

Develop a

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY



Tower Hamlets CVS
www.thcvs.org.uk
info@thcvs.org.uk
Registered Charity No.1137143



This resource is for voluntary and community groups who want to plan how to communicate their work and its impact effectively.

The following steps are the elements of a communications strategy, with links to resources where you can find more information.

Who you are and what you do

Write a concise paragraph about what your organisation is and what it does. Include a brief summary of who you work with and a list of your projects and activities. You may also want to include something to indicate the size of your organisation, e.g how many people you generally work with in a year.

Your strategy

Set out your vision, mission and values, and state your strategic objectives. Include a link to your full strategy on your website if you have one. [Click here](#) for the THCVS Strategy 2024-2029.

Audiences

Define your audiences, both internal and external. These might be your beneficiaries, statutory partners, funders or members. How large an audience you are thinking about, how important they are to your organisation and how you might want to grow and develop your engagement with them over time? What do they need to know from you and what do you want to communicate to them?

You could use [this quadrant diagram](#) for stakeholder analysis. There is some guidance on how to adapt it [here](#).

Overarching strategic messages

What are the messages you want to be communicating to those different audiences? For example a community group that runs football sessions for young people might have the following strategic messages:

- The children who play football with us thrive.
- We are friendly and accessible.

Families, the council and your funders might also want some additional messaging to assure them that:

- The services we run are safe, well-staffed, and follow all the correct guidelines.

Potential staff might want to know:

- We pay a decent rate.
- We are a welcoming, diverse team.



Communications activities to support your strategy and values

Write down the communications activities that you are going to deliver. You should add 'key indicators' that let you know if you are on track. For example, the organisation that runs football sessions for young people could have:

- **Strategic objective:** We are friendly, accessible and inclusive.
- **Communications activities:** Promote Wednesday football sessions by using short films.
- **Key indicators:** The number of young people taking part in the Wednesday sessions increases to 15; you can demonstrate that the confidence of the young people has increased through your communications.

Internal communications

This should include how your team will contribute to your external facing communications and who will be responsible for this. For example do you want them to take photos at events or post on social media? You might also want to set out how you will communicate decisions made by the board and management team, how you collect case studies for reports or how your team finds out about successes and celebrates project progress together. When your team are well-informed about your organisation's goals, strategies and successes, they feel more connected and are more likely to be engaged and motivated.

External communications

Think of an external communications strategy as your organisation's plan for talking to everyone outside the company. It's important because it helps people understand what you do and why you matter. This plan makes sure you share the right messages in the right way, so people trust you, want to work with you, and support what you're doing. The strategy makes sure you're saying the right things to the right people in the right way.

For organisations where one individual manages all communication, internal communication plans are crucial for each project. These plans help articulate key messages and objectives clearly before they are shared externally. An example communications plan template can be found [here](#).

Current communications analysis

Set out the current situation:

- Do you use social media, and if so which platforms do you use and how many followers do you have? What kind of content do you put out on the different platforms?
- Do you send out a newsletter, and to how many people? Do you know what the open rate is? What do the recipients think about it? What kind of content gets the most views?
- Do you have a website? What kind of content do you put on it? How accessible is it? What kinds of feedback do you have from your stakeholders about it? How many page views does each page have, and what are the most visited pages?

Platforms

List the different platforms that you use and how you use them. Think about the '4 pillars of content': educate, inform, entertain and inspire, particularly about which platform you might use for each one (or a combination of pillars). The different platforms have different strengths, so choose those that suit your organisation best:

- **Website:** Is your calling card. Funders may look at your website to see if your organisation is active and what it is doing, so make sure it is kept up to date.
- **LinkedIn:** LinkedIn is primarily used for professional networking, career development, and job searching. It's a platform for professionals to connect, share insights, and find opportunities within their industry.
- **X:** Is good for quick updates, announcements, and engaging in real-time discussions, but can be challenging for businesses to maintain a consistent presence.
- **Facebook:** Offers a broad reach with its massive user base (over 3 billion monthly active users) and is versatile for various content types, from sharing links and articles to engaging in community groups.
- **Instagram:** Visually-focused, great for showcasing products, services, and company culture through images and videos.
- **Tik Tok:** A great platform for reaching younger demographics with short-form, engaging videos, especially for brands that want to build a relatable and humorous image.
- **YouTube:** Ideal for creating and sharing longer-form videos.
- **Email newsletter:** Mailchimp and Brevo both offer free plans which include a limited number of daily emails and mailouts.
- **Printed leaflets:** might be a good way to reach older people or those who are digitally excluded.



Accessibility

Accessibility in communications refers to the inclusive design and delivery of information that ensures everyone can access and understand the content without barriers. Consideration should be given to the accessibility of all the features of a communication to ensure that no one is excluded from its message. From the language and pictures used to how they are arranged and formatted, there may be simple changes that improve accessibility.

It's important that everything that you communicate is easy to access. The principles of good access are:

Alt text:

Make sure to use alt-text in all social media, bulletins and on your website. Alt text is a text alternative to images, providing a description that can be read by screen readers and other assistive technologies. It allows people with visual impairments to understand the content of images when they cannot see them.

Design considerations:

- Font size: Usually 12/14 points (larger for headings, if required)
- Typeface: Use accessible fonts, for example Arial, Tahoma, Calibri, Helvetica, Verdana. These are clear and distinct.
- Colour: Provide a strong contrast to the text background
- Make sure text is left justified (unless being used as a heading or title).
- Ensure that **text lines are not packed too closely together**.

Language:

- Avoid the use of abbreviations, acronyms and initials without explanation of what they stand for as this can cause barriers to understanding.
- Use images which are relevant to the content.
- Make sure that sentence structure is short and to the point.
- Put full stops at the end of bullet points which tells screen readers to pause.
- Think about whether you need to translate documents into community languages and/or provide video or audio to accompany online text.

Branding and design

At its simplest, branding is about being consistent about what your communications look like. For example, you could use the same type face and size throughout. You could also try to use the same set of colours in all your publicity.



Data protection

Photographs: If an image can identify an individual, it's considered personal data under data protection legislation, and the photographer must respect the individual's rights, including informing them the image will be taken and obtaining consent before using it.

Key things to remember:

- **Ask permission:** You usually need to ask before taking and using someone's photo, especially if you're going to share it. This is called "consent."
- **Tell them why:** You need to clearly explain why you're taking their picture and what you will do with it.
- **Photos of children and vulnerable adults** need extra care and require permission from a parent, guardian or carer.
- **Keep it safe.** Store photos securely and don't keep them longer than you need to.

- **They have rights:** People can ask to see their photos, change them, or ask you to delete them.
- **Basically, be respectful and get permission** when needed. Further information is available [here](#).



Newsletters and mail outs: To ensure compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) for newsletters and mail outs, you need to obtain explicit consent from subscribers for marketing emails, provide a clear way to unsubscribe, and be transparent about how you will use their data. You should also minimise the data you collect and only use it for the purposes stated in your privacy policy.

Here's a more detailed breakdown:

1. Consent:

- **Explicit consent:** GDPR requires that you obtain explicit, informed, and unambiguous consent before sending marketing emails. This means you need to have a clear and affirmative action from the user to subscribe, not just a pre-ticked box.
- **Double opt-in:** A good practice is to use a double opt-in process, where subscribers receive a confirmation email after initially signing up to verify their email address.
- **Privacy policy:** You must provide a comprehensive privacy policy that details how you will collect and use the data.
- **Transparency:** Be clear about the purpose of the newsletter and how their data will be used.

2. Opt-out:

- **Easy unsubscribe:** Make it easy for subscribers to unsubscribe from your newsletter at any time.
- **Clear unsubscribe Link:** Include a clear and prominent unsubscribe link in each email.
- **No unsubscribe hiding:** Do not hide the unsubscribe link or make it difficult to find. Ensure that the unsubscribe link works and that subscribers are removed from your list when they click it.

Process & tools

This section sets out the processes and tools that you are going to use. Examples might be:

- Communicate clear deadlines for content.
- Social media planner to plan content in advance. Some popular planners are [Hootsuite](#), [Buffer](#), [Tailwind](#), and [Social Pilot](#). Some of these offer free trials but they are usually paid subscriptions.
- Create a photo bank containing images your organisation has captured, ensuring complete credit and permission details are recorded.
- Google analytics: It reveals how users interact with your site, including which pages are most popular, how long they stay on each page, and what actions they take.
- Canva: [Canva](#) is a great graphic design platform used for creating a wide range of visual content, from social media graphics and presentations to websites and more. It's particularly useful for creating professional-looking designs without needing extensive design experience. It offers user-friendly tools and pre-designed templates, allowing you to create professional-looking designs. Canva provides a cost-effective alternative to hiring professional designers and includes stock media, eliminating the need for separate subscriptions.

How do you know if you are successful?

Your communications strategy should describe what would constitute success. Measurable successes could include things like increasing the number of your followers, getting more people to come to your events, or getting more funding. You may also want to increase engagement with your communications (i.e. responding to calls to action) and develop more discussion and conversation with more or wider audiences, e.g through events or on social media.

- What changes do you see because of your communications?
- What processes and tools will you use to measure this? (for example, Google analytics). You can also measure the open rates of newsletters and get feedback from users.
- How often will you measure it?



Action plan

This section should set out the actions you intend to take, and when. These are just a few examples:

- Articulate 'Who you are and what you do', set out your organisation's strategic objectives, vision, mission and values.
- Clearly outline how your organisation will communicate internally and detail the specific activities for external communications.
- Review your website so that it is up to date.
- Add case studies to your website and promote them through social media.
- Increase the reach of your newsletter by promoting it on social media and word of mouth.
- Develop and launch a campaign.
- Develop a social media planner.
- Review and refresh brand guidelines (logos, colours, identity for your organisation).

Resources needed

In this section you should think about the resources you need in order to carry out the communications strategy. This could include:

- Your team of staff and/or volunteers. Do you have a specific member of staff whose job description includes communications?
- The wider team's involvement in planning and creating communications content for their areas of work.
- What training and guidance needs to be provided?
- Do you need to employ a designer?
- How can your trustees support?
- Could you appoint a communications volunteer ([click here](#) for a link to Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets)?



Other resources

- **CharityComms** – The membership body for charity communications workers.
- **Comms Creatives** - Online training for communications professionals.
- **Media Trust** - Communications training and media industry volunteers.
- **Arts Marketing Association** – A membership body for arts, culture and heritage professionals.
- **Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets** – Find volunteers and receive support and training in volunteer management.

If you have any questions about any of the information in this resource, THCVS can give 1-1 support and advice. Please email us at info@thcvs.org.uk.

