



9. Creating sustainable connections

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Thinking strategically

The strategy for any project’s communication should always consider that project’s audience and their needs, including the best ways to reach them and the message that they should receive. Knowing more about - and understanding - the audience in depth and detail means that communications will be relevant, appropriate, and have some potential to both connect and engage with participants, close audiences, and wider audiences alike. Indeed, a project’s communications may need to reach out to very different ‘audiences’ - including the initial stakeholders and collaborators, the participants and co-creators, and, finally, the audiences of a final presentation, if one is planned.

Thinking about particular media or channels of communication make it more likely that audiences will be reached in ways that they will understand and expect. Fashioning creative and meaningful messages can touch audiences and spark an interest that can create attention and, importantly, action - in ways that create relationships enabled to live alongside a project and its development, moving beyond its lifespan. Understanding how and why the project’s communication is relevant and appropriate, and getting a sense of how and why particular audiences react or respond allows for meaningful and sustainable connections. Giving participants and audiences opportunities to interact will also allow for new communication ideas and platforms. Being able to plan for the project to continue to have some kind of presence after its completion can also create novel impacts and engage with potential audiences, and so extending its life in unexpected ways.

Developing a sense of audience needs is very useful for a project’s communication, since this generates a deeper sense of understanding and empathy. It is crucial to consider elements such as personal experiences, views and concerns.

Connecting and communicating with audiences allows your project to find and reach them in a way that’s focused and makes the best use of the projects’ resources.

Knowing who your audience is

How might you start to define your audience? Thinking specifically and in detail about how audiences are defined and getting a better sense of who they are improves the opportunity for successful and meaningful engagement.

Some questions to consider in developing an understanding of an audience can include:

- How old are they (their generation, the decade they belong to, their stage of life)?
- Where do they live? Are they clustered together in a particular place or separated in some way geographically? What’s their time zone?

• What languages might they speak? Are they the most widely-spoken languages in that area? What are their interests, and how could these connect with the project?

• What are their beliefs and values? We’re more than age, education or income - thinking about things that people have in common (and points of difference) relating to their lifestyles and interests can help connect with audiences in surprising ways.

The Orfeo & Majnun project (2016 - present) - which took place in six European countries - targeted specific audiences and communities. In Malta, communication was developed in English, Maltese, French and Arabic, to make sure that diverse communities could take part.
www.orfeoandmajnun.eu

• Where can audiences be found? Connection and communication depend a lot on getting into the eyes, ears and brains of potential audiences - otherwise an audience may not be reached, or the wrong audience might be targeted.

Some questions to consider in gaining knowledge of where an audience’s attention might be found can include:

- How does an audience like to read, listen to or view information? Do its members use certain devices or reply on particular (familiar) sources?

- Are they familiar or unfamiliar with certain types of media? What's the best way to connect with them? Are there certain types of media they won't engage with? It's useful to think of how old and new media can work together to find your particular audiences.

- Can examples in the media they use which connect in particular ways be worth learning from? There could be websites that audiences might regard as useful or informative in certain ways or publications that they're certain to see.

The community project Ġewwa Barra (Inside Outside) (2017-2018) worked with a very specific section of a marginalised community in Malta's capital Valletta. In order to attract participants, the project lead, accompanied by a community leader, called many of the residences in the city in person, speaking to people and spending time encouraging them to take part. While time-consuming, this approach allowed the project to reach people who would not read newspapers or follow social media online.
www.facebook.com/gewwabarra

ject has? What does the project offer that they'll be keen to find out more about? What message does the project have that the audience simply must hear? Should they think or act in a particular way in response to the project's communication?

- Can project participants connect with audiences in ways that run parallel to the projects? Do participants' stories or messages represent something vital and engaging? How could opportunities be created for the project participants to have a voice or play a part in the project's communications?

The project En oförglömlig historia - Trajoskodrom romano (An Unforgettable Story) (2-16 - 2018) worked with a Roma community in Sweden and told the story of the Roma journey over a thousand years, through a musical performance. The work was created and performed by Roma amateurs and professionals from different groups and of different ages. Young people develop knowledge of their own history, interview their elders and practice writing, reading and storytelling. At the same time, the audience was given an insight into the Roma journey through the ages, creating a deeper understanding of the group's situation today.
www.postkodstiftelsen.se/blog/projekt/en-oforglomlig-historia-trajosko-drom-romano

- Are there any barriers or challenges in getting the message across to an audience? Why might its members lose sight of or misunderstand any communication?

Knowing what matters

How do you start to think about making your audience care, making them realise that they're interested or intrigued and convincing them to connect with a project? The communications industry bombards us all with thousands of messages every day, so trying to find a way through this noise and attracting an audience can be challenging, but also presents many opportunities.

Some questions to consider when developing a message which can meaningfully connect with an audience could include:

- What is the main reason for trying to connect with an audience and the appeal a pro-

Any project is long, possibly complicated, and composed of a lot of different activities. Thinking about when (as well as how) to reach out, connect or develop a relationship with audiences can be very powerful - it doesn't always have to happen at the end of the work. Some questions to consider when developing a timeline to help plan when to communicate can include;

- Are there points within the project when it would be a good idea to make people aware of the project's activities?
- Are there benefits to updating audiences on progress made at particular milestones within a project?
- How can the story of what's being made be told in a way that gets people interested and sustains this up to a point when the project is launched? There might be different ways to connect with audiences at certain points in a project's life.

We might often think that once a project is complete and an audience has been found, then the job has been done - but in fact, it's often just the beginning. Post-project activities may need to be promoted; these communications need to be part of the timeline to connect with the project's audience. How will communications be sustainable, and for how long?

The project Life Bitch! is an artistic platform and a social movement in Södertälje, Sweden where young girls and women aged 13-25 can express themselves and find community

beyond cultural, religious and ethnic differences. The vision of the project is to raise the status of young women, on stage, in the city, and in Sweden. The project organises open activities and an outreach project, inspiring girls in the city.

www.livetbitch.se

Some questions to consider when developing sustainable communications can include:

- Is there the opportunity to archive the project and all activities in one place? Would a website or a publication be the most appropriate way to achieve this?
- How can the project's afterlife exist in such a way that is useful and valuable to the artist, participants and audiences in the future? A website can sometimes seem to be unloved or ignored when it stops being updated, and in some cases can cease to exist and go missing entirely - so having a plan for making sure the project remains available and accessible can be very important, as organisations develop and grow or change.

copywriter or designer needed? Who has skills which can help to create the materials that best reach the project's target audiences? There could be opportunities to work with stakeholders to help develop ideas and materials for communication, or where sponsorship helps to produce things such as publications or help host websites which allow the project to exist materially or tangibly.

Measuring impact and audience response will allow a reflection on whether certain methods might be best to develop as part of existing work or in the future. There might be ways of receiving feedback or extending the relationship with audiences through mechanisms such as email newsletters, comments pages, submitting reviews or responses to events or performances. Audience reach and how many people see communications are one way of measuring impact - opportunities for feedback, dialogue or co-creation make for a richer relationship and one that can be more sustainable over time. There may be a particular measure which is most appropriate or relevant for the project and its audiences - this could be used to capture the project as part of the communications approach. It may also be useful to share the results of the project's impact with participants and stakeholders, so that success in reaching, connecting and communicating becomes something to celebrate - showing numbers of viewers or examples of audience response, for instance.

Considering impact

Understanding the impact of a project's communication is vital for any art-based project and is closely linked to knowing who the audiences are, and why things matter to them. One useful way to help understand the intended impact is to write a statement which summarises the change the project hopes to achieve - this then allows a consideration of how best to make any communication with audiences.

How does the project's communications perform - are certain resources needed to reach audiences in particular ways or in certain numbers? Are certain people required to perform particular tasks related to how these communications can take place? Is a photographer,