

Start With Clarity

Communications Strategy Brief Template

What This Resource Is

A concise strategy brief for defining the purpose, audience, intended result, message, responsibilities, and evidence of success before communications work begins. It creates one shared point of reference for leaders, communicators, subject-matter experts, and implementation partners.

Why It Is Needed

Communications work often enters a team as a requested deliverable: a press release, campaign, event, toolkit, or social post. When the underlying decision is unclear, teams can produce strong materials that solve the wrong problem, reach the wrong audience, or arrive too late to influence an outcome.

How It Helps

- Connects communications activity to an organizational priority and defined outcome.
- Surfaces assumptions, dependencies, risks and approval needs early.
- Clarifies what audiences should understand, feel, or do.
- Aligns decision rights, roles, timing and available capacity.
- Establishes useful measures before execution begins.

Use this brief before choosing tactics.

The brief should be proportionate to the work. A high-risk initiative may require deeper research and planning. A routine communication may need only a short, disciplined conversation.

How to Use the Template

1. Complete an initial draft with the communications lead and the person accountable for the organizational priority.
2. Validate audience insight and subject-matter accuracy with the people closest to the issue.
3. Resolve decisions about scope, timing, approvals, and resources before production begins.
4. Use the approved brief to guide the work, assess change requests, and interpret results.
5. Return to the brief after delivery to document learning and improve future work.

Strategy Brief

1. Organizational Priority

What organizational goal, commitment, risk, or decision does this work support?

2. Communications Challenge or Opportunity

What needs to change? What is happening now, and why does communications have a role?

3. Intended Result

What meaningful result should communications help produce? Describe the change rather than the deliverable.

4. Priority Audiences and Stakeholders

Who must be reached, heard, informed, involved, or equipped? Distinguish decision-makers, participants, influencers and affected communities.

5. Audience Insight

What do we know about their needs, beliefs, barriers, motivations, context, preferred sources and access considerations? What must still be learned?

6. Desired Audience Response

What should each priority audience understand, feel, decide or do?

7. Core Message and Supporting Evidence

What is the clearest central idea? What facts, stories, proof, voices, or lived experience support it?

8. Strategic Approach

How will communications contribute to the intended result? Identify the role of listening, engagement, content, media, events, partnerships, leadership communication, or other approaches.

9. Channels and Touchpoints

Where and when can the audience be reached credibly and accessibly? Which existing relationships or moments matter?

10. Deliverables

What will be created or delivered? Include only the outputs required by the strategy.

11. Roles and Decision Rights

Who recommends, creates, reviews, approves, publishes, responds, and owns the final result?

12. Timing, Dependencies and Risks

What dates, external decisions, subject-matter inputs, approvals, sensitivities or operational dependencies affect the work?

13. Capacity and Resources

What staff time, skills, budget, technology, vendors, translation, accessibility support or partner participation are required?

14. Measurement and Learning

What evidence will indicate progress or success? Identify baseline, target, data source, reporting cadence, and who will use the findings.

15. Final Decisions and Approvals

Record the approved scope, unresolved decisions, approval owner, and date.

Readiness Check

- ☐ The work supports a defined organizational priority.
- ☐ The intended result is clear enough to guide choices.
- ☐ Priority audiences are specific and informed by insight.
- ☐ The team has authority or access needed to influence the result.
- ☐ Timing and commitments reflect available capacity.
- ☐ Approvals and decision rights are explicit.
- ☐ Measures are defined before execution begins.

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