

Communications plan guidelines for EPA-Funded Research Projects

One of the main goals of the EPA Research Strategy 2014 – 2020 is to increase communications and awareness of the research funded by the EPA Research Programme. The knowledge generated by EPA Research can help Irish people make better choices about their futures - from the government using our knowledge and data to inform their policy making, to enabling individual citizens to make more sustainable and healthier decisions in their daily lives. For this reason, the EPA requires a Communication Plan to be prepared for all new projects (except projects funded as part of the Green Enterprise Programme) and fellowships funded from the 2014 research call onwards¹.

A communications plan is a core document within a project management plan. Although communication plans should be customised to suit the project, the first questions that should be addressed when putting a communications plan together are:

- **Who** do you want to communicate to?
- **What** message(s) do you want to communicate?
- **When** do you want to communicate?
- **What** is the best communication channel to use?
- **Why** do you want to communicate?
- **How** are you going to communicate?

A good communications plan will give the researcher or project team a focus on the messages of the project and will build credibility and visibility for both the organisation undertaking the research and the EPA. For the purposes of EPA-funded research fellowships and projects, all communication plans should contain the following headings:

- Stakeholders
- Key Messages
- Outputs
- Channels
- SMART Goals
- Budget
- Evaluation

Stakeholders

Please provide a list of all relevant stakeholders - this should include:

- The people who **need** to know about your project
- The people you **want** to know about your project
- All interested parties, or those who may be affected by the research

¹ The communication plan for projects awarded following the 2016 call should be submitted via email to the relevant EPA project manager

Key Messages

Please list 2-3 key messages that you want to convey to your stakeholders. These may be different for different groups, i.e. the message for policy makers could be different to the message for a technical audience. Please ensure that you

- include the main points that people want and need know about the project once it is complete.
- link the main objectives and outputs of the project, e.g. if you are producing a database, you should communicate that the database is available and explain why it is of benefit to your stakeholders.

Stakeholder Specific Messages

Please also consider using stakeholder specific messages if you need a certain stakeholder to know something that may not be relevant to other groups, or if the outcomes of your project will have an importance for a certain stakeholder group, i.e. policymakers, it may be appropriate to have a tailored message specifically for communicating with these groups. This will not be applicable for all projects and should be limited.

Outputs

Please list the expected outputs of your proposal. At a minimum the EPA expects the following outputs to be confirmed:

- Final report
- An appropriate number of peer reviewed papers (indicate target journals in channels section), in compliance with the EPA's Open Access and Data policy. Please refer to Terms and Conditions of Grant Award and Guide for Grantees for further details.

Additional outputs that will bring added value to the proposal include, for example:

- Good practice guides, leaflets, toolkits, book chapters.
- Non-peer reviewed publicity (articles, policy papers,) smart phone applications etc.
- Models, databases, surveys and questionnaires, photographs, audio or visual recordings, software code and software libraries etc. All data must be made available via the [EPA Research Data Archive \(SAFER\)](#)
- Oral or poster presentations at peer reviewed conferences.
- Organisation of events (such as workshops, conferences or short "lunch and learn" type presentations) to communicate the results of your research.

Channels

Please consider what methods you will use to communicate your key messages and stakeholder specific messages, e.g. website, social media, events, publications, etc.

It is important to note that it needs to be communicated that the project outputs (final reports, peer reviewed papers, posters, presentations, etc.) have been produced, so just generating a report or a journal article is not sufficient. The channels through which Stakeholders will be informed that these outputs are available also needs to be captured in this section.

Channel Specific SMART Goals

The Communication plan needs to include **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**imebound goals for each channel that has been listed e.g., set up a website within 6 months of project start and update when new project information is available. The purpose of setting SMART goals is to keep focus by setting time limits and to make evaluation easier.

Communication Budget

- 5% of the overall budget must be allocated to communication, (3% whilst the project is on-going and 2% for post completion dissemination).
- Already available resources within academic institutions should be used where possible, for example, put your project information on your academic institution's webpages instead of creating a standalone website, use the institute's in-house repositories to publish outputs to ensure green open access and make use of institute venues to host meetings and events.
- Please note that all projects must comply with the EPA's policy on Open Access and Data. Green Open Access is the optimum solution. This budget may only be used for Gold Open Access in exceptional circumstances, subject to approval in advance by the EPA. Expenditure on Gold Open Access that has not had the prior approval of the EPA will be deemed ineligible.

Evaluation

It is essential that evaluation of your plan takes place whilst the project on-going as well as once it has been completed. This allows for improvements and amendments to be made to the plan, if needed.

The evaluation should:

- Be linked to SMART Goals – how will progress be evaluated?
- Constantly evaluate what is working and what isn't. Not all channels are suitable for all projects.
- Consider and recommend appropriate corrective actions to be adopted if necessary e.g. If a channel isn't working, evaluate if more time or resources should be invested, or if something else should be focused on.
- Include metrics to support the effectiveness of various communication activities to different audiences. (e.g. number of twitter followers, number of hits on project website, number of attendees at 'lunch and learn', newspaper circulation, radio / TV audience, number of downloads etc.)
- Consider what success looks like and work backwards.

A Communication Plan template is included at the end of this document. A word version of this template can be downloaded from the [EPA Website](#).

Communication Plan Template

Please fill in all sections of this template.

Stakeholders

E.g.:

- *Policy makers*
- *Research community*
- *Steering committee*
- *Public*
- *EPA*
- *NGO's*
- *Public representatives*
- *Local Government*
- *Media etc.*

Key Message 1

Key Message 2

Key Message 3

Stakeholder specific message 1 – if any

Stakeholder specific message 2 – if any

Outputs

- *E.g.:*
- *Final Report*
- *Peer Reviewed journal articles*
- *Good practice guides*
- *Leaflets*
- *Toolkits*
- *Book chapters*
- *Models*
- *Databases etc.*

Channels	Why did you choose this channel	SMART Goal	Time Frame	Evaluation Method	Estimated Budget
<p><i>E.g.:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website Newsletter Social Media EPA Research Reports Peer reviewed publications Project Events or workshops Attendance at conferences Media Direct contact Targeted Briefings Outreach Meetings Infographics Posters 	<p><i>E.g.:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting up a website with all project information in one location will enable the team to disseminate information easily to all stakeholders 	<p><i>E.g.:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up a website within 6 months of project start and update when new project information is available. 	<p><i>E.g.:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setup within 6 months and on-going for duration of project 	<p><i>E.g.:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All project outputs and updates available on website Use Google analytics to measure visits to website 	<p><i>E.g.:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> €300 from on-going budget for hosting fees for duration of project €300 from post dissemination budget for on-going hosting after project completion

Acknowledging EPA Research

Please remember to clearly acknowledge EPA Research in all project communications.

The standard wording of: “This project is funded under the EPA Research Programme 2014-2020” should be used on all project outputs.

Please remove all references to STRIVE or ERTDI Programmes.

Printed literature

The EPA Research Logo should be included on all project posters, websites and literature. The logo is available in a range of formats. If you require a copy of the logo, please contact research@epa.ie.

Social Media

For Twitter accounts, please use either: @EPAResearchNews funded project or funded by @EPAResearchNews in the Twitter Bio section. For other social media sites, please use the standard wording above.

Press Releases

For press releases that are being issued by your organisation, we ask that you mention that the research is funded by The EPA within the first couple of paragraphs, using a sentence similar to the one below:

“This research, which was/is funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Research Programme 2014-2020....”

Please include the text below (including the hyperlink to the website) in the notes to editor’s section.

EPA Research Programme 2014–2020

The EPA’s current Research Programme 2014–2020 is built around three pillars -Sustainability, Climate and Water.

More information about the EPA Research Programme can be found by visiting the EPA Website where you can sign up for the quarterly Research Newsletter. This provides news and updates about research calls, events and publications that are of relevance to researchers and other interested parties.

You can also follow EPA Research on Twitter @EPAResearchNews for the very latest information and developments about the Research Programme and its projects.