 4
Reach or visibility	Interest	Passive support	Active support	Action
Number of views, impressions etc	Click through rate, video completion rate etc	Likes, comments, follows etc	Shares, endorsements etc	Petition signs, emails to politicians etc

Once we have a piece of creative content (a video or a poster, for example), the first activity metric that we need to measure is ***reach*** or ***visibility*** of that message. If you're using social media, you can easily understand reach through social media tools, but if we're putting posters in shops or leaflets through doors, how do we best understand reach? We can do this by counting how many people are looking at our poster, or even just measuring how many leaflets we delivered, and how many were taken away. **Impact indicator 0** is simply the visibility of our message, since visibility is vital to the successful impact of any communications campaign: at the very least, did people see our messages (e.g. impressions, reach etc)?

Various studies have been conducted over the years which tell us that we need to see messages between 7 and 12 times before we start to pay attention to them. When thinking about placing our messages, it's worth sharing them as broadly as possible so that audiences start to notice them, and hopefully hear or understand what they are trying to say.

Social media is a great tool for communicating, but so are other out-of-home methods such as posters and billboards. The key to message delivery is to think about the various ways we can reach people throughout their day. Perhaps on their commute to work, perhaps at the supermarket, perhaps at a sports centre, theatre, or other places where we might visit for our hobbies. Finding unusual partnerships is a great way to be creative with reach, and many organisations will be keen to partner to support environmental action as well as other public interest causes.

For social media advertising, you can find out whether Google will help subsidise your placement costs: **https://www.google.com/nonprofits/offerings/google-ad-grants/**

The next indicator (**impact indicator 1**) is **interest**: are there ways you can measure this, and are there any suggestions in your data that people were interested in your message? Think about e.g. click throughs, video completion rates, if you're using social media. Perhaps there is a way to measure interest in your offline communication activities. Perhaps we can measure interest in person by seeing how long someone continues to read our poster. Perhaps we can only measure interest through asking about it in focus groups or interviews when we're testing content - not a "real world" indicator, but a useful learning nonetheless.

Both of these indicators are fairly passive indicators that don't tell us much about our impact, but they help us understand whether our content has been seen, and whether our audiences find it interesting or compelling enough to begin their listening journey. These are the basic needs of an impactful communication campaign, so worth measuring to help us learn, and to identify the incremental ways through which we achieve impact. (What if no-one saw it? What if no-one was interested? What could we do differently?)

Next to reach and interest, we have ***support***. Similar to interest, here we are looking to measure a more active indication of support among our audiences. Did they share our social media post, or comment on it favourably for others to see? Did our offline audiences take a leaflet, or pass them to a friend, or perhaps visit a website we'd mentioned in our poster, or some other active indication that they were curious enough to take some small action in support of our efforts. Are we seeing ***passive*** or ***active*** indications of ***support***? What can we also learn, perhaps, from unfavourable comments, or what if no-one shared it? Is there a way we can make our post more shareable for audiences, perhaps allowing some element of co-creation?

And finally ***action***. Here we are looking for metrics which suggest our audience has taken active measures to contribute to our issue. Perhaps they've signed a petition, or emailed their elected representatives (both of which we can measure digitally). What measurement activities can we put in place to measure actions taken for offline interventions, based on your calls to action?

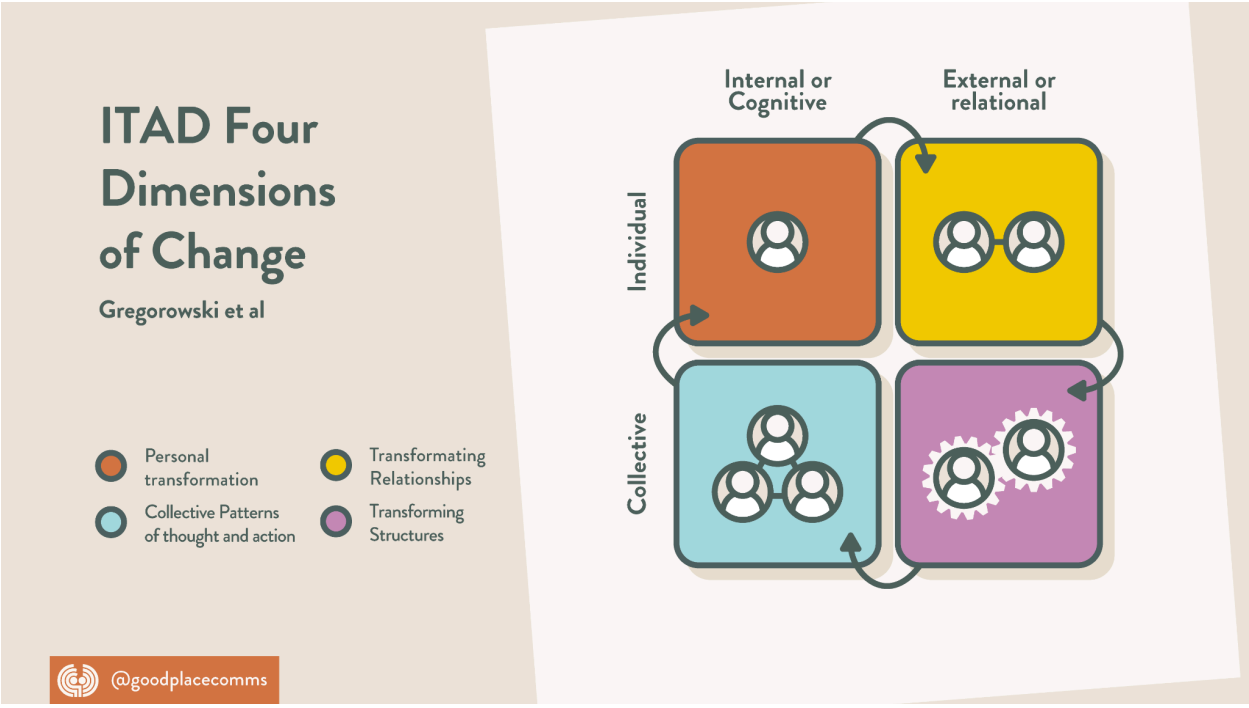
Another way to measure the impact of our campaign is to test it using public opinion research. This can be very expensive, so isn't essential, but you can test videos and posters in a survey setting to see how people react, or in focus groups. You might even test the creative among friends, or people you know who resemble the audiences you're trying to reach. You can also conduct A/B testing in digital formats to see the impact of the communication intervention on those who saw it online versus those who didn't.

Defining a change logic

To understand how change occurs, models have been developed which help us understand and position our work. Although every process of change is different, they often share certain features. These common features are what the models try to capture.

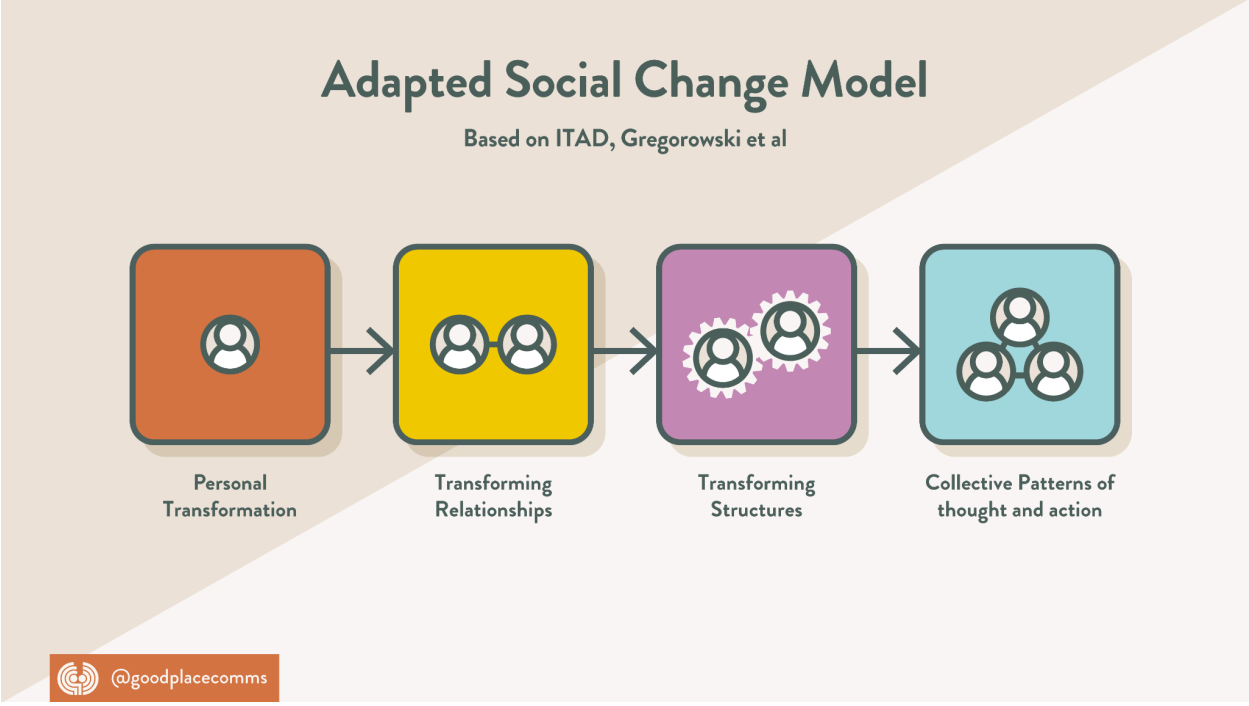
There are a number of **change models** that will help us explain to colleagues how and why public interest communication can support broader climate-friendly outcomes. Many models share a bottom-up approach, where individual-level changes add up and begin to influence norms within communities and societies, which in turn influence governments, to create reform to accelerate change towards climate outcomes. These models can operate at many different scales — for example, an organisation, a community, a city, a country, or even the whole world.

Here is the 'Four Dimensions of Change' model, adapted from ITAD. Starting in the top left part of the circle, we can start to see how our communication intervention could transform perceptions and actions among individuals.



This then builds towards interest and change at a relationship, community or societal level. This might be conversations in social media, or reporting in traditional media. This can then become visible to leaders, allowing public audiences to make demands of their governments and institutions to take action. These legislative, economic or institutional reforms then become self-sustaining, leading to longer-term shifts in behaviours, norms or attitudes. You can see some examples of this in action, at the section “Consider measurement and metrics”, below. A communication campaign will tend to focus on directly influencing the top two quadrants (**personal transformation** and **transforming relationships**), in order to indirectly influence the bottom two (collective patterns of thought and action, and transforming structures and systems). However, in planning, delivering, and evaluating interventions, it is important to consider all four.

Using a more linear approach, such as the one illustrated below, we can better see where and how different activities might influence each quadrant, and helps us plan for measurement activities to help us understand our impact. How are we measuring personal transformations? How are we measuring the transformation of relationships, and structures?



Assessing the cost of measurement vs. our time and resource constraints

Measuring the success of your messaging can take up time and resources. For a very resource-constrained organisation, how do you know if you are devoting the right amount on measurement, rather than too little or too much?

Most evaluation practitioners recommend saving between 5 and 10% of your overall budget for measuring effectiveness. This is meant to apply to some of the most well-resourced organisations in the world, so it's fine if your budget doesn't quite look like this. What's important is that you don't avoid measurement and evaluation altogether. Even for a resource-constrained organisation, it's a really critical part to understanding what you did, showing other people what you did, and learning from what you did.

The purpose of this guide is to help you avoid the cost of research and data-collection from expensive sources, but admittedly this guide still requires some of your time. And for under-resourced organisations, time is of the essence.

Spend a few minutes early on to design some measurement activities. This can help save time in the long run (since a retrospective evaluation is much harder, and can be more expensive, than one you have planned for). By planning out some measurement activities, you can also help delegate some of this data collection to other people in your organisation or team - perhaps volunteers, or those who run your social media accounts, or anyone helping you create and deliver your media content.

Further reading

Why is public interest communication important to climate change?

Public interest communication can be used for any issue. In this guide, we tend to use **climate change** for many of our examples. Communication efforts can help shift individual behaviours to better support climate outcomes, for instance when it comes to recycling, transport use, and diet. However, individual climate-supporting behaviours aren't enough to meet global climate targets. For that, legal, economic and institutional change is required.

To support legal, economic and institutional reform, public interest communication can help increase demand among public audiences that their governments and institutions must do more. In this way, public interest communication can be used as a **political advocacy** tool, to influence decision-makers to make the legal, economic and institutional reforms necessary to support rapid, just and robust climate action.

Public interest communication is often 'outward focused', running campaigns to influence policy or wider social norms. However, public interest communication can also be more 'inward focused', seeking to drive change within an organisation. Sometimes the two may overlap, for example when a very large and diffuse organisation might resemble 'the public', and when similar communication efforts are required to create lasting change. We can look at **models of social and organisational change** to understand more about how public interest communication can support the legislative and financial systems change required to save the planet.

Learning from other change models

A change model is a framework used to understand, manage, and implement change within an organisation or a group. These models provide structured methods to guide the process of transition from the current state to a desired future state. Change models are tools. There is no one correct change model. Occasionally it might be useful to look at the same set of challenges using more than one change model. So far we have mentioned the ITAD **Four Dimensions of Change** model, Prochaska's **Stages of Change** model, and Schwarz's model for **Universal Human Values**. Here are a few more. We're not going to explain them in detail, but we want to include them so that readers who are interested can go and find out more.

Lewin's Change Management Model involves three stages. First, the "Unfreeze" stage prepares the organisation to accept that change is necessary, creating awareness for the need for change. The "Change" stage involves transitioning to the new state, where people begin to resolve their uncertainty and look for new ways to do things. Finally, the "Refreeze" stage ensures that the change is sustained over time, making the new ways the standard operating procedure.

Kotter's 8-Step Change Model starts by creating a sense of urgency to motivate people to move from their comfort zones. Next, it builds a guiding coalition of influential people to support the change. Forming a strategic vision and initiatives provides clear direction for the change efforts. Enlisting volunteers involves contacting as many people as possible, ideally across many different parts of the organisation, and inspiring and empowering them to get involved. Removing barriers enables action, and generating short-term wins provides momentum. To maintain progress, the model calls for sustaining acceleration, and finally, the change is institutionalised by embedding it into the organisational culture.

The ADKAR Model consists of five stages: Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, Reinforcement, and is similar to the Stages of Change model, by focusing on the incremental determinants of success when it comes to individual or organisational change.

Systems mapping is not a one-size-fits-all model, but a way of creating your own model to fit your situation and goals. In system mapping, we create a diagram to visualise all the important 'things' in a system, and understand the intricate relationships and interactions among them. This approach is useful for recognising how various parts of the system influence each other, including feedback loops that either reinforce or balance the system over time. There are formal definitions of a *system*, but we can more easily think of it as *"all the things I am interested in influencing, plus the things that influence them."* Maybe this includes existing media, or governments (national vs. local), or political structures. Maybe these are our friends and family, and our social norms. These are messages that we see each day which in some way influence the way we act or behave. This mapping can help us think about the environment in which our message might land, as well as additional structures we might want to influence.

Systems thinking is especially interested in "non-linearity," where a small change leads to a big change, or vice-versa. As a simple example, a change in one person's attitude may make a big difference if that person happens to be the Environmental Minister. On the other hand, a lot of resources could be spent upstream on trying to change individual behaviour through communication, which might end up making only a small impact if the right structural incentives are not in place downstream.

The systems thinking guru Donella Meadows suggests some places where intervention in a system can be effective. For example, if you can alter the overall **mindset** or **paradigm** from which the whole system arises, this can produce profound transformations. Meadows says, "Paradigms are the sources of systems. From them, from shared social agreements about the nature of reality, come system goals and information flows, feedbacks, stocks, flows and everything else about systems."

Of course, altering an overall paradigm is very hard to do. There are many other ways to intervene which may be easier to do, especially on a tight budget. For example, another leverage point is the **distribution of power over the system's rules**. Or empowering different **stakeholders** can lead to changes in how the system operates and whom it benefits. Modifying the **rules** themselves can directly influence system

behaviour. Systems mapping may also reveal **feedback loops**, either reinforcing feedback loops (such as the compounding interest in a bank account that grows and grows) or a balancing feedback loop that tends toward an equilibrium (like a progressive wealth tax).

Systems thinking and public interest communication can be complementary. Mapping the system you want to influence, and identifying potential leverage points, may give you insight in how to design your goals and outcomes, and which audiences to target.

Assessing the limitations of change models

Do change models centre the Global North? Do they centre organisations with lots of resources? A model that helps you to change something will usually have some assumptions about how that thing operates in the first place. For example, many change models assume that when enough individuals change their perceptions and behaviours, a critical mass can build until bigger actors (such as community groups, civil society organisations, or loose social movements) also begin to behave differently. This in turn can begin to make leaders and policy-makers behave differently. These assumptions are often true. **But they may be more or less true in different places, at different times, and about different issues.** We recognise that these models and approaches will be more relevant or less relevant to different public interest communicators around the world.

It is also possible for things to get “lost in translation” as they escalate, and it’s possible to generate **unintended consequences**. Leaders and policy-makers may find a way to address the changed perceptions and behaviours in ways which don’t align with your goals. Rather than listen to protest marches and change legislation in line with protestors’ demands, maybe the government of the day decides instead to outlaw a public’s right to protest. It’s worth considering these models in a way which is realistic to your environment. As public interest communicators, it’s important that we take steps to **avoid doing any harm**.

Perhaps another weakness of most existing change models is that they tend to be optimistic. They focus on defining a goal, and successfully delivering it. But this doesn't reflect the full experience of many organisations, and in particular resource-constrained groups. Maybe we need more change models that support those with resource constraints in trying to change something, but also in failing in ways that are safe and do some good, even if it wasn't what was originally intended. This is where measurement can help, as it gives us data to understand and learn from what we've done, but it also helps us identify weak spots. It helps us become more comfortable with analysing and learning about both the good and the bad.

Thinking through ways to build a movement

A movement is a group of individuals, perhaps with some organisational support, campaigning towards a change in policy, culture or norms. There are a number of ways to build movements, but they are difficult to do. Movement building is a part of public interest communication, but it requires different approaches, as it often requires a combination of ingenuity, capitalisation on a political or cultural moment, and grassroots organisation efforts.

There are many ways to build and grow a movement, depending on the goal and context. Here are a few important principles to help get you started. Tearfund produced these guidelines as recognised factors of success of movements over the years.

Values	Develop a set of core values (eg non-violence, mutual respect, integrity) and put them in writing. You can then regularly check that the movement is sticking to these values over time.
Vision	A clear vision of what could be achieved will help people to feel inspired, motivated and ready to help build a better future.
Skills	Different members of a movement will bring different skills, eg the ability to organise events, conduct research into an issue, plan, communicate well, or understand the law. Mutual sharing of knowledge, experience and skills will increase confidence and provide everyone with the opportunity to lead and contribute.

Relationships	Relationship building helps members to feel part of something bigger than themselves. A lack of hierarchy, and the feeling that all members of the movement are leaders, are key to sustaining motivation and action.
Advocacy Demands	The advocacy demands of a movement need to be clear, specific, and communicated well if they are to get the attention of decision-makers.
Plans	Small actions can help create momentum, and small, early successes provide motivation.
Patience	Bringing about the social, political or cultural changes you want to see may take a long time.

Approaches to help us come up with creative ideas

After you have identified goals and defined outcomes, you will want to design some communication activities (see "Designing communication activities"). By definition, there is no reliable recipe for creativity, but the principles outlined in this guide will help you craft messages that have the most chance of success. In addition to these, there are certain approaches that can help to produce creative results.

Typically these approaches involve **ideation.** This is usually done in a group setting to generate more ideas, and is useful to do among individuals who resemble the audiences you're hoping to speak to. In the first phase, **divergent thinking** (commonly known as **brainstorming**), the goal is to come up with as many ideas as you can very quickly, without worrying if they are good or bad. In the second, **convergent phase**, you select the most promising ideas and develop them further. Sometimes the idea that seemed the silliest may actually produce the best result.

The discipline of design also offers many exercises that can help with ideation. For example, in **Crazy 8s,** each participant folds a piece of paper into eight sections and then has eight minutes to sketch eight distinct ideas, with one minute per idea. The **Worst Idea Exercise** encourages participants to come up with the most terrible ideas they can think of for delivering a message or solving a problem. By deliberately thinking

of bad ideas, the pressure to generate the "perfect" idea is removed, often leading to surprising and innovative solutions. Once the worst ideas are listed, the group then analyses them to find hidden gems. You can also use **random prompts**, for example, using a random word generator, or opening a book to a random page, to get inspiration. Can you come up with a message which relates to the random word or concept, and still aligns with your intended outcome?

Identifying emergent opportunities

Within public interest communication, it is important to have clear goals, clear outcomes, and to baseline or benchmark your indicators, so you can measure the progress you make towards your goals.

However, in the course of a campaign, sometimes “low hanging fruit” or other opportunities may be revealed. Especially for low income communicators, grabbing these opportunities may be important. But how do we tell the difference between an emergent opportunity that is worth pursuing, and a mere distraction?

This is where your communication planning comes in helpful. Imagine you notice during a social media campaign that one piece of content is generating significantly more engagement. This is useful to boost your visibility numbers, so maybe you double down on that piece of content and remove the other. But take a moment to think about why it’s generating significantly more engagement. Is it funnier? Is it more relevant to the current situation? Or is it just a better piece of content? And is that extra engagement generating greater impact? Or is it just being seen more? Sometimes the thing that generates the most engagement might not always generate the greatest impact overall. Go back to your planning pages to think about whether this greater engagement also contributes to greater impact.

A common mistake among public interest communicators is to speak to people who already support our position, and encourage them to take action. That’s because, on the Stages of Change model, these people are easier to motivate. This is true. But what if the decision-makers of the day are more likely to listen to voices other than those who agree with us? What if young people on social media are more likely to take action, but

the government is more likely to ignore them, and instead listen to older voices, or experts? It's worth identifying "low hanging fruit" to decide whether it suggests a strategy that's worth following, or if there are better ways to use our resources elsewhere.

Other emergent opportunities might lie in a **cultural trend** which influences audience perceptions. Maybe there's an election happening, maybe the country has recently become obsessed with a new TV show. In your strategic and creative discussions, it's worth thinking about the things coming up that you can plan for (e.g. an election, anniversary or celebration) and having communication plans or creative ideas ready to go when it's time. It's also worth identifying unexpected emerging trends and going back to your strategies to think if there are ways for you to capitalise on that. Perhaps you can shift your creative a little, or boost visibility of your creative by aligning it with the cultural movement, through hashtags or other media formats.

Learning and failing fruitfully

A positive mindset is important in any public interest communication campaign or intervention. But it is also worth thinking about what to do when things don't work out the way you want. Especially for low income communicators, it may be necessary to know when to pull the plug, and divert resources elsewhere. You may also have captured insights and information that you don't want to waste—so how do you save them for a future intervention, and/or share them with other stakeholders who could make use of them?

This can be particularly important when we are thinking about larger structural and systemic changes. A well-resourced organisation might regularly ask, "What have we learned, so we can do better next time?" A constrained organisation might ask those questions, or they may not have the luxury of trying again.

Here is an extra **Wrapping Up activity** you can try when things have not gone the way you would have liked.

Extra activity: Create a safe space where everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts, and/or allow anonymous feedback. Focus on extracting key learnings from both failures and successes by asking:

- "What can be learned from this?"
- “Even if we didn’t achieve our goal, can we identify ways in which we contributed to our outcomes?”
- “Who needs to know this?”
- “How can we create lines of solidarity, support, and collaboration, both internally and externally?”

Conduct a basic stakeholder mapping exercise: ask who are the main audiences you have been trying to influence, who is impacted by the success or failure of your messaging, and who could impact the success or failure of your messaging. Make a list of broad categories of stakeholder. From these categories, take special care to identify fellow travellers, other organisations or groups who might be facing similar challenges, or interested in similar goals and outcomes. Explore opportunities for mentorship, collaboration, and the sharing of best practice by asking:

- "Have you encountered similar issues?"
- "How have you addressed them?"
- “What have you learned?”
- “Can we work together?”
- “Who else shall we contact?”

You can also engage stakeholders by sharing your findings and asking for their feedback. Ask questions like:

- "What did you observe?"
- "What insights can you add?"
- “What do you think these results tell us about what we might do in future?”
- “How can we collaborate to boost our impact?”

Using stakeholder mapping

For resource-constrained organisations, full audience segmentation research may be an unaffordable luxury. However, the lighter touch processes of stakeholder analysis and stakeholder mapping may be useful instead.

Stakeholder analysis is a process used to identify the individuals or groups who have an interest in or are impacted by something — a campaign, project, organisation, initiative, etc. This may simply mean brainstorming who your stakeholders are. The definition of a ‘stakeholder’ is very wide — it is anyone who might be impacted by your campaign (or the underlying issue), or who might impact the outcomes of your campaign. From your initial list of stakeholders, you will probably want to identify your key stakeholders. These should definitely include any audiences you want to reach. They could also include other stakeholders who have particularly high interest and/or influence.

It can help to represent all this visually. To do this, you can do some **stakeholder mapping**, for example plotting them on a matrix, often using axes like "influence" and "interest." This helps prioritise engagement strategies, ensuring that key stakeholders are effectively managed throughout the campaign’s lifecycle.

	Low interest	High influence
High influence		

Low influence		

Usually stakeholder mapping involves quite broad categories (e.g. "customers," "suppliers", “voters”, “decision-makers”) but sometimes it might be more granular and specific (e.g. named organisations, communities, individuals).

Stakeholder engagement refers to the process of actually talking to stakeholders, to better understand their views, and sometimes to include them in decision-making processes. Connected concepts include co-production / co-creation, as well as participatory design and participatory decision-making

Optionally, there are **stakeholder mapping and stakeholder engagement standards** which you can use. Standards like the AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard (AA1000SES) provide a more detailed and structured approach to stakeholder analysis, mapping and engagement, and can help with inclusivity and transparency. By following recognised standards, organisations may be able to challenge their own assumptions about whose voices matter, ensure that their engagement practices are consistent and credible, and minimise biases and gaps.

There are some **pitfalls** to be aware of. There is a risk of unfairly excluding certain stakeholders, including marginalised or less powerful groups, or stakeholders who are indirectly impacted (we live in a complicated and interconnected world, after all). Another issue is engaging stakeholders merely to collect data (as a bit of free or cheap market research, perhaps), or to fulfil regulatory requirements, without genuinely empowering them. This can lead to tokenistic engagement, where stakeholders feel

their participation is superficial and their concerns are not taken seriously. We might speak to young people, for instance, to hear their views about climate change, but not adequately represent them in the development of our systems and plans. There are also questions about who can legitimately speak for a particular community, group, or audience segment. Over-reliance on formalised mapping techniques might overlook the dynamic and evolving nature of stakeholder interests and relationships.

Money also complicates matters, as always: if budget is available, should stakeholders be compensated for their time? If so, what is a fair amount? There are pros and cons to paying participants in stakeholder engagement processes. On the pro side, it can help to include those who would otherwise be unable to participate. But on the con side, it can sometimes lead to stakeholders misrepresenting who they are, or what they really believe (perhaps telling you what they think you want to hear).

Finally, the way stakeholder analysis, mapping and engagement has often been practised, it can exclude the **potential** stakeholders. Sometimes we go out and actively create new stakeholders — for example, by recruiting people to a cause, or finding a collaborator or partner we can work with. This may be especially important for resource-constrained organisations.

So to the traditional stakeholder analysis and mapping, we suggest adding another phase: **stakeholder ambition scoping**. What are your ambitions about who your stakeholders should be? Who would you *like* to be stakeholders, even if they are not currently stakeholders? Think about all those groups, organisations or individuals that are *not* stakeholders, but could potentially become stakeholders. You can also think about how minor or peripheral stakeholders could become more central, important stakeholders.

Connecting with people and organisations like us

It’s especially important to know that you’re not alone in your quest to make the world a better place. For every issue area a public interest communicator wants to influence, there are thousands of other communicators, nonprofits and even some funding organisations (e.g. foundations and governments) that are interested in this topic too.

Find ways to connect with other communicators, other issue-area groups and other organisations that you can learn from, and who can learn from you. You'll be surprised how willing they are to collaborate, because advancing public interest outcomes - and in fact saving the planet - is in the best interests of all of us.

Many of these organisations will have funds to conduct some research about their audiences. Ask if they'll share it with you and organisations like you, through webinars or virtual conferences, or even just via email.

They may also have conducted their own systems mapping which could help you with yours, or eradicate the need for you to reinvent the wheel.

One part of expanding the discipline of public interest communication methods, is to show how we can all benefit from the work of each other: academic learnings about what will help create change; practitioner learnings about what works and what does not in the implementation of our work; and funder learnings who have spent resources on understanding audiences, targeting them with media interventions, and evaluating their own programmes and portfolios. A large part of our work at Good Place Comms is to try to make this sharing easier: persuading large organisations to better distribute their learnings and finding better ways to connect them with the change-makers who exist all over the world.

Collaboration is key to being a public interest communicator, and if there are communities to join, join them. If there aren't, create them. You'll be amazed at what you might learn.

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Additional Resources

Climate Acuity uses arts, storytelling, and play to communicate, innovate, and strategise around issues that matter to people and planet.

Good Place Comms are advocates of data-based decision making who work with grant-making foundations, governments and non-profit organisations to create public interest communication, advocacy and investment strategies to support the United Nations' global goals.

The Center for Public Interest Communications (University of Florida) "helps organizations around the world discover how behavioral, cognitive and social science can unveil insights into how people think, make decisions and behave. Through the use of science, systems thinking and human-centered design, the Center helps organizations create and implement powerful communication strategies."

The Journal of Public Interest Communications "is an open-access, interdisciplinary journal that publishes **peer-reviewed research in the emerging field of public interest communications."**

RadComms is a network of communication practitioners, "growing and strengthening the ecosystem of social-change communications by bringing together a global cohort of communicators to cross-pollinate conversations across a variety of movements, backgrounds, levels of experience, geographies, languages, and political associations and by radicalizing the field to focus on building narrative power thereby putting people closest to the oppression at the center of our efforts."

ITAD “provide expert monitoring, evaluation, learning and strategy services that help organisations improve their performance and catalyse positive lasting social, economic and environmental change” and are the source of the ITAD social change model mentioned in the primer.