

**Interreg**  
*Mediterranean*



**PROGRAMME MANUAL**

# DESIGNING YOUR EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Programme cofinancé par le Fonds Européen  
de Développement Régional (FEDER)

Programme cofinanced by the European Regional  
Development Fund (ERDF)

## FORWARD NOTE

For the 2014-2020 programming period, the Interreg MED Programme has adopted a new approach for project management that drives new orientation on project identities and on (expected) results rather than on processes or simple outputs. Each project will be part of a thematic community of projects running during the whole programme period and to which they will contribute. Project partners will have to develop their relations in the spirit of the “MED community” in order to allow the development of a true “community identity”. In this sense, the project communication approach will be based on thematic communities rather than on the identity of the project itself. Following this new approach, project partners as well as Programme bodies will permanently be interconnected in one consistent and single manner.

## Introduction

Six months after their approval, Modular projects are requested to provide a communication strategy, together with the first progress report. Whereas, Horizontal projects must present a first draft version of their communication strategy including a communication plan (or activity plan), no later than 4 months after the project approval.

When designing their communication strategy, both Horizontal and Modular projects should carefully take into consideration the development of a true “community identity”, thematic and Mediterranean, in order to create a greater awareness of results.

Bearing this in mind, there are three interactive levels that must regularly communicate and cooperate with each other:

- Transnational/Programme level;
- Thematic community/horizontal projects level;
- Project level.

Each level should find means of coordination and define their degree of intervention, as well as the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder in terms of communication activities and supports, definition of the communication strategy and media communication. Clear separation will allow enhanced complementarity and will help to avoid any overlapping.

The communication strategy of the Horizontal project must be set up in coordination with the Programme and with the Modular projects of its thematic community, through meetings, working papers or consultations. This positioning has the purpose to grant the strategy the coherence and adherence of every modular project to develop a clear understanding of mutual tasks and coordination methods. In this respect, the communication responsibilities of Horizontal projects can be summed up as the following, they must:

- Draw the communication strategy of the thematic community they are in charge of;
- Implement this communication strategy through an annual communication plan;
- Coordinate this communication strategy between all the stakeholders (see part “internal communication”).

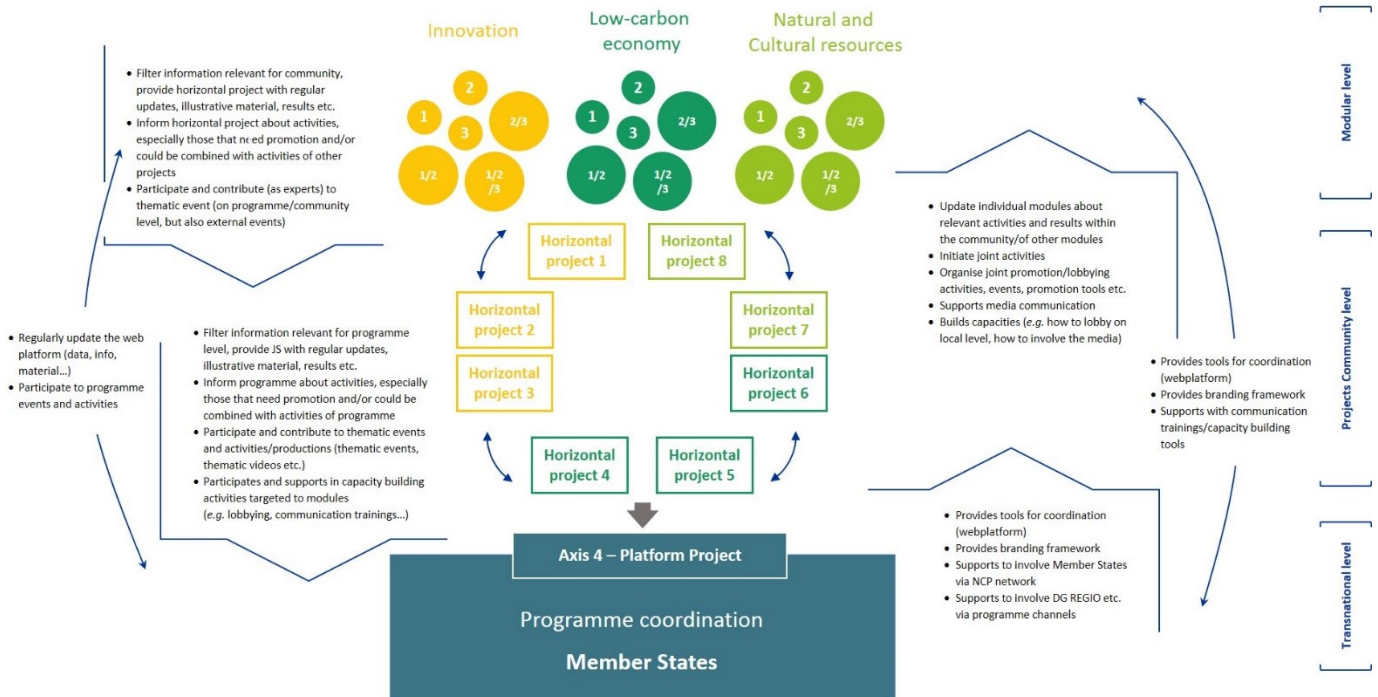


FIGURE 1: COMMUNICATION LEVELS OF INTERVENTION

Either way, project partners are strongly advised to follow the recommendations detailed hereunder to draft their communication strategy that should be based on discussions and decisions involving all project partners. The communication strategy shall be short and precise and at least include the following main sections:

1. Strategic overview and situation analysis
2. Objectives
3. Target groups
4. Tailor messages
5. Communication channels and activities
6. Timeline
7. Financial and human resources
8. Evaluation

## Strategic overview and situation analysis

Project partners are strongly advised to perform a SWOT analysis beforehand. For this purpose, they need to list all the project's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in terms of communication. A SWOT analysis will help them look realistically at the project's communications environment and plan accordingly. Project partners can answer the following questions to undertake their SWOT analysis:

- **STRENGTHS:** What are the strengths of your project?
- **WEAKNESSES:** What are the potential weaknesses of your project? What could be damaging or negative?
- **OPPORTUNITIES:** What communications opportunities are there? Is there anything new, different, interesting or unique in your project that you could capitalise upon for publicity?
- **THREATS:** Are there any potential threats that your project could face? What might go wrong? How could this affect your communications and PR activities?

## Objectives

Communication needs to be goal-driven. We communicate to achieve or change something.

The communication objectives derive from the management objectives. Project partners are advised to build-up their communication strategy on the same grounds as their project strategy, in order to achieve better results and coherence.

Project's overall communication objectives should be expressed in short bullet point format and clearly indicate what the project communication will bring to the project.

It is important to define these objectives in a way to be able to measure the success of communication activities. This should be about setting SMART (specific, measurable, assignable, realistic and time-related) goals that are broad enough to allow flexibility and room to adapt to changing circumstances.

## Target groups

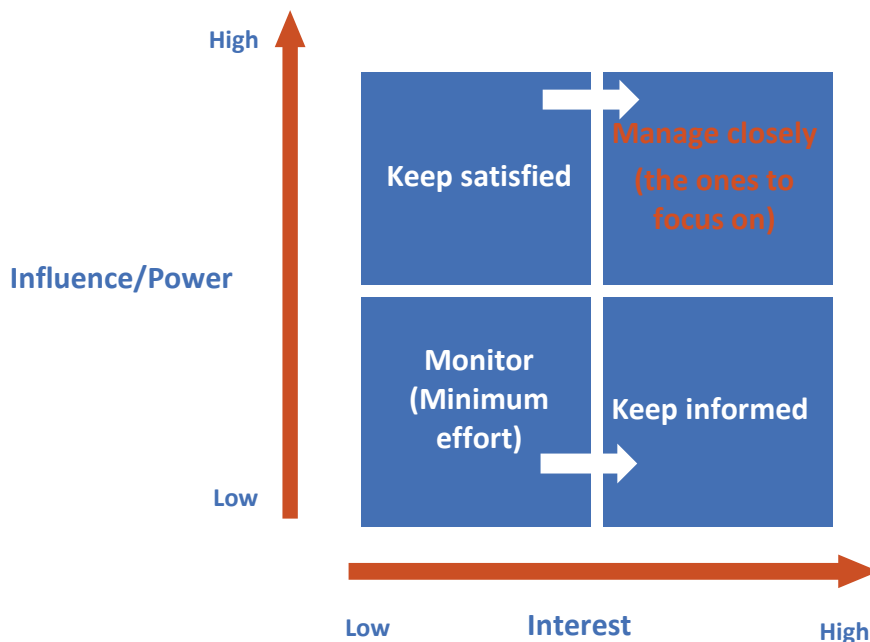
All projects need to communicate with a number of people who are – or might be – interested in their project and can have an influence on their ability to achieve their goals rapidly and efficiently.

Knowing your “target audience” is the main starting point of a communication strategy. Meeting their different needs, perceptions and expectations is in fact a critical success factor of any effective communication strategy.

“Who is our target audience in the project?” is the first question that project partners should asked themselves. The target groups need to be identified as accurately as possible so as to ensure that the key messages are transferred to the right audience. For this purpose, it is advisable to list and map all the groups or segments of public and analyse their interest, their attitude and the best channels to reach this group to adapt their communication activities accordingly.

A stakeholder mapping will help prioritise stakeholders in terms of the strength of their interest and the degree of their influence. A good way to create a stakeholder map is the grid below, which shows at a glance which categories of stakeholder demand priority attention.

After listing the concrete target groups, this grid is used by inserting the names of groups and significant individuals in the four quadrants. There should be between **five and ten individuals in each quadrant**. The individuals **in the upper-right box are the ones that project partners should be focusing on**. However, projects should also try and therefore adapt their communication activities accordingly to make the groups of individuals located in the left hand box move into the right hand box.



## Tailor messages

Projects need to tailor their messages to their target audience in order to meet their interests and expectations. The messages have to be easily understood. The wording should be carefully crafted to be appealing to the public.

So what is a good message? A good message is distinctive, consistent (your target groups need to hear the same message from different sources and on different occasions), concise, clear and simple.

## Activities

Project partners need to define the activities and tools that they will undertake in order to achieve their objectives and set in place the communication approach. The choice of the tools must address the targets in an effective manner.

As seen previously, the Programme will provide a web platform (please refer to the related section), on which the thematic communities, the Programme and the projects will be able to publish information about project management, deliverables, outputs, results, events, news and databases, capacity building information. However, this tool should be completed with other activities. It is up to the project to decide which tools other than the Interreg MED Programme platform are the most appropriate to reach their target audience.

There is a wide variety of tools, each with different purposes. Nevertheless, all projects are strongly advised to follow the recommendations described here below.

### a) General recommendations for Modular projects

All modular projects shall include at least the following general activities in their communication plan:

- Social media communication of/for project and active participation in thematic community and Programme social media communication;
- Publication of at least one short portrait of the project – adapted to main target group(s) (printed publication such as flyer or audio-visual such as video);
- Presentation at and contribution to external events (e.g. with other projects, the community of projects, etc.);
- At least one promotional activity to promote the final output(s), e.g. social media campaign, an event, exhibition, seminar has to be foreseen;
- At least one activity targeted to the general public, possibly via local, regional or specialised media, in line with the targeted public;
- Participation in information and training seminars (and/or following guidance provided):
  - Web platform trainings;
  - Communication trainings;
  - Other capacity building seminars.

When filling in the Application Form on Synergie CTE, each kind of modular project (M1, M2, M3 or a combination of modules) has to consider its own specific communication activities, adding and complementing to the general activities described before, the ones that are the most suited to their activities.

### b) Specific recommendations for MODULE 1 and MODULE 2 PROJECTS – Studying and testing

To better communicate the results of Module 1 and Module 2 partners are specifically advised to observe the following recommendations:

- Publish short project summaries targeting the general public in both languages: French and English;
- Projects delivering policy recommendations must draw up at least one communication activity or a strategy to build credibility for the project output in relation with the horizontal project;
- Technical studies (Module 1) and tests (Module 2) are extremely difficult to understand by unprofessional specific targets but even by professionals of other scientific areas. In this regard, it is highly recommendable for projects to use an accessible language and a user-friendly format in order to make the whole concept and its details easily understandable. Story telling could be an option;
- Results of analyses, studies and tests shall be communicated to projects target groups in the most adapted ways, according to the practices of the targets;
- Projects with Module 1 can include the reinforcement or establishment of networks. In order to communicate a network, specific coordination and information tools should be built up guaranteeing that the members of the network can receive up to date information, can exchange, can be identified, etc. The web platform of the Programme already offers a useful coordination tool. In any case, other efficient tools can be used, depending on the partner's dynamics, as for example a dedicated coordination platform or blog (integrated in the website). Project partners must state in their communication approach how they intend to address this coordination issue. Which methods and tools they will be setting up.

c) Specific recommendations for MODULE 3 PROJECTS – Capitalisation activities

Projects with Module 3 must transfer results from previous projects to territories and targeted beneficiaries. This means that concrete actions on local or regional level or directed to specific targets should be undertaken in order to raise awareness of the target public.

The activities foreseen or expected to be carried out by module 3 are:

- Public relations and/or outreach strategy (e.g. local markets, local entities, associations professional, involving local schools etc., specialised media to draw the attention of specific targets, participation in events as fairs, sectorial and professional meetings);
- Stories, interviews, end user testimonials, images that will nourish communication on several levels;
- Social media activities to get in contact and raise awareness of local/regional citizens;
- Video or radio strategy to bring the stories to a higher level of visibility;
- Seminars or living exhibitions to present demonstrations, experiences, i.e. get the target groups into direct contact or experiencing the subject of the project.

In the case of policy recommendations, a lobbying orientated strategy should be implemented and targeted to local levels of government or to specific targets. Lobbying activities are common to Horizontal projects, therefore, more details on this technique on the section "ACTIVITIES FOR HORIZONTAL PROJECTS".

Multi-module projects (M1+2, M2+3 and M1+2+3) are expected to combine the activities foreseen for the specific modules they are including in the project.

**Please note that the roles and tasks of the horizontal projects and the Module 3 projects are very different and cannot be merged.** The basic criterion to distinguish them is the scope of the dissemination process. Module 3 projects mostly keep a thematic and territorial focus. While a horizontal project can coordinate several Module 3 projects and make the synthesis of their results. Horizontal projects and Module 3 projects should therefore be perfectly coordinated in order to avoid any overlapping.

## d) Activities for horizontal projects

Horizontal projects are the centre of capitalisation and communication of the Programme, in every level. They represent the thematic communities of modular projects.

In this context and for transnational transferability purposes, they have to process and filter the results of the exchange with modular project contributions to the thematic community, in particular with results of their activities, qualitative information, participation in events, delivery of stories from the field that could be interesting at the transnational level in order to promote the thematic community.

They should also guarantee the quality of the materials to be published, not only from the point of view of the written contents. The texts should be written in plain language, and demand quality image files: high resolution professional images and high quality audio-visual materials. For this purpose, the horizontal project must establish guidelines and orientations for the modular projects. The Programme can provide guidance on this matter and can also provide joint training webinars or seminars in this and other capacity building events.

In a more precise way, here is the list of the minimum concrete activities to be included in the communication plan of the Horizontal Projects:

- 1) Strategy building and updating (annual plans);
- 2) Management/regular update of the thematic website:
  - Nourished by information and data of project;
  - Further nourishing (after selection) the Programme website;
- 3) Social media communication of/for the thematic community and active participation in the Programme social media communication;
- 4) Participation of the communication officers in the MED communication working group;
- 5) Publication of:
  - One thematic Community brochure after 1 year then regular production of thematic publications (printed or online publications);
  - Short leaflet of the selected projects after 6/8 months of their respective implementation;
- 6) At least one videos for the project (promotional videos, coverage, video streaming of the events);
- 7) Organisation of:
  - Thematic events involving projects and coordinated with the Programme;
  - 4 key events : preparatory meeting; official kick-off; mid-term conference; final conference;
- 8) Participation in Programme events and active contribution (with possible co-organisation);
  - Thematic working groups;
  - Axis 4 “platform” project meetings;
  - Coordination events with programme bodies (JS and NCP);
- 9) Presentation at and contribution to external events (e.g. with modular projects and other thematic communities etc.); Public Relations and media communication (division between programme and horizontal projects to be defined, during pre-kick off).
- 10) Transferable and reusable databases. For this purpose it could be suggested to projects to produce databases connected to smartphone applications (improvement of complementary instruments and tools);
- 11) Lobbying activities in Brussels with relevant international networks and at the EP/CoR/EC, if needed. Therefore, it is advised and expected to draw an approach focused on personal public relations with activities such as:
  - Stakeholder mapping, analysis and targeting strategies;
  - Using expert columns in local media, as a public intervention in the agenda setting;
  - Finding a media partner for an expert event mixing and involving it with the political level;
  - Getting a public character or high credibility and prestigious institution to sponsor the project;
  - Organising a minimum of hearings and establishing regular direct contacts and travels;
  - Participating in relevant meetings;

- Influencing relevant and political working groups in the drafting of important policy or legal documents at local and European level.

More detailed information on lobbying can be found in the Communication Guide.

Again, all the activities mentioned above must comply with EU and Programme communication rules. All the activities shall be coordinated together with the Interreg MED Programme authorities, through planning and an Interreg MED communication working group.

## Timeline

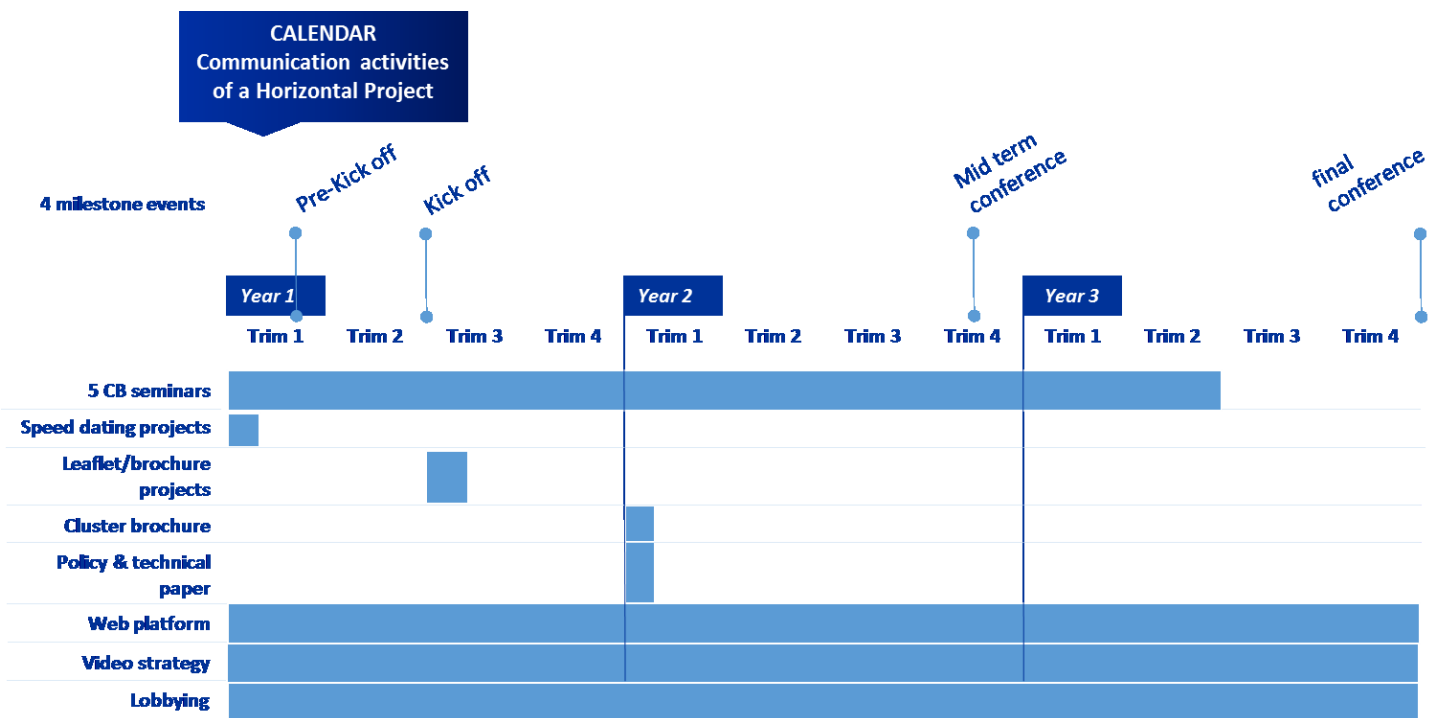
It is advisable to create a timeline that identifies when each activity will take place. This will help to ensure that deadlines and opportunities are not missed. Taking the minimum activities as reference, the calendar allows to set in place the main milestones of the communication strategy and the coordination tasks.

The calendar for Modular project communication activities must be in line with the Horizontal projects one, in order to better set up the coordination between all levels of the Programme architecture.

For Horizontal projects, the calendar should be further developed at the beginning of the project, taking into account key events and milestones of the Modular projects belonging to their thematic community.

As far as possible, in particular for projects with lasting longer than one year, the Horizontal project and the Programme should be informed each year of the planned activities for the following year, in order to better frame complementarities of communication actions and avoid repetitions and waste of resources.

FIGURE 2: MODEL OF CALENDAR FOR COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES OF HORIZONTAL PROJECTS



## Financial and human resources

First and foremost, all projects (Modular and Horizontal) should not allocate resources to the development of a website and a logo as those are provided by the Programme. However, financial and human resources should be



assigned to develop communication content and regularly update the web platform. Specific branding can also be created for event campaigns and products or services delivered by the project, if necessary, or to enhance the contents of the website and other related digital strategy.

a) Modular Projects

Modular project partners should allocate resources for their own communication activities and in order to establish a regular work relationship with the related Horizontal project and with the Programme.

The partnership should assign communication responsibilities to a single partner, whereas a contact person should be designated to act as a liaison officer with the Horizontal project and the Programme. Please see hereunder the “mediator”.

Financial and human resources must be allocated to ensure the project participation in external events, when justified and useful for the project, other than the horizontal project events and seminars.

b) Horizontal Projects

The coordination of communication activities being rather complex, resources should be assigned to follow up the strategy from the conception, up to the evaluation, in order to guarantee the follow-up and connection at all levels.

Likewise, financial and human resources must be allocated to ensure the project participation in external events, promoted by other thematic communities or by the Programme or thematically relevant specific transnational events.

Concerning the project budget allocated to communication activities, specific branding can be developed for event campaigns.

In terms of human resources, each Horizontal project shall foresee one full time professional communication officer that could also be responsible for the capitalisation activities. If the Horizontal projects propose two separate officers, one for communication work and another for capitalisation (moreover, if they are from different partners or countries), it is critical to present a model of hand-in-hand cooperation between them.

## Evaluation

It is highly important to assess the effectiveness of a communication strategy so as to know whether the objectives have been met, which activities were successful and which ones should be improved or left aside. Evaluation also creates useful feedback to share with other projects and the Programme, so that they can learn from the project experience.

The communication evaluation criteria, indicators, measures and methods, during the operation and at its closure have to be defined in line with the project specific and communication objectives. If it is an operation of long-term duration, a mid-term evaluation should be foreseen.

To establish comparability of results, the Horizontal project can propose a common framework and structure of evaluation, sufficiently flexible to be adapted by the projects. In alternative, the Horizontal project can analyse the results of the communication evaluation and submit it to the Programme.

The modular projects will cooperate with the horizontal project in setting up a common evaluation grid and methods.

In these common or individual exercises the Programme can provide the necessary knowledge to support and frame the exercises of evaluation of communication activities.

Evaluation of communication activities should be included in the global project evaluation.

Here is a set of possible qualitative indicators:

- Satisfaction level of activities implemented (questionnaires for conferences, publications etc.);

- Identification and communication with target groups (distribution lists developed, number of direct mailings to number of persons, how is the feedback within interactive web tools developed (how many 'likes' on FB, how many comments in discussion forum etc.);
- Further analyses of web statistics: where are most of the hits (after a press article, conference, newsletter);
- Hits on different sections.

Quantitative indicators:

- Number of downloaded publications, number of printed and actually distributed publications;
- Number of participants to events;
- Number of press articles.

#### SUMMARY OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR THE APPLICATION FORM

- ➡ Each project must present its communication approach in the related field of the Application Form (section C.5. of the AF, Work Plan, and Communication Work Package); for this purpose, the project should draw major lines stating the name of the project, the communication objectives, the target groups as well as the communication activities and tools.
- ➡ Beware, there are only 2000 characters available to describe the project communication approach, therefore we recommend all applicants to be as specific as possible. **Internal communication – coordination and community building.**