



Department for
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& Net Zero



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Developing and delivering your strategy: Stakeholder engagement and communications guide



Public Sector
Decarbonisation
Guidance

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What is the purpose of this guide?

The purpose of this guide is to help you think about the stakeholder engagement and communications plan for your decarbonisation programme. This guide will be helpful when you are first developing your decarbonisation strategy, as well as throughout your programme to make sure your engagement and communications remain targeted and effectively support your success. To develop your plan, you may wish to seek support from a communications professional within your organisation if such a resource is available.

We welcome your feedback on this resource, please email ESC at PSDecarbGuidance@es.catapult.org.uk

1. Benefits of a good plan

Aims and benefits of a high-quality stakeholder engagement and communications plan

There are significant benefits to having a clear and easily understood plan. These include:

1. **Being clear about what you are seeking to achieve.** Your plan can tell you where you need to go and how to get there
2. **Understanding the interactions between diverse stakeholders, messages and channels.** Going through the communications planning process will help you identify who you need to reach, what you want them to know, and how you will reach them. Each stakeholder group will have its own specific needs. The planning process will uncover this, helping you develop the best ways of communicating with each group
3. **Achieving results.** There are many ways of communicating and engaging, the plan will set out the priorities and methods to achieve optimum results
4. **Being relevant to your stakeholders.** A clear plan will lead to your messages reaching each stakeholder group in a way which is easily understood and relevant to their needs

Mapping stakeholders and their needs

The first step to developing your plan is mapping your stakeholders. A clear and robust process should include some key steps:

- Identifying each stakeholder group
- Understanding their needs
- Developing a stakeholder map
- Choosing relevant messages and channels to reach each group
- Reviewing the communications with stakeholders

The following questions will help you identify your key stakeholder groups:

- Who will be affected by, or involved in our activities? For example:
- Those with oversight of the programme or who need to agree the strategy
- Those whose reputation might be impacted by the programme, for example senior or political leaders in your organisation
- Those delivering the decarbonisation projects, both internal and external, this includes your procurement and legal colleagues, internal delivery teams and external contractors who will be critical to your success
- The public, service users, staff or customers affected by changes to the operating environment
- Those with a broader interest in decarbonisation

Once the stakeholders for the decarbonisation programme or project are identified, review the list and identify the interest they are likely to have in your programme. This mapping can then be used to help you think about the most effective way of communicating with each group. This is an ongoing process, as stakeholder interests may change from project to project and over time. The stakeholder map should be seen as organic rather than fixed and reviewed at regular intervals.

Once your map has been developed initially it can be helpful to consider the following questions:

- Why are we communicating with each group? Be clear about the reason, examples could include:
- Informing people of why this decarbonisation programme is being implemented and the projected benefits
- Securing buy in for your strategy or individual projects (this could be informal or formal, for example through a business case process)
- Their help is needed for delivery, for example procurement teams or facilities management teams
- Alerting people to works being done in particular areas or buildings
- Reporting on progress on reducing emissions
- Which groups or individuals should be prioritised? You may not have resources available to cover all the groups identified.
- What are the most effective ways of reaching each stakeholder group? Are there existing methods (for example developing and submitting a business case, or via a defined procurement process), meetings or other approaches like social media accounts or newsletters, or will new methods of engaging

need to be developed?

Considering the needs of each audience group and answering the following questions will help ensure that their needs are met, the methods you chose to communicate with them are appropriate, and you are more likely to be successful:

- Are you aiming to provide information, or do you also need to influence?
- How are they connected to your decarbonisation programme?
- Why are their broad interests/areas of focus and specifically what are they interested in regarding your programme? For example, all finance teams will be interested in value for money, but the team might have a more specific focus as well if your programme was delivering an innovative solution.
- What outcomes are most important to them?
- How do you or your organisation currently communicate with this stakeholder? Is this enough?

2. Key elements of an engagement and communications plan

There are some key areas to address when you are developing the plan for your decarbonisation project or programme. The following represents some good practice features. However, tailoring your plan to optimise the impact on and benefits to your organisation's stakeholders should be the guiding principle.

Aims

Provide a short commentary on the decarbonisation programme your plan covers, and the purpose of the engagement and communications plan.

Objectives of the plan

Clarify the key objectives that you wish to achieve with your communications. Make sure that they are [SMART](#) (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) objectives, as this will provide the same discipline to the communications plan as the strategic programme has itself.

Know your audiences

For higher priority groups or individuals, or those you need to influence for successful delivery you may wish to do more detailed work to understand their views, priorities and possible objections, enabling more tailored messaging. For example, Ministers or Councilors might need a dedicated plan, or all service users might be too big a group to consider, so you may need to think about specific service user types or specific local communities.

Methods

A good place to start is by understanding the existing methods for communication and engagement within your organisation. For example, you may have an internal communications team, an externally facing team (for example a press office or marketing function) and already have established processes for engagement or communication, for example sign off processes, relevant meetings or boards, newsletters, social media or an intranet. The suitability of these existing

mechanisms to deliver your objectives can then be considered once you have mapped your stakeholders.

You may need to develop new methods of engagement or communication for your decarbonisation programme to complement your governance structures and processes you are using to deliver. For example, you might need to set up a new page on the intranet, or a new mailing list to particular stakeholder groups. Using the right method for the right stakeholder group is key to success.

Messaging

The decarbonisation messages should be focused on the identified stakeholders. Depending on the topic, you may develop different sets of messages for various audiences, tailored to their area of interest. This may change as time goes on and your programme matures.

For stakeholders that need to be influenced, ensure you understand what information they will need and want to receive, when they need to receive it and in what format is their preference.

For stakeholders that need to be informed, focus on the outcomes of the decarbonisation programme or project rather than the process. Ensure that your messages highlight the positive difference your programme will make to the individual stakeholder groups. Use the what, when, why, who, where and how questions to make sure you've included the basic information in your messages.

Channel plan

When thinking about your communication activity think about your routes to reach the particular stakeholder group. This could include for example: media releases; fact sheets; articles; brochures; events, a post on social media or other news media. Consider who will be responsible for stakeholder or media responses, and ensure you have enough resources to respond.

For stakeholders that need to be influenced, ensure that you understand any processes that you need to follow, or any individuals you need to target. For example, understanding the business case or strategy sign off processes. If possible, seek advice from those running the processes, as well as teams that have successfully navigated them on how best to proceed.

Review

Measuring and reviewing are key to learning from experience and improving your decarbonisation engagement and communications over time. The measurement data can be drawn from a range of sources, for example: formal research; social media or other feedback from stakeholders (both internal and external); focus groups and surveys; volume of website hits or retweets; and potentially the amount of media coverage of your decarbonisation programme.

Checklist of good practice

When thinking about reviewing your approach and how successful your programme is at communicating its messages, a useful checklist of good practice includes:

- Do your communication and engagement objectives cover all your priority stakeholder groups?
- Is your approach in line with your strategic decarbonisation objectives, and does your activity reflect your approach?
- Do you have activity that targets each of your priority stakeholder groups?
- Are your messages appropriate for your different audiences?
- Will your measurement technique help you assess how effectively you met your objectives?

3. Working with your communications team

The following two sections of this guide are less focused on stakeholders directly involved in programme delivery and more about external communications. There is more information about setting yourself up for success regarding internal processes in [Theme 4 guide - Funding](#) and the Maturity Matrix Guide.

In order to develop a professional communications plan and delivery, working well with your in-house or externally provided communications team, if you have one, is very important. However, the language of decarbonisation and net-zero transition may not be something that the communications team are experts in. Therefore, there are some simple planning steps that you can work on together with your specialist communications colleagues which will create a common language for you both. Here is an idea of a set of questions that you can answer together, which both sets out what you are trying to achieve and gives a framework for professional communication support.

- **Objective:** What do you want your communications to achieve?
- **Message:** What information or call to action will this communication contain?
- **Plan:** When and how often will you deliver this communication?
- **Route:** What channels will you use to communicate to stakeholders?
- **Methods:** What tools and platforms will you use?
- **Stakeholders:** Who will receive this communication?
- **Responsibility:** Who is in charge of the communications plan, and for responding to stakeholder feedback and/or media responses?

Many communications teams have strong relationships with the trade press, but these websites and journals may be less familiar with decarbonisation issues. There may be net-zero specialist reporters which the communications team will need to establish a working relationship with. Also, there are specific green journals/publications like EDIE, Current; Green Business Journal; Green TV and many others who may well be interested in your programme and news of its successes.

4. How to communicate success and progress

In this section, we set out some ideas about good practice for communicating success and progress. The examples use and relevance will be dependent on what you are trying to do. For example, communicating about a programme for decarbonisation at the start is likely to be done differently to reporting or communicating successful milestones along the way, e.g. new technology implementation or amounts of carbon and money saved.

Act positively and be realistic about what communications can achieve.

The journey to net zero can sometimes feel a bit overwhelming and some of the media commentary surrounding climate change can be pessimistic. Wider factors may also have a negative impact on the stakeholder groups you are trying to communicate with. At times, unfortunately, this may turn some people off from really engaging with the issue and can blunt the value of your communications.

We know that people respond best to goals that feel achievable. You will have much greater success in making people feel good about your organisation and its decarbonisation programme if you emphasise your goals and plans to meet these, and benefits of what you are doing rather than the scale of the problem itself.

Personal stories convey meaning and can create empathy. People respond well to real-life stories. One example could be to get the agreement of your staff team to use inspiring accounts of their efforts in your decarbonisation projects, in order to bring some personality to the issue. This also makes net zero and decarbonisation easier to relate to for people, who might not see the relevance of the technical implementation or the level of reduction of carbon emissions. It's good to use stories which are personally relevant to the stakeholder group too, for example a faster service, greater reliability, or any other benefits from your decarbonisation activities.

Promote the projects that will help you transition to net zero. Showcase the changes in your organisation that are needed to make the transition to net zero feasible. This is an opportunity to communicate on your commitment and also the innovations that will help your organisation reduce carbon emissions. It is very important to show to people how your decarbonisation activities create real impact to people on a day to day basis.



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