Strategic Communication

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This is About Strategy

- Many communications officers focus their energies primarily on mastering and using communications tools—your website's structure and appearance, hosting a blog, choreographing conferences.

- Understandable. But the impact on policy decisions of these actions will likely be greater if they are guided by project-specific strategies.

- Strategies themselves must be informed by judgements about the identity of key decision makers and their preferences.
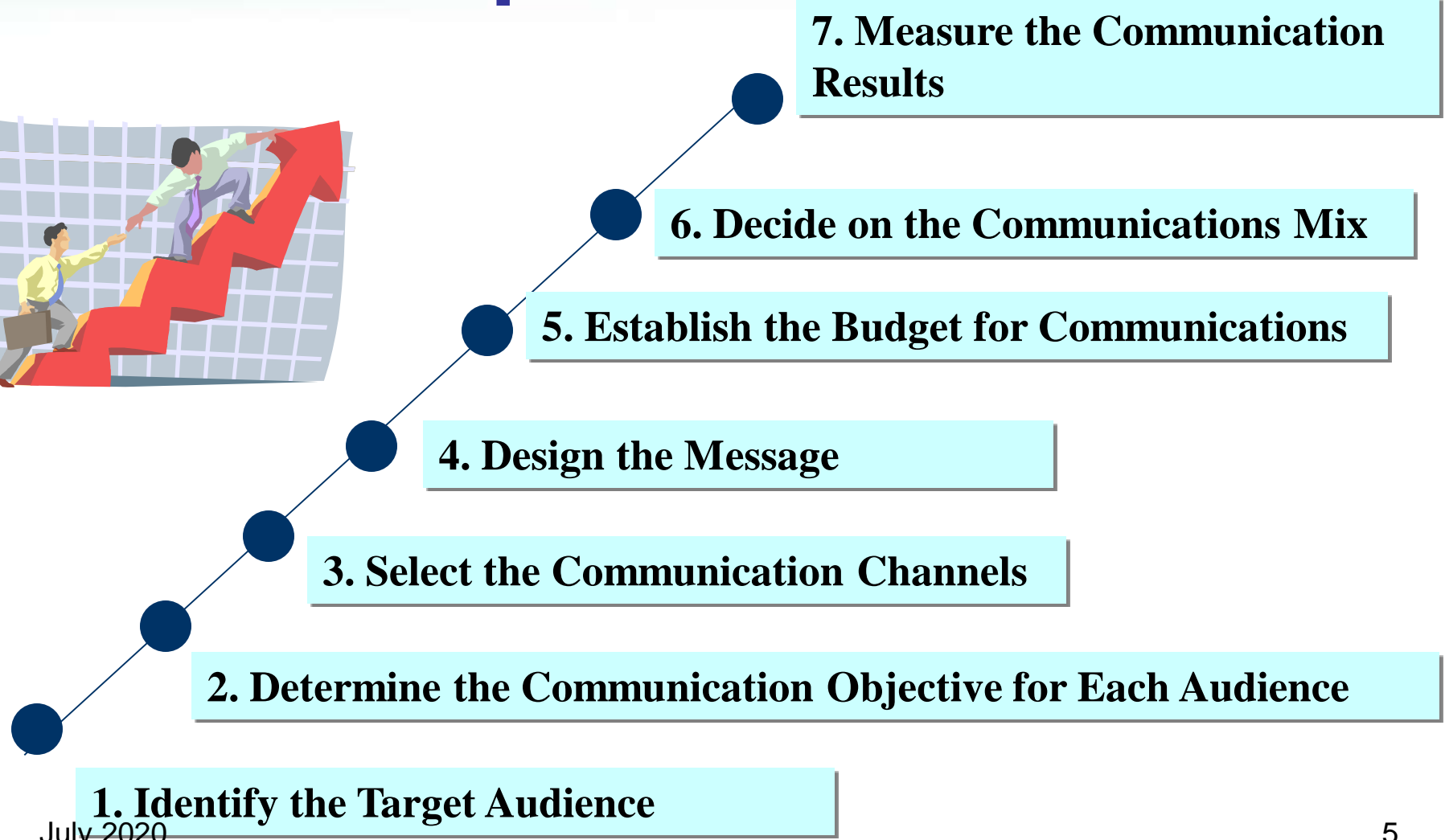
Strategy Objectives

- To affect change in public policy itself, policy processes (e.g., budgeting), program regulations, levels of expenditures

- Inform the public about important issues

- Other

  – Improvement in institutional reputation, image, influence

  – Enhancement of staff reputations

Keys to High-Impact Research

1. Be first or be early.

2. Provide the big picture or most comprehensive treatment.

3. Correct the record or destroy a myth.

4. Reframe the debate.

5. Write clearly and with forceful logic.

Communication Strategy: Seven Steps

7. Measure the Communication Results

6. Decide on the Communications Mix

5. Establish the Budget for Communications

4. Design the Message

3. Select the Communication Channels

2. Determine the Communication Objective for Each Audience

1. Identify the Target Audience

Two Types of Action Goals
Define which is Best for Each Audience

1. Inform: good for the public, CSOs, officials to know about policy research results and action recommendations

2. Influence: goal is to get the person/ organization to **DO** something; take action to realize the recommendations

- *Critical* to distinguish the objective for each audience and allocate resources accordingly

Types of Policy Issues

Issues	Audiences
•Prominent policy issues under **current** discussion	•Key members of the government and legislature
•Policy questions that **is likely** to be prominent	•Administration and legislative branch staff and intermediaries
•Second-tier policy matters under **active** discussion	Key program administrators, intermediaries
•Second-tier policy matters **likely** to receive attention in the mid-term	•Key program administrators, interest groups
•Identification of **a new** potentially prominent policy issue	•Senior member of the government and legislators, NGOs, intermediaries, the public

Alternative Target Groups and Communications Tools

- General public
  - Working with the media in all forms; certain public meetings; creative posts on website
- Sector officials, e.g., agriculture, transportation…
  - Public and private meetings with officials; policy briefs; assist professional associations with information
- Policymakers and their advisors
  - Policy briefs, meetings, roundtables
  - For staff: research reports, various events
- Researcher and policy researcher peers
  - Technical reports, Books, journal articles, articles in bulletins
- Funders—example, international donors

Alternative communication tools or vehicles-1

--written products from your organization by audience size

- Special memos or briefs requested by policymakers
- Books
- Journal articles
- Direct, personalized emails
- Policy briefs
- Discussion papers
- High quality project reports
- Articles in CSO-produced newsletters or bulletins
- Posting on web-site

Larger audience

Alternative communication tools or vehicles-2

--other products

- Book launch – reaching the media
- Placing articles in newspapers, popular magazines
- Working with reporters on articles, with attribution
- Working with reporters on articles, without attribution
- TV appearances related to policy research
- Radio appearances related to policy research
- Social media
- Q/A films posted to websites (2-3 min)
- Public meetings held
- Roundtables & similar events
- Meetings with policymakers
- Meetings with advocacy CSOs

Larger audiences at top

Most useful format for receiving information for national policy development-Sri Lanka, 2018

Preferred Information Format	Percent Preferring
Website	77
Print media	47
Email	51
Social Media	20
In person	46
Television	5
Blogs	12

Preferred Information Sources for in the Armenian Policy Community

Preferred source	Career Gov Official-Senior	Appointed Gov Official	Gov Program Administrator	Academics	CSOs	Citizens
websites						
Print media						
email						
Social media						
In-person						
Television						
blogs						

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Exercise Instructions

- Go the Word file "Rating information preferences of Armenian Audiences" that contains the work table

- Score preferences of each policy-concerned group (named in the column headings) on a scale of 1 to 10.

- 1 = very seldom, if ever uses the source.

- 10 = one of the most important sources.

- Go to your Zoom rooms (based on Consortium members) and debate the values to be given to each cell in the table.

- Take 20 minutes to complete the table.

- Two groups will be asked to present, followed by discussion. An important question is why ratings may differ between groups.

Working with CSOs, Trade Associations, Think Tanks, Professional Assocations

- Identify partners at the very start of the project
- Consult with them from the beginning. Get their ideas, perspective.
- Involve them directly in the development of the communications strategy.
- Carefully coordinate initial steps in rolling out products.

When to Launch a Communications Campaign?

1. Do not act too early: government agencies or other sponsors want to be first, be seen as the source of important work.

2. Try to identify highly visible, related events or happenings to get more coverage
   a. National Day for Schools or National Day for Veterans
   b. Widely watched court case, e.g., water agency sued when children die from contaminated water
   c. Related issue being debated by electoral candidates

A Communications Campaign Does <u>Not</u> End When the Project is Over

- Policy issues are usually not resolved with a think tank's project is over.

- Critical to follow developments and contribute to the debate when appropriate.

- Outline the steps your recommendations will have to pass through to be adopted by the relevant agency, the ministry of finance/office of the president and, if needed, the legislature.

- Track progress, keep in touch with those with direct knowledge of the policy proposal's progress.

- Be ready to contribute to the debate.

Government Action Takes Time

Typical route followed in moving policy recommendations from a research project for a major regulatory change submitted to a government agency to full adoption.

- The individual or research office that commissioned the analysis of the situation that led to the recommendation submits to her
- the program office division director; then it goes to the
  - office director, to the
  - deputy minister, to the
  - minister; and then to the
  - ministry of finance for its assessment and approval; and on to the
  - office of the president (which may have several levels).

Class Exercise

- Develop a communication strategy for one of three cases
  - High priority policy issue now under active consideration
  - Issue likely to be of high priority in about two years
  - New policy issue
- Define a realistic issue for each case. 1-2 sentences
- Fill in the chart you downloaded from the project web page and be ready to present *and* defend the results.
- Join the "mixer" group to which you are assigned.
- Take 15 minutes. 3 groups—one for each case--will be called upon to explain their strategies. 5-6 minutes each. Class discussion.

Defining Target Audience & Approach for Specific Conditions

II		
Target Audience	**Reason Audience is Important**	**Communication Tool**

Influencing the Decision on a Technical Issue in U.S. Housing Policy to Assist Low-Income Families to Live in Affordable Housing

Traditional approach: Public Housing
- Housing projects (usually multiple apartment buildings constructed for poor families with funds from the national government.
- Local Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) responsible for managing the units and selecting tenants following federal rules. PHAs are local government agencies but funded mostly by the national government.
- Only low income families could live in the buildings.

New Alternative: housing allowances
- Poor families were given a "voucher" (promise of the government to pay for most of the rent of a qualifying unit).
- They are were free to choose any unit that meet minimum quality standards and had a reasonable rent.
- Early experience with the program was very positive.

The Proposal for Improvement

1. All future families selected for housing assistance receive a housing voucher.
2. They can select qualifying dwellings in the housing market or in Public Housing buildings.
3. PHAs now competing with private landlords will respond to the competition by improving their management practices.
4. "Transition support" will be given to PHAs to make these improvements and some upgrades to the apartment buildings.

Key Players in Making the Legislative Decision about the Program Proposal

1. Congress: It must pass the legislation

--Key actors are staff advising members of Congress

--Influence is primarily through technical analysis of options and personal connections.

2. Public interest groups

--Primarily the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, a CSO, Strongly opposed.

--Local governments: mixed but mostly against because of worries about empty public housing properties, patronage opportunities.

3. Technical experts

--Thanks to the positive evidence from a huge social experiment on housing allowances and book detailing the proposal, they favored the proposal.

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