Communications

Handbook

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Communication strategy

A communication strategy covering the aims, target groups and messages forms the backbone of a project communication plan.

The legal basis for the communication strategy in the INTERREG IVB projects is expressed in the Commission regulation (EC) No 1828/2006 in articles 8 and 9. This regulation formulates the basic obligation of the project partners, which reflects the general approach of the EC to communicating the information about the structural funds:

> *"The beneficiary shall be responsible for informing the public ... about the assistance obtained from the Funds."*

1. Set clear objectives

Communication needs to be goal-driven. We communicate to achieve or change something; therefore it is important to define communications objectives properly in advance.

At the same time, it is not sufficient for a project to define its objectives as "to raise awareness" or "to communicate our activities and results". Communications objectives need to be clearly defined, detailed, achievable and measurable. Its ultimate goals could be to improve legislation, to inform public policy on a particular topic, to improve public services, to change opinions of certain stakeholders or to raise public awareness of a specific issue.

It is important to make a difference between the project objectives and communication objectives. In addition, it is necessary to distinguish between internal and external communications objectives. Both need to be addressed: communication between the partners as well as communication, which is targeted to stakeholders outside your partner organisations, including the general public.

The starting point is to understand and define what you and your partners want to achieve, and develop project specific communications aims.

2. Identify your target groups

The key stakeholder audiences your project needs to communicate with are called "target groups". These groups all have different characteristics and needs. To be effective, it is important to know precisely who you need to address and think about the target audience every time you communicate.

How to define target groups?

Target groups can be easily identified by developing a list of important people and organisations that you want to know about your project and its work. Be sure to include all partners in this brainstorming exercise!

Examples of well defined target groups could be "politicians and public officials dealing with water management", "regional business support organisations", and "public transport authorities". However, "EU", "politicians", and "academic institutions" are not specific enough. Finally, remember not to consider media as a target group; they are a tool to convey your messages to the true final audience.

3. Develop messages

A message is a simple and clear idea that acts as a guiding principle for all kinds of communication – everything from the content of leaflets, brochures and websites to the agenda for a media interview, to conversations with stakeholders.

A message is not the same as an advertising slogan or a marketing line. Messages sum up the main aims of your project and may focus on some of the specific aspects of the project.

It is essential to think about the audience every time you communicate. Different target groups are reached by different tactics and different media. Messages need to be tailored to be appropriate for different target groups – what is relevant to local policy makers, might not interest the general public.

A good message will be immediately appealing to its target audience: it should be strongly worded to stand out from everything else that is competing for their attention.

At the same time, it is important to keep things clear and simple. Do not use more than three messages at any time, otherwise your audience will suffer from "information overload" and fail to grasp any of these ideas. Instead, to multiply the effect, try to send few messages from different sources and on different occasions.

How to develop project messages?

1. Try to put down what you do in one short sentence. What problems does your project tackle? How does it benefit the participating regions? Why should people care about this issue? What would be the best possible headline about your project in the media? What three things would you like the audience to remember and tell someone else about your project?
2. List the target groups, create a table and match each audience with a communication objective – state what you want to achieve by communicating with them.
3. Mark down what ideas and information you need to communicate to achieve these objectives. This is the basis for your messages.
4. Check the list of draft messages and combine similar ones, if possible. Decide which messages are the most important.
5. Try to refine the language and say the same messages in a more simple way. Remove all unnecessary words and complicated vocabulary. Look at each word and ask whether it would be understood by someone who is not fluent in your language or who doesn't know much about the subject matter of your project. Make every word count!
6. Show the messages to people outside your project. Friends and family will do, but journalists or people close to your target audiences are better. Do they understand? Are they interested? If not, try again.
7. Finally, select the best three messages. Support each message with evidence and examples ("proof points"). Make sure everyone within you project is familiar with how to use them as every piece of external communications should be executed in line with your key messages.
8. Periodically, take a look at any press coverage and see whether your messages are getting across. If the messages are not working at all, you need to think again. However, do not take this step lightly – this is the essence of your project. This is why you should put effort into getting it right during the first time.

A message should be a short sentence (up to 25 words), which is simple, clear, credible, memorable, positive, active, free from jargon, easily identifiable, and adoptable in different communication tools.

Messages can come in a form of a statement, idea or assertion: e.g.
- "(x) is a problem and (y) is the solution."
- Project (x) enables (actors) to cooperate on improving (y)."
- "The work of project (x) is valuable because (y) and (z)."
- "(actors) must share solutions on the issue of (x) because…"
- "(x) must take action on the issue of (y), otherwise (z) will happen."

4. **Create a time plan**

5. **Define your budget**

Communication activities

This section gives an overview about the main communication tools and practical tips. It also provides an insight into the specific characteristics of different media, teaching how to create media interest and giving useful tips about communicating with the press.

Below are a number of communication tools that you can combine to generate interest and awareness in your project. All of these tools and tactics are useful, but it is important to find a right mix and in each case consider whether the coverage generated would merit the cost. Be sure that the result is sufficiently valuable to you and is in line with the overall communication strategy of your project. Always make sure that all expenditure is eligible.

1. Basic non-media tools and activities

Project events

Organise events that are interesting for your target audiences and for media to attend. This can be a conference, an exhibition, a round table discussion, a field trip, a briefing, etc.

Website

A website is an invaluable tool for your project. It is the first source of information about you for many people outside your project, so it needs to contain the right information in a clear and accessible design and structure.

The website should give an overview about the project, its objectives, progress and results, partnership and their contacts. Develop a section for the press (including the latest press releases, fact sheets, photos and links). A login-based Intranet for partners can be a useful tool for exchanging information as well as having an overview of the responsibilities of the partners and the implementation of the project.

Use simple messages and language that is understandable for everyone. When developing the content, have in mind that on screen people's eyes scan around unpredictably and settle on interesting keywords. As people lose interest quickly, break up your text with sections and bullet points, highlight key words and be as concise as possible. Update the website regularly; consider using an RSS feed to keep readers informed.

Pay attention to web site design and usability: make it user-friendly and practical . Good websites have an intuitive system of links to all the key pages and sections of the site. The reader should be able to access all information with no more than 3 clicks. Make it easy to navigate between pages and remember that not all users will enter the site at the front page. Keep the design minimal and professional, avoiding any sound, movement or clashes of colour. Look for value for money.

Writing for the web

Content is the most important part of a website. When writing web texts, try to anticipate what kind of information the users need. Always use short sentences and simple language– when you write, think about the person with the least expertise on the subject. Avoid acronyms, abbreviations, jargon and everything else typical readers might not understand. Be neutral in your language, otherwise you risk losing credibility and people's trust.

You should support your readers in their goal to find useful information as quickly as possible. To get your message through you have to know the reading habits of web users.

People tend to read text on websites very differently from the way they read on paper. On paper, people read sentences fairly predictably from left to right, and persist through long stories. On screen, people's eyes scan around unpredictably and settle on interesting keywords. On paper, people are more likely to read to the bottom of the page. On screen, people lose interest more quickly and many people do not bother to scroll down.

Main recommendations for writing for the web would thus include:
- Highlight key words (bold typeface, colour, hypertext links)
- Use meaningful sub-headings (e.g. no metaphors)
- Break up your text with sections and bulleted lists
- Use the "inverted pyramid" writing style: present news and conclusions first, details and background information later
- Be concise. Avoid long texts that require scrolling. Use half of the words you would normally use in a written text.

Publications

Create publications for your project that are easy to read and understand. This also applies to the rather technical studies and guides. The brochures, guides, leaflets, flyers, fact sheets, posters, etc. do not have to be done by a professional company. What is more important is that they contain the right information about your project. Quality of the content always comes before expensive design, layout and printing. Cut the jargon, keep it simple, get to the point and ensure that each item emphasises the same consistent core messages of your project.

Vary the format of your content, use boxes, lists, bullet points, and graphics. Be realistic how much information can be conveyed in the space available and do not crowd the design – leave a substantial amount of white or empty space to make the content easier on the eye.

Make good use of graphics and imagery – use bold and striking pictures, preferably including some action or and interesting view or place, rather than bland portraits, group pictures or handshakes.

Publications are expensive. If you don't have budget for bulk printing, opt for online marketing materials that can be downloaded from your website in a PDF format.

Remember to have all publications checked by a native speaker, preferably by someone with editing experience. Always check that the publications meet the publicity requirements.

Newsletters

Newsletters are a good medium to let people know about your project, inform readers regularly about recent changes, new initiatives, events in which you have participated, or even interesting case studies. They also provide a written record of your activities and can create interest in upcoming events.

Depending on your project's scale and workflow, a newsletter can be published monthly, quarterly or annually. If you prepare a regular newsletter, develop a new theme for every issue and focus a number of your articles on this theme. Encourage all your colleagues to write articles. You could also ask local politicians, NGOs or other organisations to contribute articles or editorials.

If you don't have budget to print, consider creating an electronic newsletter that can be available on your website and in an email version. It is user friendly to use the HTML code for the newsletter text - then the newsletter opens automatically on the screen and speeds up the process of reading. HTML is also stored easily on the Internet. However, also allow a choice between text and HTML format for those who might not be able to download the codes. Keep the layout simple – do not include unnecessary pictures or colour backgrounds.

You can also check newsletters compiled by other organisations as they can be interested in INTERREG project activities. This is a great opportunity to reach out to a new segment of your target audience.

Promotion materials

Promotion materials are items carrying the visual identity of your project folders, e.g. bags, pens, USB hubs, cups, calendars, T-shirts, etc. Always make sure the materials have practical value and keep ecological aspects in mind when producing them.

Organising/Participating in external events

Take part in external events such as exhibitions, conferences, trade shows and round-table discussions. This could be either as an exhibitor (although sometimes there might be a charge for this), speaker or even a delegate. External events give you an opportunity to come face-to-face with your target audiences and tell them about your project. Always go to events with your information pack and press kit to give to people who might want more information about you. If there are journalists at the event, use this as an opportunity to develop relationships and tell them about your project.

Find speaking opportunities as this allows you to reach out to your target audiences. This could also mean giving talks at schools, universities, business groups or other organisations. Make use of opportunities to raise the profile of your project and to share information about your good work. Make it interesting for your audience, provide lots of examples, and always speak about the importance of European cooperation. Be interactive and always plan time for questions from your audience.

Remember that participation in external events contributes to the promotion of the project and its results, as well as of the institution or region involved. One of the major promotional events organised on the European level are e.g.:
   - Open Days – European Week of Regions and Cities who deal with implementing the European Cohesion policy.
   - Euregia – international trade fair for local and regional development in Europe.

2. **Examples of possible additional activities**

Social media

The Internet offers an array of modern opportunities to promote your project. Different options include blogs, social networking (Twitter, Facebook, etc.), and wikis.

Blogs are easily created and regularly updated websites that work like an online diary, discussion board and news forum [3]. Creating a blog can be a good way to showcase a project and to get people involved in its development. Your blog can be hosted on your website's server or you can set one up for free with many blog hosting services. However, if you create a blog for your project, make sure to update it regularly and encourage other people in your project to participate.

You can also explore the world of social networking [4]. To give a few examples, Twitter (www.twitter.com) is a networking environment for sending short online messages (e.g. project news). Facebook (www.facebook.com) is a website mainly used for getting in contact with friends, but can also be used as a tool to raise awareness about causes and initiatives (e.g. inviting people to join a cause or participate in the project's events).

Wikis are websites which allow easily creating and editing any number of interlinked web pages. Wikis can be used for creating collaborative websites, storing your project's results and for simple note taking. It could

also be useful to enter an encyclopaedic article about your project in Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org).

Videos & documentaries

Filming documentaries and videos can be a way to reach specific target groups (including the general public), especially through local and regional media. However, it is very time consuming and costly, so it should be considered carefully.

A less expensive option would be to upload a video clip to an online video service such as YouTube (www.youtube.com) or Google Video (video.google.com*).* Also include a link to the video on your website.

Networking and finding supporters

Get out to events and activities and speak to people about your project. Network whenever you meet opinion-formers, politicians, non-governmental organisations or business leaders. Consider every contact as a potential opportunity to further expand your network and reach your aims. Tell them about your project, promote your messages and show their added value in this process. Find people who would endorse your project, who will be like ambassadors for your project and will speak about it when out in public. Prepare and circulate briefing documents to make sure that your supporters also understand and forward the same core messages.

Participate in award schemes or create one yourself

An award scheme can generate awareness of your project with your target audiences and with the general public. If your project can develop a creative awards scheme, even if it is mainly symbolic, and encourage people to apply, it could create more awareness among your target audiences.

RegioStars –The Awards for Innovative Projects – is an annual award scheme for most innovative and interesting projects which is a part of the communication policy of the Regions for Economic Change initiative. Its objective is to identify good practices in regional development and thus reinforce their transfer and visibility. Further information can be found at the following address: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/innovation/regiostars_en.htm

3. Media Communication activities

This section gives an overview about the possibilities you have in terms of different media, shows how to create media interest and find press opportunities.

Communicating with the Media

Know your media

Europe is home to an enormous number and range of news media, each with a different target audience and its own news values. It is not possible or desirable to target all of them. Projects should consider two factors when deciding which media to target:

1) Which media do our own target audiences pay most attention to?
2) Which media will consider our messages newsworthy?

The answers to these two questions will usually be similar, because media define news as information that their own target audiences want to know.

Media	Target group	Specific features

National, regional and local newspapers	Can target the national, regional or local population, but also specifically people working in business, intellectuals, people supporting a specific political party, etc.	Afternoon deadlines for morning distribution and around lunchtime for evening distribution. Style ranges from serious politics to soft gossip.
Magazines	Can be focused on news, general consumer (e.g. men or women), specialists (e.g. fishing, health), industry or trade (e.g. transport, technology)	Articles are sometimes planned months in advance; there is an opportunity to pitch your stories for next issues.
TV and radio	Can be focused on an age group or a specific area. Often produce own news. Often have shows targeting a specific audience.	News is fast moving and immediate; stations often work to very tight deadlines.
News agencies and wire services	Deliver raw news to all major media to adapt for their own input, often report local news to international audiences.	24/7 news coverage, work very fast and often break news first; strict deadlines.
Internet news	Main sites are affiliated to larger newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations. In addition, there are Internet media portals, specific industry sites, and newsgroups.	Internet news provide endless PR opportunities.

It is recommended to first contact the media target at the public administration (e.g. periodicals issued by regions or ministries). This is also recommended by the DG Regio to contact the EC representations in your country and other informations relays such as Europe Direct in order to cooperate with them in terms of media contacts and promotion possibilities.

Develop relationships with reporters

Try to find out their story interests, work processes and deadlines, and be as helpful as possible. However, do not inundate journalists with too much information and do not be too pushy. Think of long term relationships, not short term coverage.

Get to know your local media and find out what kinds of stories interest them. You can call or email them, but it might be even better to invite them out to lunch or coffee to develop personal relationships. When you do have news, try to organise interviews for them with key people from your project.

Send a letter to the editor

This can be in response to an article from a previous edition. The letter can argue a point of view or express an opinion, agree or disagree with an article, or be used to dispute facts and figures – or even the entire article. A letter in response to an article must be sent within 48 hours and should not exceed 150 words.

Write opinion editorials

An editorial is an expression of opinion on an issue by an individual who doesn't work for the publication.

These are normally written by communications people, but carry the signature of a well-known or high-level person. The subject matter should be timely and linked to something that is already in the news. There is no sense talking about flooding if the media are covering a drought. Be sure to contact the publication in advance and limit the writing up to 400 words.

Link your project to other news and events

Link your project's media coverage with other events and news on EU or national level. Use other news stories as a way of generating news for your project. For example, projects in the field of transport could create links to the European Mobility Week and Car-free-Day, the European SME week could be an opportunity for entrepreneurship projects, etc.

Position people involved in your project as industry experts

Try to get people working for your project quoted in newspaper articles or on television and radio. Media are always looking for people to offer expert opinions, so let them know who your people are.

Write a case study

A case study is a short writing (up to 1 page of the publication) about your project's work. The normal formula for a case study is to identify a problem that your project has addressed, explain what you did to fix the problem and describe the results. Case studies explain in concrete or human terms what your project does. What are the practical applications? How does it affect people from your region? What kind of problem is it helping to address and why is it important? This practical information often provides the real-life illustration that journalists need to grasp a story. Be sure to include interesting quotes!

Send a press release

Issue a press release if your project is doing something new, interesting or different that would interest regional, national or international media. A press release will encourage journalists and news agencies to develop articles on the subject. Always carefully target your press release and ensure that it has news value. Try to keep the press release to one page. If you have more information, you can always direct journalists to your project website.

Organise a press conference

A press conference can be effective if you need to communicate a news story to target media simultaneously. A successful press conference requires substantial resources, including 15-20 full days of work. Organise a press conference only if there is news of real interest to the target media or when the only way you can respond to a whole range of questions posed by a large group of media is by holding an open conference. Do not abuse the method to announce details. If only a very small, selected group is involved, it might be more effective to hold individual briefings. Often the story could be better covered by just distributing a news release, holding a briefing or telephoning media contacts.

If it is necessary to hold a press conference, send out invitations at least two weeks in advance and choose a central location for the venue. Request journalists to give full particulars at the registration desk and include these in your press list. During the event, allow enough time for questions and record what is said. After the event publish the transcript on the website and send it to media who could not attend but would be interested in the news.

Publicise research results

Provide news material based on research that has been undertaken as part of your project or is linked to your project. Write a concise executive summary that is interesting and easy to understand, preferably using straightforward media-friendly language. Newspapers and magazines are full of reports and statistics issued by companies and organisations – this can be a great headline-getter.

Create a survey

Link a survey to your project and publicise the results to the media, especially if it highlights a problem or shows that you are making a real difference. Make it relevant to your key messages and news angles that are likely to interest media.

Organise a tour or a press trip

If your project is involved in something interesting, organise a field study or a trip to let the press see your project in practice. But remember there must be some kind of news in it and you need to plan it well to actually show them something useful. Moreover, as the IVC programme operates mainly on the policy level, you need a good reason like a very interesting sight or a novel solution which can be presented in an attractive way in the media. Avoid just pictures of meetings or static images.

Forward feature lists

Many media have a schedule of topics and themes for future issues. Ask to see the forward feature lists of your target publications and offer to contribute to any themes that are relevant to your project.

Prepare story ideas

Have something ready what you could pitch if called by a journalist. Good PR is not only calling media when you need them but being ready to offer story ideas and being helpful when they need you.

Creating media interest

The first thing that goes through a journalist's mind when he or she reads your news release is always: "So what? Why should my readers care?" Think hard about what journalists and their audiences would be interested to read. Take the information you have, and tell it in a way that makes them care.

News value

News can be hard (information that people need to make decisions) or soft (human interest and entertainment). Look for an angle that will connect your agenda to something your audience cares about.

Have in mind that people outside your project are not interested in the process – what they care about is results and meaning. A key principle is to **look for the intersection** between what you want to say and what they want to hear. When INTERREG projects fail to communicate effectively it is often because they are talking about things – like process – that fall in the circle on the left, but not the circle on the right.
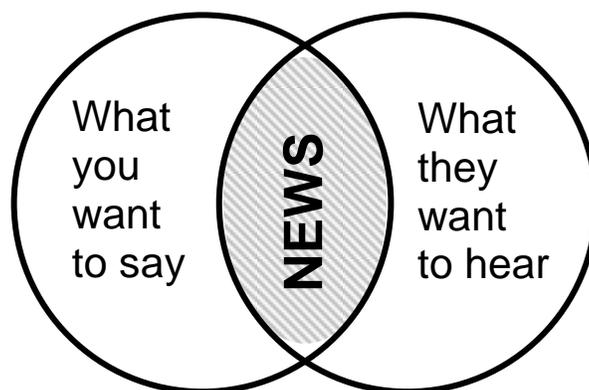
What kinds of ideas and information tend to lie in that intersection?

At one end of the scale, "**the very big**" issues are always interesting: the major themes like innovation, quality of living, jobs, the environment and climate change. These ideas are in the news and in people's minds and conversations every day. All INTERREG projects address big issues in one way or another. Communicating about how you are part of the solution to big issues will get you into that intersection.

At the other end of the scale, "**the very small**" issues are the local results and impact that people feel on their doorsteps and notice in their everyday lives. These are the results, the concrete impacts and changes that INTERREG projects make in the real world – not the theory of territorial cooperation or the process of cooperation, but tangible outputs like better paid jobs through innovation or safer houses through flood protection.

Messages will not make the news if they just say how worthwhile and important a project is. To get published or broadcast, a project must shape and adapt its messages inventively to be newsworthy. In general, news is about people rather than things, and concrete events rather than abstract ideas.

Think hard about how to touch your target audience. What do they care about? Why will this matter to them? To generate interest in your project and its activities you need to develop creative news angles that will capture the interest of your audiences over the activities of other organisations.

Creating media opportunities

Do not wait for journalists to contact you. Go to them and anticipate their needs by drawing their attention to key events and interesting aspects of your project.

From time to time, almost every person within your organisation will come across an event or an idea that is newsworthy. Sadly, not everyone will recognise it when they see it! Here are a few guidelines for spotting a PR opportunity.

- Think **interest**: will this be interesting to other people?
- Think **news**: how your local paper or radio station report?
- Think **local**: how does it involve people locally?
- Think **people**: the media are usually more interested in what people are doing than in what organisations are doing.
- Think **communities**: what contribution has your project made to a community initiative or activity?

If brainstorming sessions are not enough, try to ask a friendly journalist what they would consider newsworthy about your activities. You will probably have to spend some time explaining what you do, but they may come up with something you hadn't even thought was worth a news release. They might also be able to help with news angles for the story. Often, it is also possible to link your activities or project to other news stories to generate news for your project.

Working with the press

There are standard tools that you should have prepared before you begin doing media relations for your project. These include:
- Communication plan for the overall media strategy
- Press kit with information about your project and the programme
- All relevant logos and EU publicity requirements
- Biographies of any key people who will give interviews
- Media lists with contact details for key journalists
- Photos (preferably uploaded on your webpage)

- Writing style guide to ensure everyone writes consistent materials
- Events calendar of forthcoming events you are taking part in
- A system for archiving press coverage

The following section describes the main tools you will need when working with the press: press kits and press lists.

Press kit

Every project should have an up-to-date press kit that contains fact sheets of all the important information about your project, case studies and biographies of key people.

Although press kits are designed to be presented to journalists, they can also be an important source of information for other people who want information about your company, such as European institutions, local governments, industry associations, regulatory bodies, member state governments, and the general public.

If journalists conduct an interview with someone from an organisation, or if they receive a press release, they usually need additional information. A journalist can always do their own research about your project, but this could take them a long time. So giving them a press kit could make the difference between them writing a story about your project or not – and between that story being right or wrong.

Press kits can either be in a hard-copy printed format or available electronically, either by email or on a website – it's usually a good idea to have both. Remember to have them in an easy-to-read format.

Your project's press kit should have a nice professional-looking folder with your project name and logo placed in a prominent spot on the front cover.

The press kit should contain the following:
- A general fact sheet about your project: what is your project doing and why is it interesting?
- Background information about the project
- Any brochures or materials that might be interesting for the journalist (if it won't be interesting, don't include it)
- At least one case study on your project
- One or two relevant recent articles published about your project
- Recent press releases that you've issued – one or two is enough
- Biographies of any key people or of the main spokesperson
- Recent photos of your project – either hard copy, links to website, a CD or USB stick

Press list

Know your media and know your reporter. Each project should have a press list to keep track of all media contacts. You are responsible for making basic list of media contacts. In case you need to extend it, you may refer to your NCP or IP, but it is also recommended to contact the EC representation of Europe Direct. Be sure to update and complement this list with further media contacts relevant to your project.

It is particularly important to find out the frequency with which media appear and what the editorial deadline is. There is not point in sending a press release on the day that a weekly publication goes to press – the journalists will be too busy, and the pages already set.

Read, watch and listen to your target media regularly. This will help you to identify what they consider to be newsworthy and what angles they take on events. You can take this to a personal level by searching for previous stories written by a particular journalist: identify themes in his or her interests and gather all the information in the press list. It is always better to contact the media with a reference name, otherwise your effort might get lost amongst everything else.

Organising events

There are many opportunities to hold or take part in events that bring together your project partners and key target audiences. Use the events to communicate your key messages directly to your target groups and generate awareness for the value of the work that your partnership does.

This section of the manual in conjunction with the event management checklist focuses on a range of ideas and practical knowledge that will facilitate the organisation and management of effective events.

Preparation

INTERREG project events can sometimes be weak because they are seen as an objective in themselves rather than as a strategic tool to achieve a bigger objective. An event needs to be conceived and planned with a clear purpose in mind and deliver long lasting value.

Planning has been the key for INTERREG projects that have organised successful events. It depends on a clear understanding of the purpose of the event and the target audience, matched to an appropriate event plan. For instance, if you want to influence policy on a regional level, it will be very important to plan an event that will be appealing to regional policy makers.

Be sure to start planning early. If you are holding a large conference for 300 people, you will need to begin a year before the event.

Organisers
Build a team responsible for the event and put together a detailed plan. Identify local contact persons and allocate roles to the team members. If the direct decision-makers are not part of the organising team, make sure to brief them regularly. Hold regular meetings with agenda points and minutes; keep the whole team informed and committed.

Audiences
Think laterally when considering target audiences for an event. Which groups of people can you interest in attending? Which groups of people have the potential to help you to achieve your practical and communications objectives if you can reach out to them through an event? Who has a stake or an interest in your subject matter? Who is already involved, but could become more committed or useful to your project if you engaged with them more closely?

It never hurts to be ambitious in planning a list of people you would like to attend. There are no guarantees that they will come, but you can improve your chances a great deal by thinking hard about how to make the event attractive for your target audiences. Think about what they are interested in. Why would they want to come? How can you make your event appealing to them?

Budget
Projects have a set budget for their events and you will normally not be able to exceed this. Check all costs in advance. Your budget will ultimately determine where you hold the event, the number of people you invite, and the quality of the support material (such as presentation handouts, press packs, brochures, etc.). However, it is good preparation and execution that will determine the overall quality of the event.

Start a budgeting spreadsheet as soon as an event is planned and make a team member responsible for tracking costs. Allocate all fees and costs; keep some contingency budget for emergencies. Be aware of public procurement procedures and the time needed to contract services. Always ensure eligibility of expenditure.

Theme/title
The headline theme of an event defines its identity and is an important factor in helping people decide whether or not they want to attend. The theme must fit your project's objectives and the communication

strategy.

Keep it short, simple and easy to understand. If your project is about developing parks in urban areas then "Spatial planning and trans-national cooperation for the effective use of green spaces in urban centres" would be difficult to understand for many external audiences. A conference theme such as "Improving green spaces in European cities" would be much more effective.

Timing
The date chosen should not conflict with any other events that your target audiences might also be interested in attending. Check carefully if all relevant employees and spokespeople are able to attend. Also check for clashes with other more newsworthy events: political events, holidays, etc.

Agenda
Always make sure that the format of your event is based on the needs and interests of your target audiences. Organise sessions and arrange speakers in a clear and logical order. For example: general introduction to the topic, specialist views and case studies, workshops on different aspects of the topic, summary and conclusions.

As a general principle, don't rely excessively on one-way communication. Include regular interactive elements in the programme, such as panel discussions, workshops and break-out sessions for discussions. Always allow plenty of time for questions and discussion. Be sure to build in regular breaks to encourage networking possibilities and for busy attendees to answer phone calls, send emails, etc. Build in some flexibility in the programme, for example if some presentations do not finish on time. Plan enough time for coffee breaks (20-45 min) and lunch (1-1.5 hours).

If you want media to attend your event, ensure that you have interesting sessions for them or organise an event specifically for journalists, such as a briefing, press conference or interview opportunity. If you want to attract national news media and want coverage on the day of the event for TV and radio, or the following day for print media, you should organise such sessions in the late morning.

Speakers
Interesting, knowledgeable and skilled speakers are one of the make-or-break factors of any event. High profile names or people from well-known organisations will help to make your event appealing to target audiences. Individuals who are naturally good at presenting to groups can also transform the atmosphere and impact of the event itself.

Depending on the nature of your project and event, interesting speakers to invite might include:
- European policy: people from the Commission or Parliament
- National policy: people from Member State governments or organisations
- Regional policy: people from regional assemblies, local authorities, etc.
- Experts: academics, researchers, think-tanks, etc.
- NGOs: with an interest in your project
- Industry: many projects have some link with industry and it is often important to involve them in some way with your project – offering a speaking slot can be useful
- Trade associations: relevant EU or Member State-based bodies

When inviting speakers you will need to provide them with more information on the event, normally in the form of a draft programme, a briefing on the types of people attending the event (including other speakers) and a summary of what they are expected to do. Develop the invitation early to give your speakers as much notice as possible. Always follow up proactively in person afterwards: do not assume that people received, read, or registered your invitation or that they will respond to you.

Provide speakers with presentation templates. Obtain and assess all their presentations and hand-outs well in advance of the event. Discuss and confirm fees, travel expenses etc. in advance and for prompt payment.

Moderators

A good event can become great with the addition of an excellent moderator. Make sure that you have someone who is able to manage the event, lead discussions and debates and make the event interesting and relevant to participants. If necessary, you may consider hiring a professional moderator. Many journalists also make good moderators; ask some of your media contacts if they know of someone suitable.

Venue

Before researching suitable venues have some idea of how many people you expect to attend, how many rooms you will need and what kind of catering is required. Make sure the venue is accessible for the people you wish to attract. Always ask for several offers and check what is included in the price (e.g. catering, technical equipment, etc.). Visit the venues before making a decision. Negotiate on the price and contract and avoid paying up front – credit card guarantees sometimes work.

If your budget is small and you cannot afford to hire a venue, consider using a meeting room in your office. If the event is to be held outdoors, make a contingency plan in case of bad weather.

Catering

If you are going to provide food, a buffet is a good idea as it allows people to mix and talk. However, allow for enough tables and some places for people to sit down. Ensure that you allow for all dietary requirements.

Accommodation

Insist that delegates book accommodation well in advance. Make a block reservation in a nearby hotel, if possible, especially during other major events or in cities with limited hotel capacity.

Technical equipment

Think carefully about what technical equipment you will need for holding the event – laptops, projectors, screens, etc. Always check what the venue provider has to offer; some equipment is often included in the price. Arrange a site visit in advance and also check the equipment to be used. Ensure that on the day of the event you will have somebody available for support at all times - preferably in the presentation room but at least in the building.

If possible, collect all presentations before the event and pre-load them in one large presentation file on the presentation laptop – run one after the other, including links to any external media.

Consider hiring a professional photographer for bigger events.

Invitations to participants

Develop the invitation as soon as possible to notify target audiences well in time. To inform people about your event it is best to use a combination of email notification, letters through the post and telephone calls. Make sure that the invitation tells your target audiences "why I should attend." Keep everything simple and easy to understand. A dedicated e-mail address is the easiest way to ensure replies. Indicate a reply-by-date and a contact mail/phone number. If necessary, send a reminder closer to the date. Don't forget to include all the necessary logos to the invitations.

Don't forget to use your project's website and newsletters to promote the event. It is also common practice now when organising most significant events to have a dedicated website. This can easily be a page on your project's website. It might be useful to publish a list of attendees or at least mention their organisation name somewhere on your website.

Registration

You can organise registration for the event by e-mail, but common practice is to have online registration. This makes life easier both for delegates and for event organisers. People submit their details online into a database that you can normally access through a private site and output into Excel in order to keep track of delegates. A website that has a content management system will allow you to add, delete and update event information yourself without the need of a programmer.

Have a specific person to be in charge of maintaining invitation list and sending confirmations to participants once they have registered. In addition, send some further practical information about the place where the event is taking place. This can be an info sheet about the location of the venue (address and map), main transport options to get there (information on main airports and how to reach the venue from there), accommodation possibilities and other necessary information.

Rehearsal meeting
Hold a rehearsal meeting a day before the event. Go through the main presentations, anticipate frequently asked questions (locations of rooms and toilets, internet access, etc.) and make sure everybody can answer them. As things never go exactly as planned, also prepare for the unexpected – decide who will make decisions on the spot, also when it concerns additional costs.

Pack all the necessary equipment and materials you need with you from your office: this could include name badges, place labels for speakers, registration sheets, pens and paper, contact lists of suppliers, fully charged mobile phones, a binder with information about receipts and confirmations of bookings, and an EU flag.

During the event

Registration
Make people feel invited. Have someone greet the participants and show them to the cloakroom and the registration desk. Have plenty of people at the registration desks to avoid long lines and to answer to possible questions the participants might have.

An applicant pack could include a name badge, an agenda, presentations, speaker biographies with photos, a list of participants, accommodation details, a map of the venue, a feedback form, tourist information, contact phone numbers of organisers, a press pack, and project publications.

Although delegate packs and paper handouts are regularly used and expected by attendees, there is a slow move towards providing such documentation electronically. Electronic support materials can be downloaded from the event website, e-mailed in compressed format or distributed on a CD following the conference.

Technical equipment
Meet the person responsible for technical support. Arrange and check the necessary technical equipment and set-up, e.g. lectern, video projector, laptop, etc. Check you have all connection cables, power sockets, transformers, adapter plugs. Make sure you know how to adjust air conditioning and the lights. Check if all presentations are available in the laptops and that you are able to open all files.

Guests
Arrange for the arrival of guests in sufficient time for a dry-run and any last-minute changes. Meet speakers on their arrival and introduce them to necessary people, e.g. the person responsible for technical support.

If media attend your event, make sure they are well taken care of. Always appoint people responsible for journalists who can introduce them to people to interview, explain your project, and act as a contact point if they require any information. All journalists who attend your project events should have personalised itineraries that highlight who they will meet and where they should go, and full contact information if they need to follow up with you later.

Photos
Photos tell more than words. No matter whether you have hired a professional photographer or a person from your project, make sure to brief him/her on the main moments you would like to retain and what kind of photos you would like to have taken. Avoid using staged group photos. Prefer realistic and colourful action shots, which can be later used in publications, press articles, thank you letters, and on your website.

After the event

Follow-up
Upload the event documents online (presentations, photos, etc.), take care of all costs and fees, and send thank you notes to all participants and guests. Use photos taken at the event for illustration. Send photos of the event to media who attended as well as to those who did not. Be prepared to answer follow-up telephone calls. Later check and document media coverage.

Prepare a post-event newsletter or brochure or at least follow up on the event in your next newsletter.

Evaluation
Hold a debriefing session with the organisers - discuss what went well and what can be improved in the future.

Go through feedback questionnaires that were filled in on the spot or send a feedback form to all participants a day after the event by email.

Internal communication

Internal communication includes all communication within a project and is just as important as external communication. One might even see internal communication as a prerequisite for all external communication. Internal communication makes sure that all partners speak with one voice and provide the same consistent information.

1. Audiences

For communicating internally with INTERREG projects you have two different kinds of audiences. One group is the people that are working directly within your project. These are your project partners and of course the lead partner.

The second target group consists of the people who work within the partner organisations – whether it is a local or regional authority, agency or foundation. Too often people working on INTERREG projects are too busy to tell the people within the organisation what they are working on and why it is of benefit to people living in the region. If you don't tell them what your project is about and its benefits, they will not know about it. Informing people might also help you find some good third party advocates or endorsers, such as local politicians or organisations that conduct similar or complementary work to your project.

2. Targets and aims

An internal communications strategy should be planned using the same framework as a public relations strategy for external audiences. Define communication objectives and messages which respond to the needs and characteristics of your partner organisations. Be sure to align your internal and external communications.

The aims could be that all partners:
- have the same information (what is done, why and when, responsibilities, deadlines, etc.)
- identify themselves with the main aims of the project
- feel being part of the project
- know their responsibilities and tasks

As to partner organisations, the aims could be that they are aware:
- that they are participating in the project
- what results are produced
- how the organisation benefits from the results
- who is the contact person for the project in the organisation

3. Tools

There are a number of different ways that you can communicate with the people working on your INTERREG project. Below are a few suggestions that you could consider:
- Newsletters
- Intranet
- Telephone conference calls
- Meetings (technical working groups, management meetings)
- Trips to partner institutions or regions
- Team building events
- Internet
  - online meetings
  - file sharing
  - online groups
  - message boards
  - blogs

- Marketing materials

There are also multiple ways to reach out to people who are not working on your project directly, but who work within the same organisation as you do. These can include:
- Newsletters
  - sending them copies of your project newsletters
  - asking them to write an article about your project in their own newsletter
- Intranet
- Website
  - Publish information about the project on your organisation's website
  - Ask to add a direct link or a banner to your project on the home page of the organisation's website
- Meetings
  - Ask to make a presentation about your project at the meetings of other departments
- Marketing materials
  - Distribute copies of your brochures and leaflets
  - Ask to have information about your project included in their marketing materials

Always think about what kind of information is already available for the people working at your partner organisations, what are the attitudes and opinions of the staff at the moment and what would interest them the most.

4. Responsibilities

It is important that everyone within your project knows what is going on and what their role is within the project. It is important to define responsibilities to ensure the communication tasks of the project are managed effectively.

It is especially important to allocate responsibilities for internal and external communication. Make sure that the tasks and responsibilities of the project coordinator and the project component 2 (Information and communication) leader are complementary and do not overlap.

The nature of INTERREG IVB operations means that PR activities must take place on many levels: local, regional, national and pan-European. As you need to execute public relations activities in one or more countries, you will usually need a coordinator to ensure that:
- There is a level of consistency in communications across all countries
- The individual public relations programmes are executed well
- Interaction takes place and best practice activities are shared
- Reporting is carried out in the required way and in a timely manner

Activities that project partners should regularly undertake include:
- Translating, adapting and distributing information from the coordinator to target audiences
- Informing local internal audiences about what is happening with the project
- Initiating news releases and developing PR opportunities for local activities
- Handling local media enquires and developing relations with local press
- Performing media monitoring in their country and/or region
- Reporting to the overall project coordinator

Annex 1: Press release checklist

- Have you identified your target audiences?
- Have you determined your messages?
- Have you chosen the best angle to make them care?
- Are you targeting the right media?
- Will they consider it news?
- Have you put the news in context – the big picture?
- Is all the important information at the top?
- Are your messages consistent throughout the press release?
- Is the headline catchy and shorter than 10 words?
- Does the headline have a strong and active verb?
- Does the first paragraph tell the whole story?
- Does it answer the "so what" question?
- Can you speak every sentence comfortably? Does it sound right?
- Are your sentences all shorter than 30 words?
- Are your paragraphs all shorter than 3 sentences?
- Are there any dull words that you could strengthen – especially verbs?
- Are there any complicated or flowery words that you could simplify? Is it interesting?
- Is it written with energy?
- Can you avoid repeating any words or phrases? Would synonyms help?
- Have you used any jargon or unexplained acronyms?
- Is the tone appropriately businesslike and balanced?
- Is the language objective? Are you over-selling the message?
- Have you backed up your assertions with evidence?
- Have you left any holes or unanswered questions?
- Have you given sources for any external statistics?
- Have you checked every number and the spelling of every name?
- Do your quotes use strong, natural, spoken language?
- Are the spelling and grammar 100 percent perfect?
- Do the format and layout conform to your template specifications? Are all appropriate logos present and displayed correctly?
- Is the date correct?
- Are the contact details present and correct?
- Are the notes for editors present and correct?

Annex 2: Event management checklist

Before the event
- Tasks are allocated to all organisers
  - Invitations and registration
  - Budgeting
  - Welcoming participants
  - Coffee breaks and catering
  - Registration desk
  - Taking photos
  - Taking minutes
- Invitations sent out in time (speakers, media and participants)
- Rooms are available for the number of people expected
- An alternative indoor venue is available for outside events
- A block reservation is made or the participants have received practical information with accommodation recommendations
- Enough time is planned for coffee breaks and lunch
- All organisers are briefed to answer frequently asked questions
- Speakers (and the moderator) are briefed
- All presentations are checked for content and appropriate typeface

During the event:
- A reception desk is available for registration
  - Registration sheets
  - Name badges arranged in alphabetical order
  - Conference packs and promotional materials
- Place labels and water are available for speakers
- Conference room equipment is checked
  - Laptops with presentations
  - Multimedia projectors and screens
  - Cables and electricity sockets
  - Microphones, sound system (big room or many guests)
    - persons handing out the microphones
  - Air conditioning and lights
- Enough toilet facilities are available
- There are recycle bins in the conference room
- All activities comply with the information and publicity requirements of your operation

After the event:
- Event documents and photos are uploaded to your project's website
- Thank you notes sent to all participants and guests
- Conclusions made based on feedback forms and debriefing
- All costs and fees are taken care of

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

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7. European Commission English Style Guide
http://ec.europa.eu/translation/writing/style_guides/english/style_guide_en.pdf

8. 5 useful logo design tips by David Airey
http://www.davidairey.com/5-vital-logo-design-tips/

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http://logodesignerblog.com/

Main European news services:
- Reuters: www.reuters.com
- AFP Agence France Presse, AFP: www.afp.com
- Deutsche Press Agentur, DPA: www.dpa.com
- Associated Press: www.ap.org
- Bloomberg: www.bloomberg.com

Main pan-European media portals:
- EUObserver: www.euobserver.com
  News and reports on European issues
- EurActiv: www.euractiv.com
  EU news monitoring, policy positions, discussion forums
- EuroZine: www.eurozine.com
  Linking over 100 European cultural magazines