



**COMMUNICATING  
ABOUT LITERACY**

Developing Your  
Communications Strategy





Communicating About Literacy: Developing Your Communications Strategy is a supplementary, companion document to the Community Literacy Planning Guide, published in 2006 by 2010 Legacies Now. Download the Community Literacy Planning Guide at [www.2010LegaciesNow.com](http://www.2010LegaciesNow.com).



Communicating About Literacy: Developing Your Communications Strategy is a 2010 Legacies Now publication in partnership with Literacy BC and the Province of British Columbia.

2010 Legacies Now is dedicated to strengthening arts, literacy, sport and recreation, healthy living, accessibility and volunteerism in communities throughout British Columbia and Canada. As a not-for-profit society, 2010 Legacies Now is creating lasting legacies around the province leading up to and beyond the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.



2010 Legacies Now gratefully acknowledges the Province of British Columbia for its ongoing support of literacy work in B.C.



**MESSAGE FROM SHIRLEY BOND  
MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND DEPUTY PREMIER**

Thank you for taking the time to connect people with the literacy services in your community. Your work will help people improve their life chances and economic prosperity. Reading and numeracy are the basic skills we all need to participate in our society. Over a million B.C. adults struggle to read a restaurant menu or bus schedule and lack the skills necessary to read a newspaper or fill out a job application.

This government's goal of making British Columbia the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent is an achievable one. Since 2001, the Province has invested more than \$150 million in new literacy initiatives, including pre-literacy and early learning programs.

As you coordinate information and support, you are doing more than building better access to literacy programs, you are building better communities - where everyone has the same chance to participate and contribute. By dedicating your time and efforts to improving the literacy of others, you share the simple joy of the written word with many.

**Shirley Bond**  
Minister of Education and Deputy Premier



## **MESSAGE FROM 2010 LEGACIES NOW**

Around the province, literacy task group members and literacy coordinators are making a difference every day as they work to improve access to literacy learning for people of all ages. 2010 Legacies Now is dedicated to supporting this important work in communities across British Columbia. We offer support in a variety of ways: through the expertise of our staff, our partnerships with government and a variety of organizations, our Literacy Now Communities program, and resources like the Community Literacy Planning Guide.

We are proud to introduce this new publication – *Communicating About Literacy: Developing Your Communications Strategy* – as a resource for groups that have moved through the community planning process and are now implementing their literacy action plans. Each group has identified important goals for their community. And we want to see every group, and every community, reach their goals.

That's why 2010 Legacies Now, together with the Province of British Columbia and Literacy BC, developed this guide. We hope literacy task groups and literacy coordinators find it useful as they create, implement and evaluate strategies to reach different audiences. We thank them for the work they do, and for their commitment to their community. Every day, they encourage and inspire people to connect with opportunities for lifelong learning.

**Bruce Dewar**  
Chief Executive Officer  
2010 Legacies Now



## **MESSAGE FROM LITERACY BC**

Much of our collective work in community literacy revolves around building and sustaining partnerships – engaging the many stakeholders who have an important role to play. This guidebook will support your efforts to reach out effectively, and underscores the essential contribution that new partners such as the media can make to your success.

As well, as you go through the process of articulating your vision, identifying your priorities and focusing on opportunities and challenges to create your communications strategy, you will find that you have moved a long way towards developing your overall strategic plan.

Amidst the immediate demands of our hectic daily schedules, it is immensely valuable to take a step back and refocus on who we are and what we are trying to achieve. Exercises such as creating your key messages are a powerful way to gain this perspective.

Literacy BC thanks everyone who is mobilizing to support and promote community literacy development, and looks forward to working together to achieve the results to which we are all committed.

**Cynthia Whitaker**

Executive Director

Literacy BC



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## Introduction

Over the past few years, B.C. communities have participated in the 2010 Legacies Now Literacy Now Communities Program and the Ministry of Education's District Literacy Planning Process. These initiatives encourage a broad base of interested community members and key stakeholders to increase local access to literacy learning through collaborative planning. Community literacy task groups across B.C. have established goals, objectives and actions that address the specific literacy needs of each community.

Frequent references in Community and District Literacy Plans to the need for increased communication about programs and awareness about literacy have led

to the development of Communicating About Literacy – A Resource Kit. Part of the kit is this guide, *Developing Your Communications Strategy*, which is a companion to 2010 Legacies Now's *Community Literacy Planning Guide*.

*Developing Your Communications Strategy* has been designed to support community literacy task groups and literacy coordinators to create communications strategies to reach specific literacy goals. These might include encouraging program participation, educating various sectors of society about literacy, and raising funds.



## Why develop a communications strategy?

Many community literacy goals require some kind of communication, and a well thought out communications strategy is a powerful tool that can improve the chances of success. Developing a communications strategy may sound like a luxury, perhaps time consuming or even unrelated to community literacy work, but a good communications strategy can make your work easier by focusing your efforts and helping produce better outcomes.

*“Effective communication is 20% what you know and 80% how you feel about what you know.”*

Jim Rohn  
Businessman, author,  
speaker, philosopher

### **A good communications plan will help you:**

- Explain clearly why your mission or goal matters
- Make a case for all kinds of support (funding, volunteer help, in-kind donations, free space)
- Communicate on a regular basis with key stakeholders

Simply delivering new information to an intended audience is generally not enough. To achieve your goal, you may need to influence a certain group of people to understand something specific about the literacy issue and then move them to respond in a certain way.

Strategic communications is not just information dissemination or raising overall awareness. While these are necessary parts of communications, they are not sufficient to influence people or organizations to change long-established practices or behaviours. For communication to be successful, the intended audience must first receive

information, then understand it, believe it, agree with it, and act upon it.

### **This guide will help you consider these questions:**

- What specifically do you want to say?
- Why are you saying it?
- Who are you saying it to?
- How are you going to deliver it (in how many ways and how many times)?
- What is it that you want to happen after you say it?
- What resources and techniques are required to deliver the message?
- How will you know if you have been successful in delivering the message?

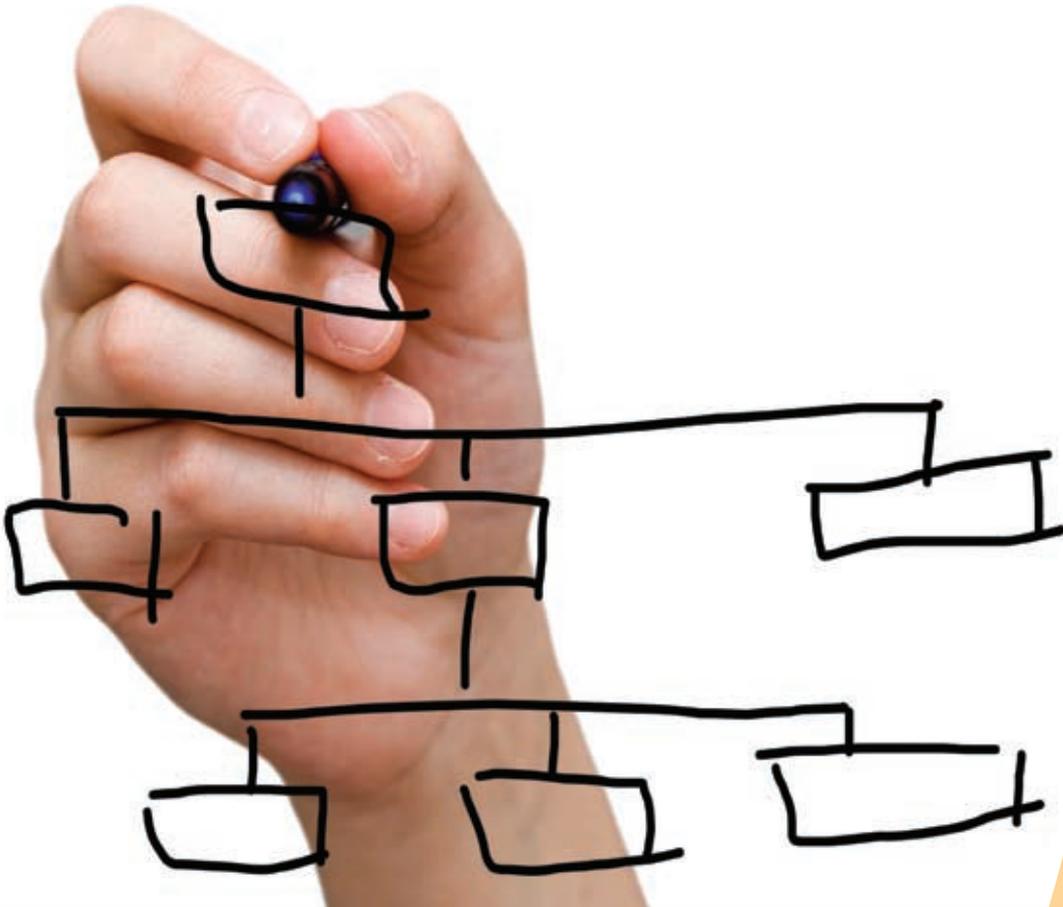
Some of the communication techniques described will be familiar to you and others may be new. Some may be familiar, but require new thinking. Some will match the unique needs of some communities more than others. However, all techniques are worth considering from the point of view that asks, “What would work best for our specific audience?”

# How to use this guide

There are many things to consider when developing a communications strategy and these have been laid out in steps for the purposes of this guide. Each step focuses attention on a specific aspect of developing communications. Of course, in practice these aspects overlap or may be considered in a different order. However, thinking through steps 1 through 5 before going to steps 6 through 9 will help ensure that your communications action plan is closely aligned with your overall strategy.

You will find worksheets throughout the document. They are intended to act as guides to writing your communications strategy.

As this document is version one and will be revised for future use, your feedback is vital. If you have suggestions, comments or stories that you want to share, we would love to receive them. Please send your feedback to [literacy@2010legaciesnow.com](mailto:literacy@2010legaciesnow.com)







## Step 1: Select literacy goals

What is the literacy program, goal or issue you want to communicate about?

You may choose to develop a communication strategy for all of the goals in your literacy plan, or you might prefer to work on one goal at a time.

- Which goal(s) is most dependent on influencing a specific audience in order to be successful?
- Which goal(s) could lead to early success and cause for celebration?

It will be easier to develop a strategy for communicating about a goal if it is specific. It will also be easier to measure results.



*“Your ability to communicate is an important tool in your pursuit of your goals, whether it is with your family, your co-workers or your clients and customers.”*

Les Brown  
Speaker and author

For example, if your literacy plan goal is to identify sources of funding for a lunch and learn program for people who are homeless, you might rephrase it into the following:

Secure \$10,000 by the end of the year to fund a lunch and learn program for 15 people who are homeless.

A literacy plan goal to explore opportunities for creating a homework club could become:

Establish a homework club for approximately 25 Grade 8 to 12 students by next September.

Once you have selected the literacy goal that you want to communicate about, you could use worksheet 1 in this step to clarify the issues and outcomes that surround it. Clearly and briefly articulating the reasons that led you to first develop the literacy goal is an important part of getting ready to communicate about it.

## > Activity: Ranking preferences

If you are having difficulty selecting goals or actions to start your communications strategy, a ranking process might be helpful.

Provide each task group or committee member with a list of goals from your plan. Each person can rank each goal based on how important it is to communicate about

it, using a scale of one to five with five indicating the highest level of importance. Gather all the member sheets and consolidate the rankings for a total score. The goal with the highest number is the goal to be considered as the priority for moving forward.



## > Tip

### FINDING HELP

You may find it helpful to establish a communications sub-committee to focus on building a communications strategy.

There may be people in your community who have experience in communications and may be willing to help with communications planning and development.

- People who organize events
- Staff or members of local service clubs or business associations (e.g. staff of the local Chamber of Commerce)
- Business owners
- Library staff who are involved in outreach or communications work
- Graphic designers
- Website developers
- People with marketing, communications or public relations experience/jobs in other sectors (corporate, business, industry, or not-for-profit)
- People working in the media such as editors, reporters, advertising sales managers, producers and on-air hosts

Depending on the program or goal you wish to communicate about, you could also look for help by specific skill type. Do you know someone who:

- Writes well?
- Has experience reaching isolated families?
- Has experience talking to the business community?
- Is good at building databases?
- Has had success getting a story in the media?



## > Tip

### **DEVELOPING ACHIEVABLE PUBLIC AWARENESS GOALS**

Raising public awareness about literacy issues is something that many literacy groups would like to achieve. In some cases, general messages are useful to “plant the seed” of an idea in people’s minds and make them more receptive to follow-up messages. But research and experience suggest that to have a real impact on people’s thinking about social issues like literacy and to encourage action, messages should be designed for specific audiences.

With this more specific audience in mind, it is possible to design and deliver a message that will be more relevant and meaningful to them. Adult learners, families, health care professionals, seniors, business owners and potential volunteers all have specific interests in or understanding about literacy, and designing specific messages for these groups will allow you to make a better, stronger connection with them.

If you have an overall goal to raise public awareness, consider how you can break this goal down according to specific audiences. Think about the groups in your community who could benefit from knowing more and what is important for them to know. Once you have created your list of specific audiences, think about what action you would like each audience to take as a result of their new understanding of literacy issues.

If your task group has an overall goal to make people aware of literacy programs, consider the variety of programs and who might attend each of them. A potential participant for a family literacy program would likely require a different set of messages to encourage them to attend than a potential participant to an adult literacy program.

## Worksheet 1: Analyze your goal

Re-state your literacy goal:

**What is the issue that your goal is addressing?**

**What do you want to achieve with this goal? (i.e. What change would you be able to observe?)**

**How will you know you are achieving your goal?**





## Step 2: Analyze the current situation

What is currently happening that will help or hinder the literacy program, goal or issue you want to communicate about?

There are many factors that may have an impact on your ability to communicate about, and achieve, your literacy goal. Being informed about these will help your task group make better decisions as you move through the communications planning steps and will assist you with the eventual development of key messages.

Some of the factors that influence successful communication and program implementation are external to your group, organization or program. After careful consideration of these, you may be in a better position to take advantage of those elements that can help you as well as overcome those that might hold you back.

Also, there may be factors within your task group or organization that will impact your ability to communicate about your selected goal or issue.



### Here are some questions for consideration:

*“Communication leads to community, that is, to understanding, intimacy and mutual valuing.”*

Rolo May  
Author

- What are your task group’s strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the goal? What are your literacy community’s major communications opportunities or challenges?
- What resources have already been identified through the literacy planning process that could be applied to communications? Information, people, money, time, partnerships and public support are valuable assets.
- Have there been any similar communications initiatives in your community that have been successful or unsuccessful? Why and how can the examples help you?
- What experiences in other communities do you know about that are relevant to your work?
- What research has been done by provincial or national literacy organizations that can provide important information that is relevant to your community, program or issue?
- What perceptions do those inside and outside the literacy field have about the issue your literacy goal is trying to address?
- What are the competing messages (or attitudes?) in your community that may be pulling on your target audience and that you will encounter when you do your communications?

## > Tip

### PERCEPTIONS

How a message is received can be affected by the perception that people already have about the organization and/or the individual who is delivering the message. Before you start undertaking your communications, you could do some research to determine what perceptions are held by the community and, more specifically, by your key audience groups and stakeholders.

You will need to know what perceptions those inside and outside of the literacy field have of your literacy task group, the literacy plan, and the work you have been doing. Will these perceptions help or hinder your efforts?

Informally survey your community leaders, colleagues, possible participants, and partners about your work. Ask them about their perceptions of what you do (programs, events, outreach) and find out where they feel they might need more information.

## Worksheet 2: Document your situation

After your task group has discussed and researched some or all of the above questions, summarize your findings for your communications strategy or prepare a SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis reviews the factors within your group, organization or community that are helpful (Strengths) or harmful (Weaknesses) to achieving your goal. The analysis also identifies external factors that can be maximized (Opportunities) or must be mitigated (Threats or Challenges) in order to achieve your goal. Factors that are often considered include technological, political or legal, economic, socio-cultural, and demographic information.

Ultimately, conducting a SWOT analysis will help you determine whether your goal is attainable in your current situation.

If your SWOT analysis helps you determine that your goal is attainable, the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats can then be used to assist with the creation of objectives and strategies by asking:

- How can we use each strength?
- How can we improve each weakness?
- How can we take advantage of each opportunity?
- How can we minimize each threat?

	HELPFUL (to achieving goal)	HARMFUL (to achieving goal)
	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>Internal Factors (within the partner groups)</b>		
	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats (a.k.a. Challenges)</b>
<b>External Factors (from the environment)</b>		





## Step 3: Identify your intended audience(s)

Who are the primary, secondary and tertiary audiences you wish to reach through communication about your literacy program, goal or issue?

There is really no such thing as influencing the general public because the general public is made up of such a wide variety of sub-groups who all respond to messages differently. It is important to clearly define who it is you are trying to reach. Knowing your audience is helpful because

people are more likely to respond to your message if it is introduced to them in a way they understand. The knowledge you gain when you research your audience's needs, interests and behaviour patterns points you to specific content for your message and to the best method for delivering that message.

There are three types of audiences: primary, secondary and tertiary.



*“To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others.”*

Anthony Robbins  
Author

### **Primary Audiences**

The primary audience is the group of people who the program goal or action is meant to directly involve and affect the most. For example, your primary audience might be businesses so you can encourage workplace literacy programs. A more specific description might be local manufacturing businesses that employ more than 15 people and have a human resources department.

You can further describe your audience by their current behaviour. For example, you could expand on the description of the businesses you wish to work with if you know they do not require potential employees to have Grade 12 diplomas, do not currently promote learning in their workplace, and require specific employee skills such as computer use.

### **Secondary Audiences**

Often you will find there are multiple audiences who would be affected if you achieve your goal and these groups are called secondary audiences. For example, in the business case noted here, other groups that may benefit from reaching the goal include the employees, perhaps the shareholders or board of directors, customers, suppliers, and competitors (all depending on the particular situation).

### **Tertiary Audiences**

There may be people who could more easily influence those you want to ultimately reach than you can directly. These groups or individuals are called tertiary or “influencer” audiences and may include family members, business leaders, the media, a doctor or a local celebrity. You may have more success with a message to these influencer groups that urges them to talk with your primary audience. This trusted source might have a greater chance of reaching your audience and encouraging them to act. In the business case example, a tertiary audience might be the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, or an influential business leader.

Every attempt at communicating with your audience can help to develop a relationship. Even when an audience does not act on a message, you may have succeeded in getting them to understand something that is important to your community. In the future, this audience may be well positioned to explain your situation to others and might join with you as things evolve or other initiatives develop. Even communications that do not lead directly to action should be noted, celebrated and stored for future use.

## Worksheet 3A: Identifying your audience

This worksheet will help you identify all the audiences for your chosen literacy goal. Some audiences will be more important than others, but it is still worth considering them all before deciding which ones are the priorities for your communications initiatives.

PRIMARY AUDIENCE	SECONDARY AUDIENCE	TERTIARY AUDIENCE
Who are the priority groups of people whose knowledge, attitudes and/or action you need to influence in order to meet your goal?	Who else is affected or benefits if you succeed in your goal?	Are there others who can influence your primary and secondary audiences?

### > Tip

#### GETTING TO KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE BETTER

It is important, of course, to avoid making assumptions when considering your audience. Write down what you think you know about them, and then test the knowledge by engaging a sample group.

This may be as simple as talking with people you know or to people who you want to communicate your message to. For example, if the business community is your primary audience, you could set up a meeting with the head of the Chamber of Commerce. Ask if you could send out a mini-survey to their membership and use free or low-cost online software such as [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) or [www.zoomerang.com](http://www.zoomerang.com).

## Worksheet 3B: Creating an Audience Profile

This worksheet will help you learn more about each specific audience.  
You will need to fill out one worksheet per audience.

### Audience:

Why is this audience important to you?

What is your desired outcome with this audience?

What are the characteristics of this audience?  
(Can you find similar characteristics amongst them?)

- What are their gender, ethnicity, income and education levels?
- Are there any language considerations?
- Do they have trouble reading printed materials?
- How do they spend their time?

What are your audience's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours as they relate to your literacy goal or issue?

How are they likely to react to your literacy message and why?

What are the barriers to this audience fully supporting or participating in reaching your goal?

- What are the benefits if they do?

How does your audience best receive information?

- What makes new information credible for them?

Are there individuals or groups who can influence this audience or who can help you better reach this audience? Who are they?

What would you measure to determine if you have been successful?



## Step 4: Identify key messages

What are the specific messages that address the literacy goal or issue from your audience's perspective?

Key messages are phrases that represent the main ideas you want to express. They open the door to direct communication with your audience, because they bridge what your audience already knows and

what you want them to understand.

You are likely using key messages in the work you are already doing. The more deliberate your task group can be in the creation and consistent use of key messages, the more powerful these messages become.



*“The truth isn’t the truth until people believe you, and they can’t believe you if they don’t know what you’re saying, and they can’t know what you’re saying if they don’t listen to you, and they won’t listen to you if you’re not interesting, and you won’t be interesting unless you say things imaginatively, originally, freshly.”*

William Bernbach  
Legendary figure in  
American advertising

**Key messages help you:**

- “Cut through the noise” and focus on what’s really important to you and your audience
- Shape the perception of your organization, task group or the issue itself
- Ensure consistency in communication
- Be culturally relevant and sensitive
- Be tied to specific audience values, beliefs, or interests
- Be more easily remembered

**Key messages should be:**

- Short: a brief, memorable sentence or phrase
- Concise: avoid jargon and acronyms
- Active: avoid using the passive voice
- Positive/motivating: talk about what can be done as opposed to what cannot
- Specific: address a particular challenge or issue
- Credible: provide relevant examples, stories or facts to back up the message

Keep in mind that to successfully motivate people you must show them that you will help meet their needs. A clear description of the benefits to your audiences will help ensure that your literacy message is received, understood and acted upon.

**For example:**

What does the individual or the organization need to know about the impact of your services on a social problem or on a specific group of people who need your help?

Why is your work important and what specifically will be improved or solved by the addition of funding?

Why should a community volunteer contribute their time to your program – what larger effort are they joining? What will they gain from their experience?

Why should a person attend your program? What benefits will they receive?

The words and phrases you use in media releases, media interviews, marketing materials, web sites and presentations should all be based on the key messages you develop, though you may write them differently in each application and for each audience.

An “elevator speech” is a type of key message. This speech is the three sentences (or less) that describe your literacy goal, program or issue. It is sometimes tough to boil this down into a short statement, but sometimes you only have a very short time to impart



this important information whether you are talking to a possible participant, a prospective funder, a reporter or a potential volunteer. You may alter some of the words and the arrangement of these statements as you use this speech with various audiences, but you will consistently use the information.

When writing your elevator speech, consider these questions and the importance of each answer to your audience:

- Who are you?
- What are you doing?
- Why are you doing it?

For the goal of creating a homework program, the elevator speech statements might be:

1. Eighteen percent of our high school students are at risk of dropping out of school or graduating without the skills they need for today's knowledge-based economy.
2. The community, through the recent literacy planning process, has prioritized the need to provide learning and homework support that some students require to reach their potential.

3. The high school, youth centre and literacy organization are working together to develop a program that will provide individual assistance.

Some key messages will be fairly consistent across all your audiences. Others will need to be adapted for specific audiences. A message that you can include with your elevator speech is a call to action and it will likely need to be tailored for each of your audiences.

In the homework program example, a call-to-action message for the primary audience, high school students, might be: Call Rodger at the youth centre at 250-555-5555 or stop by on Tuesdays at 4 pm or Thursdays at 7 pm.

The call-to-action message for qualified tutors might be: Find out how you could support students in our community by calling Isabelle at 250-555-7777.

It is helpful to develop three more key messages for each audience. These messages should consider each audience's particular interest or motivation and expand on the information in your elevator speech. Each of these supporting key messages could have a different theme. Creating two supporting points for each of these messages assists you if



you need to back them up using numbers, facts and research to add substance.

The first of these messages could build credibility and/or address quality.

**For the high school student audience example:**

**Key message 1:** There is individual help provided by people who know how to teach and understand different learning styles.

**Supporting point #1:** There will be tutors at each session who can help you complete your homework assignments.

**Supporting point #2:** The tutors will be trained about the best ways to support your learning.

The second key message could delve a little further into the issue, program or goal. It could address the central passion that inspires or drives you to want to accomplish this goal.

**For the high school student audience example:**

**Key message 2:** People in this community care about you and want you to have the support you need to succeed.

**Supporting point #1:** You can participate in creating this program by talking with staff and other participants about how the program can work best for you.

**Supporting point #2:** Groups of people from many areas of the community have come together to make this program available and successful.

The third key message could be about your primary audience, providing information about the benefits people will receive if they act on your messages. Alternately, this message can tell another audience something important about your primary audience.

**For the high school student audience example:**

**Key message 3:** If you participate, you will do better in school.

**Supporting point #1:** Research has shown that one-on-one assistance is one of the most important ways to improve student learning.

**Supporting point #2:** In a school environment, the more homework assignments you complete the more likely you are to have a passing grade.

Test your key messages. Once you have completed worksheet 4, think about getting feedback on the resulting messages. Start with colleagues and friends in the literacy field, and then consider asking others in the community who are new to literacy. It may even be useful to test them on a small group of the intended audience. Edit and refine your messages based on this feedback.

Once you are satisfied with your messages, share them. Practice them amongst your task group or with other program partners. The more you use them, the better they will become.

## Worksheet 4: Writing key messages

THE ELEVATOR SPEECH:	
Who are you?	
What are you doing?	
Why are you doing it?	
WHAT IS THE CALL-TO-ACTION FOR EACH AUDIENCE?	
Audience 1:	
Audience 2:	
Audience 3:	
MESSAGES FOR SPECIFIC AUDIENCES:	
Audience:	
Credibility and Quality message	
Supporting statement	
Supporting statement	
More information and driving passion message	
Supporting statement	
Supporting statement	
Message about the primary audience	
Supporting statement	
Supporting statement	





## Step 5: Reflect

What have you learned so far that will influence how you deliver and communicate about your literacy program, issue or goal?

Throughout the development of your communications strategy, as you gather information and think about how to communicate about your goals, you may have additional insights into how to successfully accomplish these goals. You may find that there is a need to adapt your program, activity or goal to be more responsive or appealing to your primary audience. Or there may be factors that will limit your ability to accomplish the goal and you may decide to address these before proceeding. You may also find that there are people or audiences with specific knowledge and expertise that you had not previously considered who could support your goal.

For example, as a result of talking with youth at the high school, the program partners who are developing a homework club discover that the name “homework club” has negative connotations for youth, who suggest calling it an after school program. The program partners then decide to ask a group of representative youth to brainstorm a possible name for the program and participate in the development of the program.

They also learn that some of the primary audience would not be able to attend directly after school and that an alternate time such as early in the evening would be helpful. They decide to hold at least one session of the program in the evening.

*“Communication works for those who work at it.”*

John Powell  
Composer





## Step 6: Set communications objectives

What can you do that will contribute to the achievement of your overall literacy goal?

Objectives are like goals, but they are more specific and support your overall literacy goal. Every time you accomplish an objective, you should be one step closer to achieving your goal.

Objectives should be measurable, concise, realistic and time-bound.

Communications objectives relate directly to the messages you want to get to your audience with regards to your goal. It might be useful to list communications objectives together with your literacy goal's general objectives because they are usually closely tied together. Sometimes they are the same.



**Communications objectives:**

- Relate to an important program objective that is appropriately addressed by communications
- Describe an outcome that is realistic for communications to help you achieve
- Describe a change rather than an action step
- Identify a specific audience

When writing communications objectives, remember to include:

- A specific target audience
- The nature of the change desired from your audience
- The amount of change desired
- A target date for the desired change to occur

Communications objectives often begin with verbs like increase, educate, inform, mobilize, promote, recruit and teach.

For example, the communications objectives for the goal about securing \$10,000 by the end of the year to fund a lunch and learn program for 15 people who are homeless could be:

- Secure \$3,000 from local public service agencies that provide services to the homeless by educating them about the importance of embedding learning into traditional support programs by September 2009
- Secure \$2,000 from the local community foundation by educating its board about the low relative cost and benefits of providing a learning environment for people who are homeless by October 2009

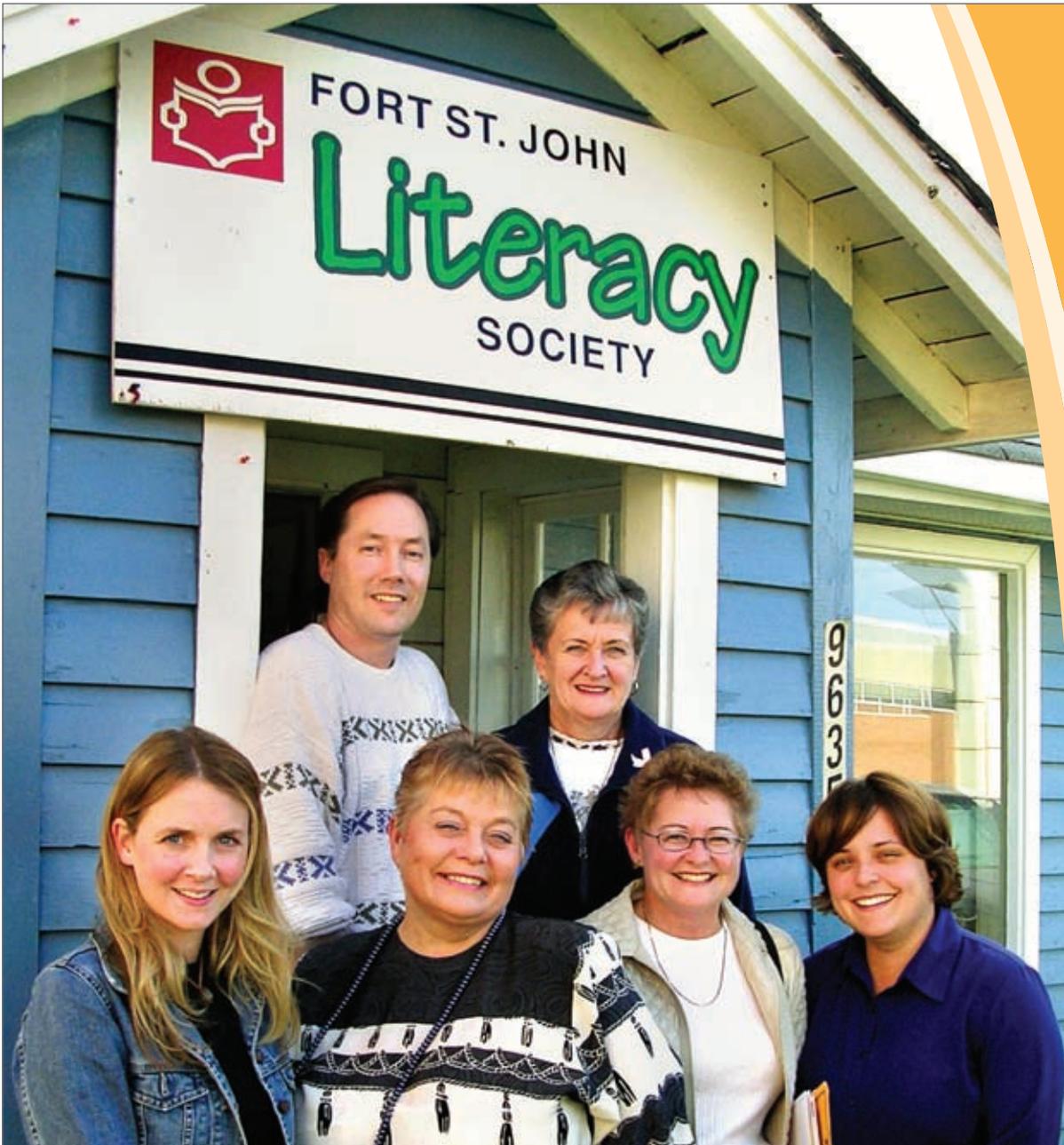
Developing objectives is often an iterative process of creating a draft and then circling back to edit or expand the objectives once you have tried a few activities.

## Worksheet 6: Creating communications objectives

Re-state your literacy goal:

HOW MUCH / MANY	WHO	WHAT	WHEN





## Step 7: Create your communications action plan

What actions will you take to deliver your specific key messages to your target audience and to reach your objectives?

The action plan is about how you are going to effectively deliver specific key messages to each audience with the resources and time that you have. People do not all respond to a message in the

same way, nor do they consistently respond to the same message sent at different times in a different context. In the corporate marketing landscape, it is considered standard practice to deliver a message a minimum of three times to the primary audience before action can be expected.

An action plan is a list of all the tactics that need to take place to achieve your objectives and your goal.

To create your action plan, consider the following for each objective:

- What main activities and tasks do you need to do?
- Who is responsible for each step?
- What kind of resources do you need?
- When will things happen – a start and end date?

You will also need to consider who will manage the implementation to keep all the actions and task members on target, on time and on budget. And you will need to determine how often you need to circle back, check in and monitor progress.

To develop a communications action plan, you need to choose communications vehicles to carry the key messages to the intended audiences.

When choosing a communication vehicle to reach your audience, consider carefully the information you gathered in Step 4 - Identifying your audience, in particular the following questions:

- Where or from whom does this audience get its information?
- Who do they find credible or who do they trust?
- Where does this audience spend most of its time?
- Where are they most likely to give your message their attention?

In addition, consider these capacity-oriented questions:

- How much money do you have to spend on your communication vehicles?
- Do you have access to people with the ability required to fully implement specific communication vehicles? Where could you get additional assistance?

Communication vehicles can take many forms. Here is a list of common ones:

- Presentations
- One-on-one meetings
- Publicity and media relations
- Advertisements
- Public service announcements
- Direct mail or brochures
- Signs or displays
- Events
- Strategic alliances or partnerships
- Websites
- Online/Internet

Are there specific locations where your audience can be reached most easily?

- Community centres
- Government offices
- Laundromats
- Malls
- Parks
- Schools, colleges, vocational and language training centres
- Libraries
- Community non-profit offices
- Public transportation depots/stations
- Supermarkets
- Fast food restaurants

## &gt; Tip

**COMMON COMMUNICATION VEHICLES AND WHEN TO USE THEM**

VEHICLE	REACH	\$\$ COST	BEST USE	THINGS TO CONSIDER
Presentations	Primary audience	Low	When you have a group of people interested in learning about your organization/goal at a particular time/date and the resources to prepare presentation materials	Not the best vehicle if you need to reach large numbers of people. Effectiveness of message delivery is dependent on oral skills of presenter
One-on-one meetings	Primary audience	Low	To build relationships and partnerships needed to reach your goal	Time consuming if large audience is unaware of your issues and goals
Publicity/media relations	Broad – depending on reach of media outlet	Low to high	When you have a message with broad appeal or you need to gain community support or sway opinion	Specific expertise is sometimes required to be effective
Advertisements	Broad – depending on reach of media outlet	High	When you want a response to a call to action or wish to reach new audiences, i.e. attend a meeting/ event or register for a program	Creative design skills and outside talent are often required to be effective. Sometimes requires a long timeline depending on the media execution chosen
Public service announcements	Broad – depending on reach of media outlet	Low to high	When you want to be able to control the message, reach new audiences/build support, change perceptions	You are dependent on the good will and generosity of media to get your message placed
Signs or displays	Primary audience and broad depending on situation	Low to high	Inform or reinforce specific messages. Highly portable if you need to change locations	Requires some resources to ensure professionalism in execution. Displays can be easily ignored
Events	Primary audience	Medium to high	Attract/inform supporters (influencers), celebrate, share information with a targeted audience	Requires a high investment of human resources to coordinate and promote events
Strategic alliances or partnerships	Primary audience	Low to high	When the partnership can help you reach intended audiences and increase trust and credibility	You must be careful about the compromises (real or perceived) that are sometimes made in the name of partnerships. Resources must be allocated on an ongoing basis to keep partnership healthy
Online media	Broad	Medium to high	To promote or provide information about your organization or issue	Specific skills are required to take on tech-savvy communications campaigns
E-marketing	Primary audience	Low	When you have a database of contacts to whom you can distribute	Sometimes difficult to cut through the volume and deliver your message effectively if you are not well known by the recipient

## > Tip

### WHAT IS MEDIA RELATIONS?

When considering audiences, be prepared to think about the media as both an audience and a vehicle for reaching other audiences. This is because the media are like anyone else; they respond best when the message they receive addresses their particular needs and interests.

Simply sending out a formula news release doesn't always get the attention you require to reach your goal. You will likely improve your results if you do some research about the particular media you are targeting for your story.

Consider the following questions:

- Which media in your community cover stories with a social aspect to them?
- Does the specific media outlet have particular segments or sections that take on the type of stories that you want to pitch them?
- Is there a particular journalist, anchor or radio personality who has taken particular interest in social issues such as literacy before?
- Does a specific media outlet have a website where they could extend the story?

For more information on how to work with media (write news releases, pitch stories), go to Ontario Literacy Coalition (OLC) – Public Awareness Action Guide [http://www.on.literacy.ca/doc/literacy\\_awareness/SAexamples.html](http://www.on.literacy.ca/doc/literacy_awareness/SAexamples.html)

## Worksheet 7: Action plan template

*“If a leader can't get a message across clearly and motivate others to act on it, then having a message doesn't even matter.”*

Gilbert Amelio  
President and  
CEO of National  
Semiconductor Corp

Goal:				
Objective:				
Action Steps	Start Date	End Date	Person Responsible	Required Resources (This might include people, funds, and materials)



## Step 8: Make a budget

How much is this strategy going to cost you to implement?

From your action plan, identify the costs associated with each action and create a budget.

This section is important for evaluating the viability of your communications strategy. Consideration should be given to which external partnerships and funding sources your community task group could explore to meet costs that exceed available funds.

**When developing your budget, consider the following:**

- Begin your budgeting process by determining what is needed to achieve success
- Be realistic about how much things cost and how much time they take to complete
- Analyze the gap between projected costs and what you have or what you need to generate in revenue and/or funding
- Include how you arrived at a total figure for an item, i.e. include quantities for printing, rates of pay and amount of time for staff
- Include a contingency so you can adapt to changes in the plan or cover unanticipated expenses
- Build a bigger budget for future projects by demonstrating a return on investment – how well the project worked, how many people benefited, and how the budget furthered your goals



## > Tip

### **ESTIMATING MEDIA COSTS**

If you have chosen to communicate through paid media, you will need to estimate the cost of delivering your message for budget purposes.

To estimate placement costs, contact the sales department of the media outlet you are considering. They can provide information on rates, booking deadlines, schedules, and technical specifications. Keep in mind that posted rates from “rate cards” can often be negotiated and some media outlets have special rates for not-for-profit organizations. Many paid-media vehicles reach broadly. To help you select the right media to reach your audience, you want to determine how much it costs to reach your specific audience through a particular media outlet.

To estimate the cost of reaching your audience, ask the sales department for an audience profile with the cost per thousand calculated. Provide them with the details of the audience you are trying to reach and ask them to provide research that shows how well their media outlet reaches your audience.

You can also ask for a “reach and frequency” recommendation. This information tells you how many times you may need to run your message with the media outlet in order to reach your audience.

You may also need to estimate production costs for creating your advertisement as advertising rates usually only cover the placement. However, media outlets often offer production services for no additional charge or a small fee, depending on how much advertising you are purchasing.

For research purposes, general advertising rates and other data is available in Canadian Advertising Rates and Data (CARD). This monthly publication provides contact and rate information for significant print and electronic media outlets across Canada. Access to print or online versions of CARD is available by subscription and also carried by some public libraries. [www.cardmedia.com](http://www.cardmedia.com).



## Worksheet 8: Budget template

The categories provided in this template are for guidance. There are likely others you would want to add depending on the type of communications vehicle you are using and can afford.

Revenue:	
Funds	In-Kind Support

Expenses:		
Category	Funds	In-Kind Support
Salaries, wages, honorariums		
Professional fees		
Materials		
Room, space		
Computer or technical aids		
Production costs, printing		
Travel (mileage, accommodation, flights)		





## Step 9: Measure success

Are you on track to achieving your goal? How will you know when you have achieved it? What did you learn?

By regularly evaluating your communications strategy, you can learn how your plan worked with various audiences, which activities had the most impact, and which parts of the plan did not work as you expected.

### **Evaluation involves:**

- Collecting information
- Learning from mistakes and successes
- Learning how you made a difference (measuring results)
- Making changes in the future

Measuring your communications objectives should be closely tied to measuring your program's success. As measuring can consume resources and time, carefully consider what objectives are the most important to measure.

- How will the results of your monitoring, tracking and evaluation be used?
- What information is important to your key stakeholders (boards, funders)?
- What techniques and mechanisms will you use?

In the after school program example, it was important to not only measure the number of students who were attending each session, but whether they were the students who needed additional support to succeed at school and not just students who wanted something to do.

**Common ways to measure your success include:**

- Counting participation and collating feedback from meetings or events
- Tracking awareness of your initiative among your core audiences
- Collecting media coverage including volume and nature of coverage
- Monitoring website usage
- Interviewing or surveying your audience. Did they take the action you needed them to take?
- Creating mechanisms for spontaneous audience feedback and maintaining records of it
- Personal observations

The after school program planners decided to use the following tools to measure which type of students were attending:

- Attendance records were kept by student name, grade and home telephone number.
- Volunteers asked participants who attended more than two sessions informal but consistent survey questions. The survey questions were developed to identify whether the student fit into the primary audience or not.

*“The greatest problem in communication is the illusion that it has been accomplished.”*

George Bernard Shaw  
Irish playwright

## > Tip

### **MONITORING VS. EVALUATION – WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?**

Monitoring tells you if your project is on track where as evaluation tells you if you are on the RIGHT track.

**Monitoring:**

- Helps you gauge your progress toward meeting your project goals and objectives
- Concentrates on the short-term performance compared with what you have planned

**Evaluation:**

- Measures the overall results/impact of the project
- Provides data for similar projects in the future
- Takes place when substantial program progress has been made. Data for evaluation is usually collected throughout the project and even before it starts

**> Tip****KEYS TO EFFECTIVE EVALUATION**

- Focus on measuring what really matters
- Set benchmarks from the beginning
- Ensure your goals and objectives are clearly defined and measurable
- Segment your audience
- Test along the way (not just at the end)
- Be creative in how you measure
- Review and re-adjust your approach based on what you are discovering

**Worksheet 9: Evaluation plan**

OBJECTIVE	MEASURE OF SUCCESS (indicators that determine whether objective was met)	HOW WILL YOU MEASURE? (tools and resources)	WHO WILL COLLECT AND WHEN?	WHO WILL ANALYZE?





## Looking ahead

Like so many things, communication improves with practice. As you work with various audiences, prepare key messages, and develop communication vehicles, you will become increasingly skilled at communications. Sharing your efforts with other community task groups and literacy practitioners will help everyone learn together. A website has been created to assist literacy practitioners to benefit from each other's efforts. It will also allow this guide and additions to it to be posted for download. Tools and resources will continue to be made available for use in your community.

Visit [www.literacycentral.bc.ca](http://www.literacycentral.bc.ca)  
Email your feedback,  
stories, or celebrations to  
[literacy@2010LegaciesNow.com](mailto:literacy@2010LegaciesNow.com)





## Appendix: Resources

Hershey, R. Christine,

**“The Communications Toolkit:**

**A guide to navigating communications for the nonprofit world,”**

2008, Cause Communications, Oct. 2008. <http://www.causecommunications.org>

Patterson, Sally J., **Generating Buzz: Strategic Communications for Nonprofit Boards,** Boardsource. 2006

Smith, Barbara E.. and Peavey, Kay, S.

**“Marketing Your Adult Literacy Program: A ‘How To’ Manual,”**

Hudson River Center for Program Development Inc., New York, 1996.

**“Simple Steps: Planning a Literacy Project”**

Yukon Literacy Coalition, Whitehorse, 2005.

**“Strategic Planning”**

Community Partnerships for Older Adults. Oct. 2008.

[www.partnershipsforolderadults.org/resources](http://www.partnershipsforolderadults.org/resources)

**“Tech-Savvy Communications: A Toolkit for Nonprofits,”**

NPower Seattle. Oct. 2008.

[www.npowerseattle.org/education/online-resources/tech-savvy-communications](http://www.npowerseattle.org/education/online-resources/tech-savvy-communications)

**“The Ontario Literacy Coalition’s Online Public Awareness Action Guide”**

Ontario Literacy Coalition. Oct. 2008.

[www.on.literacy.ca/doc/literacy\\_awareness/SAexamples.html](http://www.on.literacy.ca/doc/literacy_awareness/SAexamples.html)

**“Information and resources”** The Health Communications Unit at the Centre for Health Promotion, University of Toronto. [www.thcu.ca](http://www.thcu.ca)



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