

# Headlining Mental Health Writing Your Communications Strategy

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# Headlining Mental Health

## Writing Your Communications Strategy

Storytelling, press engagement and digital marketing can be demanding and complex tasks for charities and not-for-profit organisations, but they are essential to reach people who need support, to connect with funders and donors, and to call for the policy changes the communities we serve need.

A communications strategy will guide, hone and help you evidence your communications work, making it more manageable, measurable and effective, so your organisation can get the results you need.

### About this workbook

**Media Trust** and **Arch Communications** have produced this digital workbook to support small charities and non-profit organisations writing or updating a communications strategy.

It has been designed to accompany the Headlining Mental Health Communications Strategy Course, with guidelines, tools and templates to use during workshops and homework, but can also be used independently of these sessions.

This guide has been developed by Matt Youdale, Founder of Arch Communications and Cat Whitehouse, Headlining Mental Health Project Manager at Media Trust.

### About Headlining Mental Health

Media Trust's Headlining Mental Health programme supports UK mental health organisations to strengthen their strategic communications, so they can increase their visibility and reach, challenge stigma and get their voices heard.

Each year the programme provides dedicated workshops and training to a small cohort of not-for-profit mental health organisations, along with open masterclasses for the wider mental health sector.

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# Workshop One: Understanding Our Intentions



A good communications strategy helps your organisation reach its goals. That means there's no single strategy that works for every organisation, because each one is developed to fit your circumstances and needs.

While each strategy is different, there are some standard structures and questions we can use to guide us. You can also use these to build a campaign plan.

Communication Strategy Section	Questions to ask ourselves
Introduction and context	Who are we and what context are we working in?
Aims and objectives	What are we trying to address/achieve?
Audience segmentation and stakeholder mapping	Who do we want to communicate with?
Mapping channels	What methods will we use to reach our audience?
Key messages	What do we want to say to them?
Tactics	What resources do we need: money, people, time?
Evaluation & KPIs	How will we know if our strategy is successful?

## *“Who are we?”*

### SWOTs and PESTELs

Before we begin writing a strategy it's helpful to understand our own communications strengths and weaknesses, and the environment we're operating in.

We will use two tools to help us do this – a SWOT analysis to look at our organisations (although some threats may come from beyond our organisation), and a PESTEL analysis to understand the wider picture.

# SWOT analysis

It's helpful to work with colleagues on your SWOT. To be most useful, a SWOT analysis should be brutally honest and detailed. This means you need to think carefully about who you share it with – if anyone!



**Assessing your communications, not your organisation as a whole.**

## 'SWOT' analysis example

<b>Strengths - What are we good at?</b>	<b>Weaknesses - What needs to improve?</b>
Think about your existing profile, resource, comms channels, and relationships.	Be honest – what are you not good at comms-wise?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have a supportive social media following who regularly share our posts</li> <li>• Our comms team has good mental health expertise</li> <li>• We have a good relationship with a local influencer (radio DJ)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our website content is out of date</li> <li>• We have a very small social media following</li> <li>• We don't have many relationships with statutory services (GPs, social services etc)</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities - Where can we develop?</b>	<b>Threats... to success - What could go wrong?</b>
What could you do to improve things?	Your risk analysis - what could derail you or get in the way?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capture case studies from people we have supported, showing how we've helped them</li> <li>• Start a newsletter to connect with people who follow us online</li> <li>• Attend local meetings to meet GP surgery teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We only have 5 hours a week for communications</li> <li>• Our team has never used Twitter before</li> <li>• Other local mental health organisations have better websites and social media than us</li> </ul>





**A blank SWOT grid for you to use.**

<b>Strengths - What are we good at?</b>	<b>Weaknesses - What needs to improve?</b>
<b>Opportunities - Where can we develop?</b>	<b>Threats... to success - What could go wrong?</b>

# PESTEL analysis

A PESTEL analysis is outward looking – it focusses on external factors which could impact upon your organisation. It can help to inform the tactics you may use to implement your strategy, but because it looks at wider issues, the PESTEL approach can be useful for assessing all aspects of an organisation – not just communications.

## Example PESTEL analysis

Political	Economic
<p>Who do you need to influence locally? Is there a public affairs aspect to your work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need to influence the local authority to ask for continued funding</li> <li>• We are a member of the local Healthwatch group</li> <li>• Our MP recently resigned - we will need to get to know the new one</li> </ul>	<p>How is the economic landscape impacting on your organisation and the people you support?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local unemployment is impacting on mental health and our services</li> <li>• Donations have reduced as people have less income</li> <li>• Two local businesses donated during the pandemic</li> </ul>
Social	Technological
<p>What are the circumstances of your audiences (demographics, lifestyle, culture, attitudes etc)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local employment is mainly low-income customer services</li> <li>• 72% of our community is white British</li> <li>• We operate in a rural area</li> </ul>	<p>How are people consuming information? What can you harness?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lots of people in the age bracket we work with use Facebook</li> <li>• Most people using our services use a mobile phone for internet access</li> <li>• Our best reach is still through leaflets and posters</li> </ul>
Environmental	Legal
<p>What is the landscape you work in – think location, environment and social environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We operate in a rural area with a settled community</li> <li>• There are few local charities doing similar work</li> <li>• There is limited public transport and most people rely on cars</li> </ul>	<p>What laws affect your work or relate to it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upcoming changes to the Mental Health Act will affect our inpatient work</li> <li>• As a charity there are limitations around our campaigning work</li> </ul>



**Try your own PESTEL analysis.**

<b>Political</b>	<b>Economic</b>
<b>Social</b>	<b>Technological</b>
<b>Environmental</b>	<b>Legal</b>

# “What do we want?”

## Defining your strategic aim and objectives



Your strategy should have a clear aim and objectives. There's a reason why you're developing it and a goal you need to achieve. Maybe you need to raise your organisation's profile, seek more funding or increase awareness of an issue that matters to the people you support.

Your communications aim and objectives should align to the business plan or goals for your organisation.

The **aim** is the general goal of the strategy. It's usually short and simple (and might sound a bit obvious!)

**Objectives** are the actionable targets you set for your strategy to ensure you reach the aim. The more focussed they are, the more useful they will be in assessing your progress.

You don't need to have a lot of objectives, think about a few that will help you reach your goal, and that you have systems in place to measure.

Objectives should be **SMART:**

**Specific:** Each objective should focus on one aspect of your communications.

**Measurable:** Always ask – how are we going to check we've done this?

**Achievable:** Especially considering the time and resources you have.

**Relevant:** If an objective won't help to achieve your aim, don't include it.

**Time-bound:** Set yourself a deadline. Rolling deadlines over time help to track progress.

**Think  
about:**

Be careful with objectives around improving reputation e.g. “We will be the best-known mental health charity in England.” Unless you can invest in a national public opinion survey, it will be hard for you to measure that!

## Example aim and objectives

### **Business plan aim:**

*"We will double the number of local people we support over the next three years."*

### **Communications strategy aim:**

*"The aim of this strategy is to raise the profile of our organisation locally by communicating more effectively."*

### **Objectives:**

- Increase the number of people self-referring to the service from 200 to 600 by the end of the financial year*
- Form referral partnerships with three local NHS services by December*
- Increase the number of men accessing the service by 20% by this time next year.*

**Over  
to you!**

**What is your strategy aim?  
Agree it with colleagues, then capture it here.**

**Over  
to you!**

**What will your objectives for this strategy be?**

# Workshop Two: Understanding Our Audiences



## Identifying your stakeholders

Stakeholders or audiences are the people you want to talk to and listen to. Your communications strategy should include these, and then consider the best ways to communicate with them.

We know that mental health issues can affect anyone, so it can be tempting to think of our audience as 'everyone', but very few charities are really in this situation, or can afford to try and reach the entire general public.

Instead, most of us will want to reach people who are most in need of our organisation's support, or people who might volunteer, or donate.

Knowing who we're talking to helps us communicate more clearly.

Start by listing all the different groups of people (stakeholders) you want to talk to, and the reasons why.

## Example stakeholder list

### **We want to communicate with:**

- *Volunteers – to thank them and keep them engaged*
- *Our staff – to let them know what's happening across the organisation*
- *The local Council for Voluntary Service – to share our events and hear about their infrastructure support*
- *Health officials – local commissioners and GP network to hear about tendering opportunities and work in partnership*
- *Funders (local authority and trusts) – to show the impact of their support*
- *Local radio and TV - to publicise support services, volunteer opportunities and community fundraising*

Over  
to you!

List your key stakeholders here.

## Mapping your stakeholders

Once you have identified your stakeholders, we need to think about how these groups of people relate to each other, how they relate to your work, and which ones you need to talk to most.



This is where stakeholder mapping comes in. There are lots of ways to map stakeholders, some are best for campaigns, some are aimed at public affairs or changing opinions.

This is a basic mapping tool to inform all of your communications, including your strategy. It uses a chart to consider how important the audience is to your work and aim (influence) and whether your work or aim is important to them (interest).

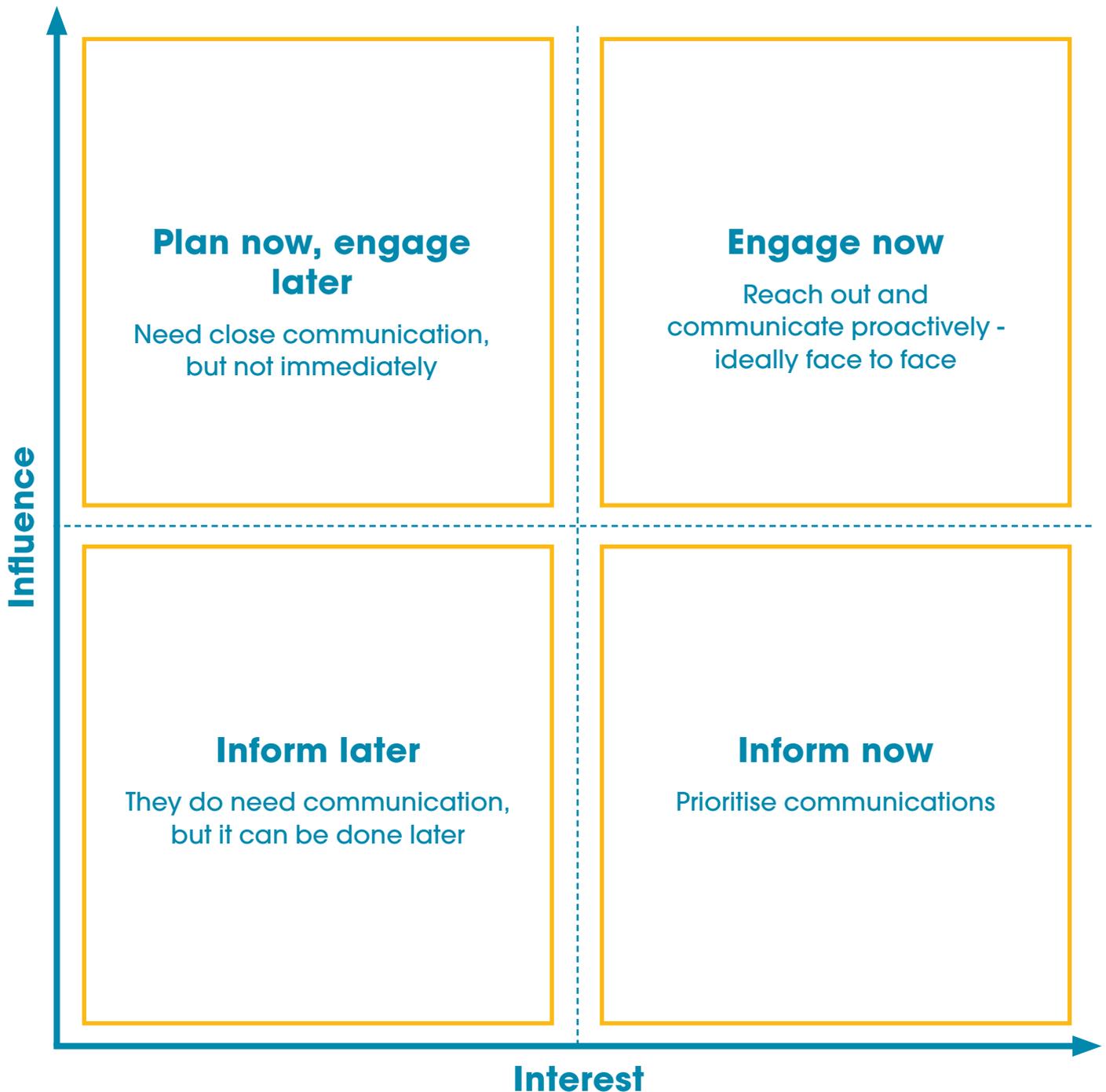
This helps you decide where to focus your effort, or who to communicate with first/most often.

Thinking about each group of stakeholders, place each one on the chart – considering where they should appear in relation to both criteria. Some stakeholders may straddle different parts of the chart.

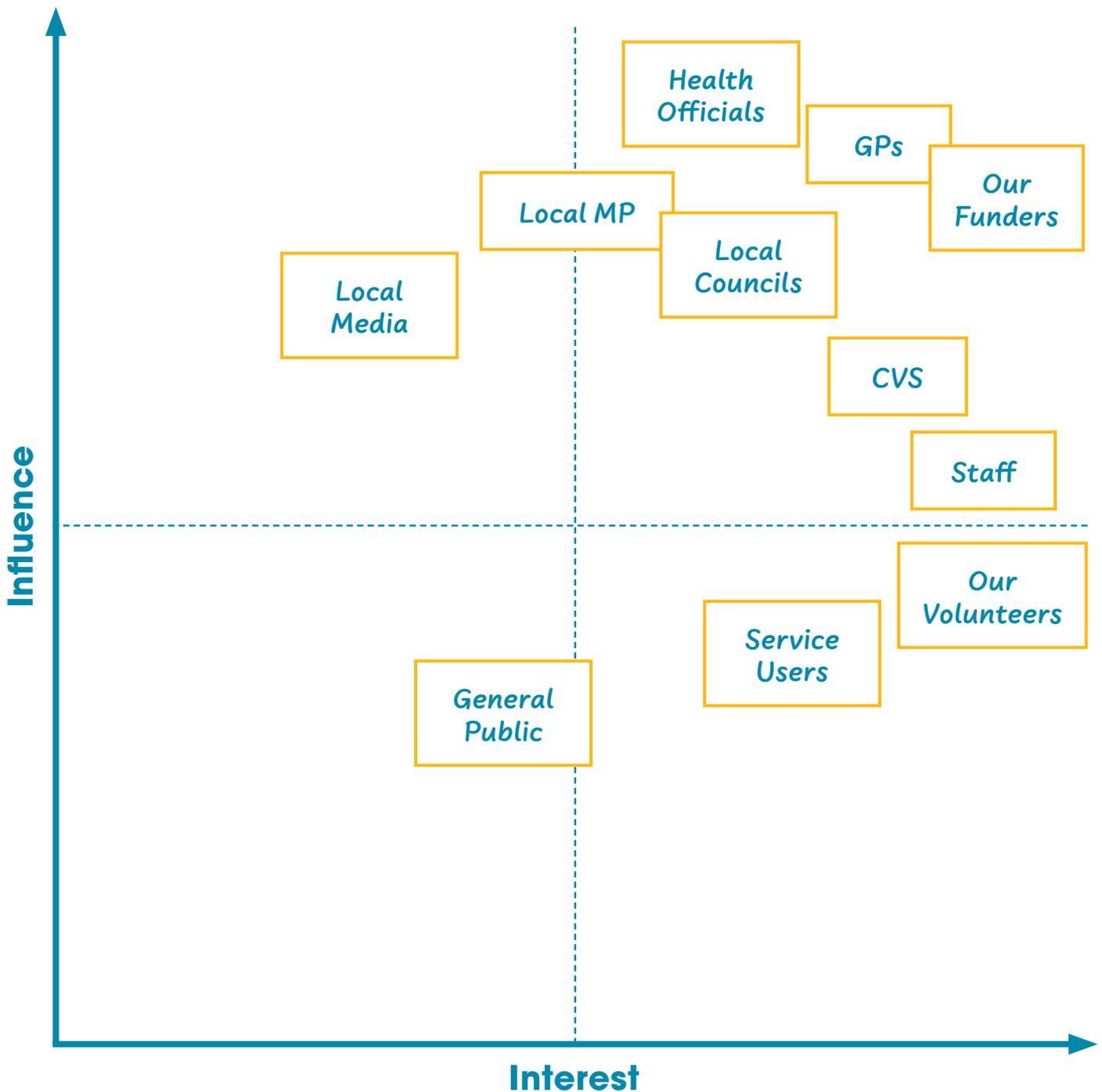
**Influence** = how important they are to you

**Interest** = whether they want to listen or get involved

The ones that have both high influence and high interest (top right) are probably the most important people for you to communicate with. Those in the bottom left section are the least important.

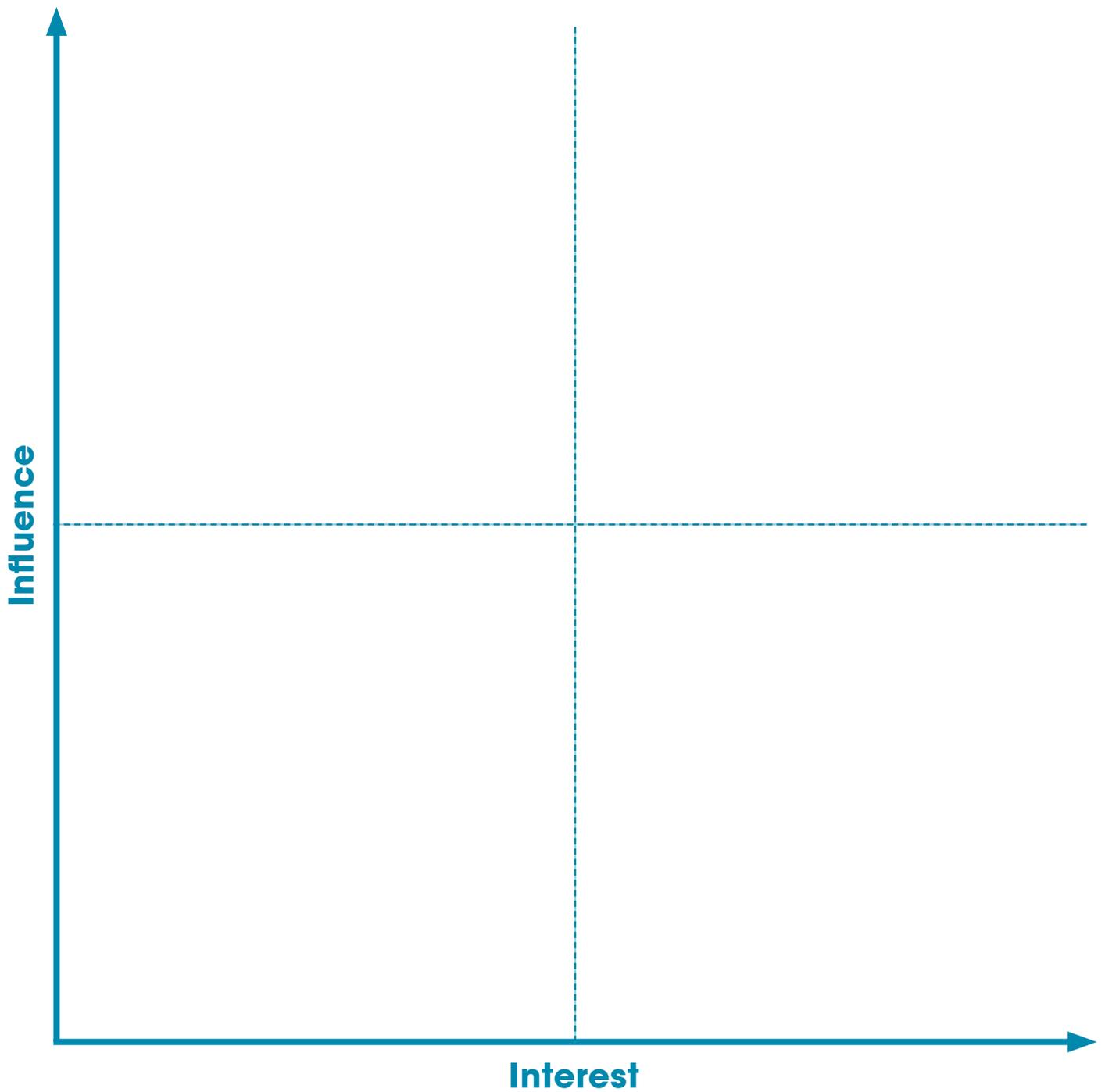


## Example 'Influence v Interest' stakeholder map



Over  
to you!

Map your stakeholders using the chart.



# Segmentation



Now you know which groups of people you need to talk to most, it's time to write down what you know about them and ways to group them together. This is called segmentation.

You probably already do this without realising it. For example, you may publicise your benefits advice service by putting up posters near your day centre, in an area where many people have low incomes. This is a form of segmentation – you are targeting people who can get to the service for appointments who are more likely to be eligible for in-work benefits.

The more you know about your audience, the more likely you are to communicate with them effectively.

There are lots of ways to segment stakeholders, some examples are listed below. It can help to think about a 'typical' person who represents that segment, and bring them to life. You can use the **Audience Persona Template** on the Media Trust Resource Hub for this.

Factor	Possible Insights
Age	Does age affect where the person goes and how they receive their information?
Sex and gender	Do people of different genders and sexes face different stigmas and barriers to your support?
Ethnicity	Are people of colour under or over-represented in your service?
Religion	Who or what guides the person's decisions and sense of community?
Finance	How affluent is the person, what job do they do and does this affect how they can support or use your services?
Location	Do you need to reach people in a certain area for funding targets? Can the people who need your service access your office?
Social habits	Where do the people shop, spend their time and meet others?

## Example stakeholder segmentation

Stakeholder group	Sub-group(s)	Potential insights
<i>Men who would benefit from our support but who aren't accessing it</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Men in local Muslim community</li> <li>• Men in local Black community</li> <li>• Young men (under 30)</li> <li>• Men on a particular estate</li> <li>• Older men (over 65)</li> <li>• Homeless men</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with community or faith leaders</li> <li>• Promote case studies</li> <li>• Use connections to local influencers</li> <li>• Targeted outreach</li> <li>• Partner with other agencies</li> </ul>

**Over to you!**

**Segment your stakeholder groups to inform your communications.**

Stakeholder group	Sub-group(s)	Potential insights

# Mapping channels



Different groups of people receive information in different ways – some people read email newsletters, others prefer a leaflet or talking to someone at an event.

Once you have identified and analysed your stakeholders and segments, you need to decide the best way to communicate with them.

Each way of communicating is called a channel. Mapping means thinking about which communications channels and methods your organisation has (or could develop) which will reach your most important groups of stakeholders.

Thinking about your communications channels will highlight which ones are most effective in reaching a range of different people.

You will also learn which groups need a particular type of communication – and whether you need to develop new channels to plug gaps.

This exercise is done on a grid – number each communications channel and put an x in the box if it works for each group of stakeholders.

## Think about:

If you are not sure don't guess, ask! Talk to your stakeholders and ask them. You can also look at what is most popular for your organisation.

## A note on social media

For this exercise, it is normal to include all social media as one channel, but you should apply the same strategic thinking to your social media as the rest of your communications.

Social media marketing takes time and effort. Work out which platforms you should be on, and why. Trying to be on every platform is almost certainly a mistake, it's better to do one or two platforms really well than juggle lots!

There is more information about social media platforms in the **Digital Strategy Guide** on the Media Trust Resource Hub.

## Channel mapping example

List your stakeholders and give each of your channels a number.

1. Social media
2. Website
3. Newsletters
4. E-shots
5. Events
6. Media coverage
7. Printed materials (posters and flyers)
8. News releases/briefings

Stakeholders	Channels							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Volunteers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Staff	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Donors/funders	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Service users	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Political stakeholders (MP, councillors etc)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Local NHS – commissioners	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓
Local NHS – GPs, others working in services	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
General public	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
News media	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓
CVS	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		



# Key messages: What do you want to say?



Knowing what you want to say – your story, or narrative – is very important in a communications strategy.

The simplest way to approach this is to write a short list of key messages – the things you really want to get across.

Each message should make just one point, but think about how you can knit your messages into a coherent narrative that builds an emotional connection and lasting impression.

When you're writing key messages:

- Each key message should be a short sentence, about one thing, that you can say in one breath
- The language needs to be emotive to build a connection
- It's a good idea to include calls to action ('contact us now', 'donate here')
- Make sure your key messages fit in with your mission statement, vision and values, and the work you've done on your strategy so far
- Don't have too many key messages, otherwise they will drown each other out and they won't be remembered. Six is plenty

You can find out more about developing your key messages with the **Getting your messages right** guide on the Media Trust Resource Hub.

Once you have the right key messages, use them to underpin all your communications and direct what you say. Make sure they're applied consistently across your communications from funding applications to the annual report, to social media.

## Think about:

Using your messages flexibly – how you use each message will depend on where you're using it. A key message can form the basis for a strong social media post or advert. You can use them to create the Editor's notes at the end of a press release, or weave them together as some powerful new content for your home page.

## Example key messages

- *Suicide within a year of giving birth is the leading cause of pregnancy-related death among UK women.*
- *Mum Health provides crucial mental health support for pregnant women and mothers in Manchester.*
- *Our expertise is recognised by the NHS and we help to ease pressure on its local services.*
- *More women than ever are struggling with their mental health whilst pregnant, and need Mum Health's support.*
- *We've launched a £250,000 appeal so we can help more local mums.*
- *Donate today, to make sure more children grow up with the love of happy, healthy mums.*

**Over  
to you!**

**List your key messages here.**

# Workshop Three: Understanding Success



## Tactics: Delivering your strategy

A good strategy is like a map. It shows us what is around and gives us a direction, but we need to plan the route to take.

Tactics are the activities you intend to complete to achieve your strategic objectives and to communicate with your stakeholders.

Each tactic should be linked to your objectives.

The tactics section of your strategy should cover:

- **Your approach** – is there a particular way you want to do things? For example: does your strategy involve social media, adding more structure to the way you communicate, or telling more stories about the people you support?
- What you will communicate and how often
- **The channels** you will use
- **An indication of the content** you will create and how it will be used
- **Creative collateral** – artwork, video production, slogan etc
- **Resources** – who'll do the work, how much time will they have, and will there be any budget?
- **Capability** – do you have the skills or do you need training or external support?
- **Partnerships** – are you doing this alone or with others?
- **Innovation** – will you be doing anything new or different?
- **Timeline** – what period of time is involved and are there key actions at certain points along the way?



**Think about:**

Writing a separate plan for who will do what. It's important that you think about who will do things, but write a separate plan for this. What you're considering here are the headlines, don't confuse this part of your strategy with an operational plan and get bogged down in assigning each task.

Once you have a strategy you will write a separate plan setting out each task, who'll be doing it, how and when.

However, there's no point in coming up with a stunning strategy which you won't be able to deliver. You want your strategy to be ambitious, but rooted in reality. So keep an eye on the practicalities – in particular, the people, time and resources you have, and shape your strategy accordingly.

## Example tactics list

Objective	Related tactics
<i>Increase the number of people self-referring to the service from 200 to 600 by the end of the financial year</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Refresh and update the 'self-referral' page of the website</li><li>• Social media campaign to drive traffic</li><li>• Improve search engine optimisation</li></ul>
<i>Form referral partnerships with 3 local NHS services by December</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attend Healthwatch and CCG meetings to meet potential partners</li><li>• Approach local GP surgeries and ask if we can speak at the weekly practice meeting</li></ul>
<i>Increase the number of men accessing the service by 20% by this time next year</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Approach local influencer (radio DJ) for endorsement</li><li>• Produce case studies featuring men who've used the service</li><li>• Place posters in local workplaces that employ mostly men</li></ul>

Over  
to you!

List your tactics here.

Objective	Related tactics

## Measuring success

It's important to know whether or not your strategy is working. If you have set the right measurable objectives, coming up with key performance indicators (KPIs) should be easy. You can also think about KPIs linked to targets from funders.



You should have a KPI for each objective in your strategy. It is best to have a single powerful one than lots of little ones.

Set yourself very clear targets, with specific numbers and deadlines. For example:

We will know we have been successful if:

- We receive 400 more self-referrals for support over the next year
- The new newsletter launching in April has 100 subscribers by December
- Unique user visits to our website have increased by 15% by July 2023

Consider whether numbers or percentages will be a better measure. You may end up using a mixture of both.

For ongoing priorities, you can set rolling targets, e.g.: increase social media reach by 5% in each of the next three years – but keep reviewing them and change them if they prove to be too challenging or too easy.

If you can't find a way of getting the evidence or data you need to measure a KPI, remove it. Some things are much harder to measure, such as awareness or reputation.

If you do want to evaluate such things, carry out a survey to benchmark what people think and know about your organisation before you start, then again at a later date (probably at least a year), to see if there has been any change.

Before and after assessments are especially useful for measuring the impact of a communications campaign. Adopting this approach would be one of the tactics for delivering your strategy.

## Example KPIs

Objective	KPI	How will this be measured?	By when?
<i>Grow our impact on social media</i>	<i>Increase our Facebook following</i>	<i>Facebook data</i>	<i>20% by the end of strategy year 1, a further 10% by the end of year 2</i>
<i>Increase the number of people self-referring to the service</i>	<i>400 more self-referrals for support received</i>	<i>Database figures for self-referrals</i>	<i>In the next 12 months</i>
<i>Increase income from donations</i>	<i>Increase corporate giving by 10%</i>	<i>Donation income</i>	<i>Within the next 6 months</i>

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to you!**

**Use the grid below to set yourself some meaningful achievable communications KPIs.**

Objective	KPI	How will this be measured?	By when?

# Writing an implementation plan



A strategy doesn't work if it sits on a shelf. We need to bring it to life by committing to implementing it.

An implementation plan draws together all the things you've decided to do, and assigns tasks to your team.

It's the same information you've already created, but in an easily digestible format.

## Example implementation plan

Objective	Tactic	Target audience	Key message	Channel	KPI & measure	Timeline	Person responsible
<i>Increase the number of men accessing the service by 20%</i>	<i>Place posters in workplaces that employ mostly men</i>	<i>Men aged 16 -65</i>	<i>We're here to help you live a great life</i>	<i>Print</i>	<i>Referral database shows 20% more male referrals</i>	<i>12 months from July 2022</i>	<i>Comms Officer (posters) Referrals lead (KPI measure)</i>
	<i>Approach local influencer (radio DJ) for endorsement</i>			<i>Local radio</i>			<i>CEO (knows influencer) Comms Officer (liaison)</i>

**Over  
to you!**

**Use the grid below to bring together your implementation plan.**

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Tactic</b>	<b>Target audience</b>	<b>Key message</b>	<b>Channel</b>	<b>KPI &amp; measure</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Person responsible</b>

# Next steps



Having completed the tasks in this workbook, you should be well on the way to having an effective communications strategy which is well thought through and shaped to meet the needs of your organisation.

There's no ideal length of time which a strategy should cover, but three years is about right. Your strategy will work best if everyone in the organisation is onboard, so when you think the strategy is ready, it's a good idea to share it with the rest of the people in your organisation, to see if anything needs adding or changing.

Finally, three other important things to remember:

1. A strategy shouldn't sit on a shelf. Bring it to life by committing to implementing it.
2. Make sure your staff's objectives and workplans link into the strategy and what the organisation wants to achieve
3. Review your strategy every 12 months to check it's on track and still valid. Circumstances change, so your strategy may need tweaking along the way.

## Good luck!



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