

DCR

Development Communications Roundtable

A Knowledge-Sharing Gathering for Communicators Amplifying Impact

Learning Guide Series:

Theory of Change, Strategic
Communications Framework
and Impact Measurement



About The Development Communications Roundtable

The Development Communications Roundtable (DCR) is a knowledge-sharing and networking event for young African communications professionals working in the development sector.

Developed by The Comms Avenue in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, the DCR has been designed to equip young development communicators with the skills, tools, and networks to achieve transformative and measurable impact across the continent.

In addition, the DCR will provide access to senior communications professionals from the Mastercard Foundation who will share unique, real-world insights and tailored advice to help them excel in their roles.

Through the DCR, participants will learn how to:

- Apply the Strategic Communications Framework and the Theory of Change.
- Measure and report communications outcomes effectively.
- Leverage best practices in development communications for transformative impact.



The Theory of Change

According to Professor Jim Macnamara, a Theory of Change (ToC) is a process of thinking thoroughly about what will cause a desired change (**desired impact**) and then establishing the link between what a programme or change initiative does (**activities and interventions**) and how it leads to the desired goals the organisation wants to achieve.

In essence, the ToC describes the desired change to be achieved and it outlines the activities and interventions that need to take place to ensure that this desired change is achieved within a particular context.



Question: If we want to achieve any goal or objective (outcomes and impact), what actions (activities/inputs and outcomes) do we need to take?

Key Steps in the Theory of Change

- 1 Identify the desired change (impact) or long-term goals and work backwards.
- 2 Identify all the conditions (outcomes) that must be in place for the desired change to be achieved.
- 3 Review and question the assumptions made in identifying what will lead to the desired impact. Your assumptions need to be backed by some data.
- 4 Gather solid evidence to validate your approach and support your assumptions.

The focus is on the goals and the activities that need to happen to achieve the change – an opportunity to co-create with the programmes team.

Identifying Inputs, Outputs and Outcomes

- **Inputs** – Something that you do.
- **Outputs** – The result of that action or thing that you did.
- **Outcomes** – What happens as a consequence of what you did.



Tip: Your goal should be to tell the story of the results your organisation is achieving and the impact you are making (outcomes).

Connecting the Theory of Change to the Strategic Communications Framework

At the heart of the ToC and the Strategic Communications Framework is the change or impact to be achieved.

- **Theory of Change:** Outlines the desired change or impact and works backward.
- **Strategic Communications Framework:** Outlines the role communications will play in achieving the desired impact in measurable and tangible terms.

For both, the key question is – **What Do We Want To Achieve?**

The Strategic Communications Framework

What is a Strategic Communications Framework?

“A structured approach to planning and executing communications that support an organisation’s strategic goals, ensuring message alignment and audience engagement.”

International Association of Business Communicators (IABC)

“A roadmap that defines an organisation’s key messages, target audiences, communication objectives, and the best channels to reach those audiences effectively.” **Harvard Business Review**

“A systematic approach to communication that ensures stakeholders receive clear, consistent, and credible messages, supporting behavioural change and organisational reputation.”

World Bank Group

Key Elements of a Strategic Communications Framework



Situation Analysis
and Context



Goals and
Objectives



Audience and
Stakeholder Analysis



Messaging
Strategy



Strategy



Tactics and
Activities



Timing, Budget and
Risk Assessment



Measurement
and Evaluation

Situation Analysis and Context

This refers to the internal and external factors that shape an organisation's communications strategy



Goals and Objectives

Consider the **broader business goals** that your communications activities are linked to.

Objectives refer to **what you aim to achieve** with your communications activities.

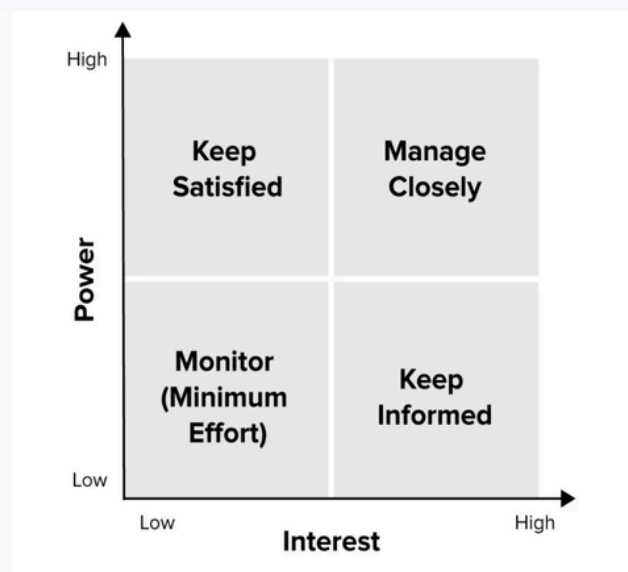
Objectives must be **measurable and quantifiable.**

Audience and Stakeholder Analysis

Effective communication strategies require a deep understanding of who the key audiences and stakeholders are, what their interests and motivations are, and how best to engage them

1. **Identify the audiences and stakeholders** that you want to target and those who have an interest in what your organisation does.

2. **Use the Interest/ Power matrix** to map each audience or stakeholder to determine the best way to engage them.



Adapted from Mendelow, A.L. (1981). *Environmental Scanning - The Impact of the Stakeholder Concept*. ICIS 1981 Proceedings, 20.

Messaging Strategy

The following elements are critical when developing your message:

- > Content and Audience
- > Language and Tone
- > Timing and Sequence
- > Content and Audience
- > Format and Platform(s)
- > Test and Approval



Tip: Focus on what you want your audience or stakeholders to **KNOW, FEEL** and **DO**.

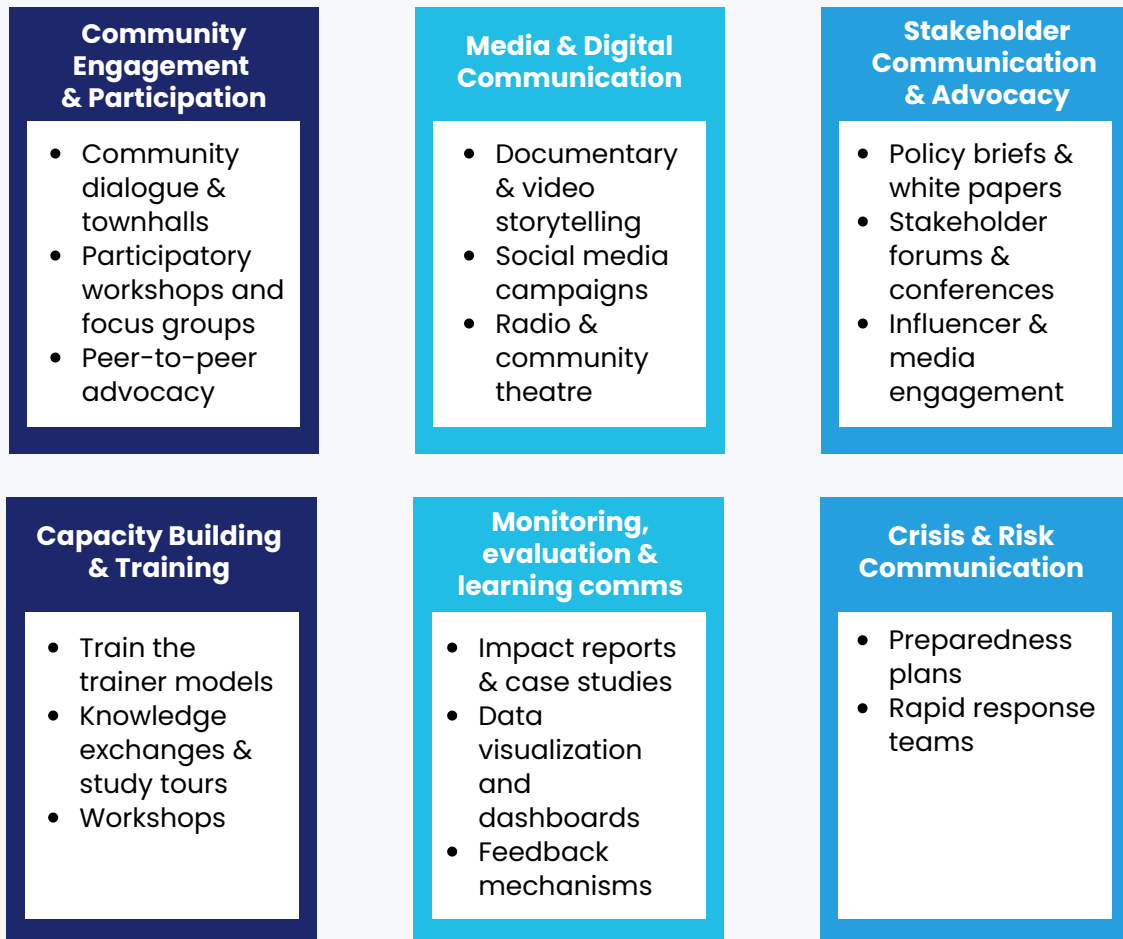
Strategy

Your strategy is **the data-driven foundation on which your tactical activities** will be built. Some strategies you can leverage include:



Tactics and Activities

Tactics are the activities you will implement to achieve your strategy. Your tactics must be clearly linked to your strategy and it should help you to achieve your strategy.



Timing, budget and risk assessment

- Create a visual timeline so you can track what activities should happen when, as well as dependencies and blockers.
- Account for human resources, operating costs and technology costs, when creating your budget.
- Risk assessment is key to the SCF, helping organisations anticipate, mitigate, and address communication challenges.

Take the following steps when assessing risk:

Identify Potential Risks – Consider political, social, economic, and technological factors that could impact communication efforts.

Assess Likelihood & Impact – Evaluate how likely a risk is to occur and the extent of its potential impact.

Develop Mitigation Strategies – Outline proactive measures to prevent or reduce risks.

Establish Crisis Response Plans – Define clear action steps for managing unexpected communications crises.

Measurement and Evaluation

Measurement and evaluation will be covered in more detail in the latter part of this guide but here is something important to note:

The foundation for measurement and evaluation is the **objectives** that you set at the beginning.



Tip: Measure **outcomes** not **activities** because outcomes help you to demonstrate the real impact of your communications strategy and tactics.

Measuring Communication Impact

The Foundation for Measurement and Evaluation

The foundation for communication measurement and evaluation is knowing what you want to achieve and being able to show whether you have achieved it or not.

It is essential to set objectives that are measurable. Without measurable objectives, it will be difficult to determine or showcase the impact of the work that you have done.



Key Question: How will you know that you have done what you set out to do at the beginning of the strategy development process?

What this means is that it is important to have measurement and evaluation in mind from the very beginning because, "Measurement done well begins with the end in mind."

Setting Measurable Objectives

Your objectives must be aligned with what your organisation wants to achieve and they must be quantifiable. The goal is to set objectives that are **SMART**:

- **Specific.** Be precise about what you want to achieve.
- **Measurable.** How will you know the objective has been achieved?
- **Achievable.** Make sure you can reasonably achieve the objective.
- **Relevant.** Ensure alignment to organisation goals.
- **Time-bound.** What is the timeframe in which the objective will be achieved?

The Measurable Objective–Setting Formula

Use this formula to set objectives that are measurable:

Improve **(WHAT)** by **(HOW MUCH)** among **(WHO)** within **(WHEN/TIMEFRAME)**

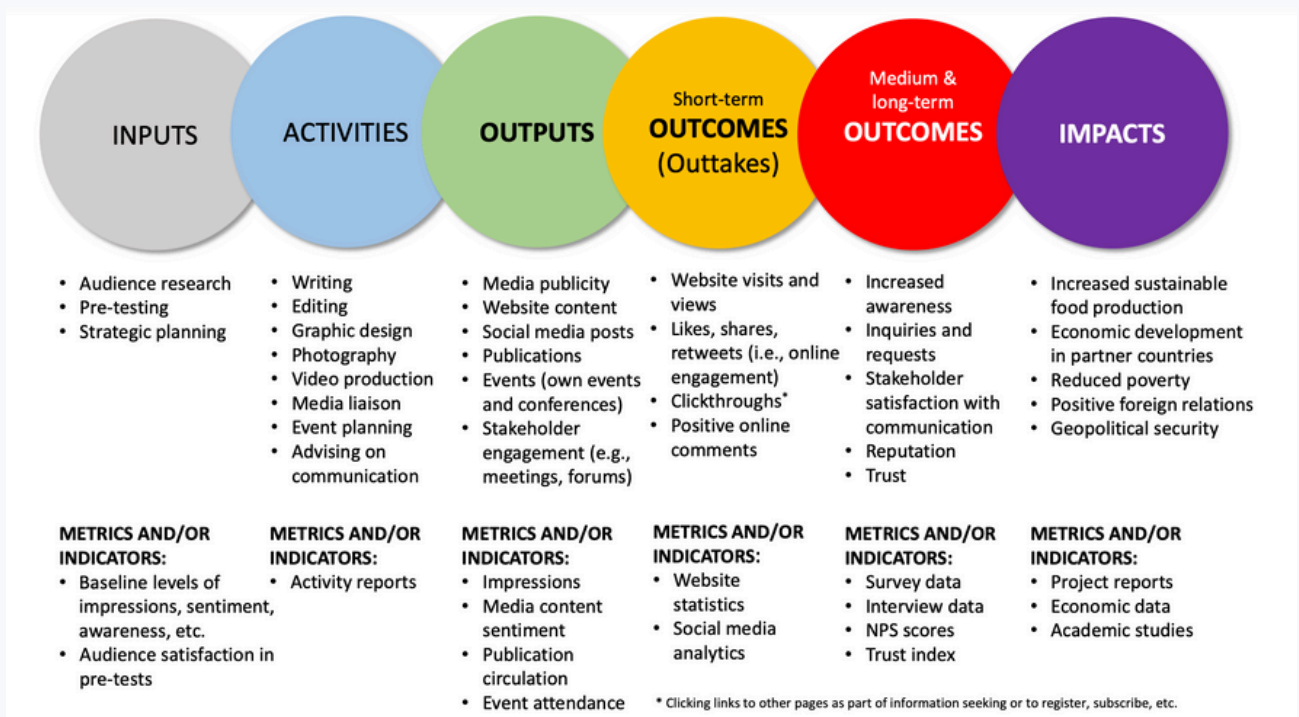
Examples of Measurable Objectives

- Increase attendance in community-focused programmes by 50% within one year (**Output objective**).
- Raise awareness of cot safety messaging among nursing mothers from 10% to 35% in 12 months (**Outcome objective**).
- Increase institutional donations by 15% within six months (**Impact objective**).

Metrics and Measurement

Always choose metrics that will help you to demonstrate the correlation between your communications activities and the organisational results that your executives want to see.

The image below shows some metrics you can measure to demonstrate tangible impact :





Tip: Tie your metrics to your outcomes. This will help you to show the correlation between your communications activities and the organisational results that your executives want to see

Measurement Tools

It is best practice to leverage a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools to measure and evaluate the impact of your communications activities.

Here are some tools you can use:

- **Survey** – SurveyMonkey, Typeform.
- **Media Monitoring** – Brand24, Mentionlytics.
- **Social Media and Website** – Google Analytics, Social Mention.
- **Reporting and Data Story** – Coverage Book.



Tip: Be clear on the information you need and use Google to find free tools that can help you to collate this data. Also, start with the in-built analytics on Social Media and Google.

Measurement is a long game. It is, therefore, important to avoid a one-size fits all and one-tool or platform approach.

Focus on the metrics that will lead to the results you want to see, get your baseline figures and use those metrics to determine whether your activities are having the desired impact or not.

Programming for Results and Impact Storytelling

Tips from the Mastercard Foundation Communications and Programming Teams

For programming to be impactful and deliver the expected results, there needs to be seamless co-creation and collaboration between the programs and communications teams.

Below are some tips that will help you to implement an integrated approach to programming that will translate to impact and effective storytelling.

1. Define the Big Picture of Impact

To achieve integration between the programs and communications teams, it is essential to have a big picture of the impact to be made from the onset.

This means having clarity of purpose and answering some key questions such as:

- What exactly are we seeking to achieve with this intervention?
- How should this intervention be rolled out to achieve that big picture?
- What does this mean for our organisational purpose and values?
- What does it mean for the individuals and communities we want to uplift and advance?



Tip: Sit down with all your partners and get clarity on the big impact outcomes they want to see.

The spirit of co-creation will help you to move quicker, faster, and it will ensure that the quality of your work and the outcomes are not compromised in any way.

2. Make a Shift from Viewing Communications as a Support Function

➤ **Become an Integrated Partner.** For communications teams to add real value to programming, there needs to be a shift from viewing the role of communications as a support function. Instead, communications teams need to position themselves as integrated thought partners to their programs teams.

Support could be taking pictures on the field, amplifying a press release or organising a media tour during a visit. Being an integrated thought partner, however, is a different thing. It means being able to positively shape the outcomes of an intervention and outline strategies that will yield the desired results.

As an integrated thought partner, you have more responsibility which means that whatever the metrics, targets, and roadmap that the programs team has for a particular intervention, you have to understand them.



Tip: You can be called to the table at every single meeting but if your contribution at that table is not of value, your presence will not make a difference. Always come to the table with value.

➤ **Be excellent.** Your communications work needs to be excellent. Be so excellent that they are forced to remember you and call you to the table.

Whatever it is that you are bringing to the table, always remember that excellence will take you far. This means that you need to know your stuff so that when you speak, people will know that what is coming out of your mouth is gold and they will respect you for it.

Excellence will move you from being seen as a support function or an afterthought. It will shift you into becoming a person who is integral to the success of interventions and programming.

How to Become a Valuable Comms Partner to your Programs Team

➤ **Be Proactively Integrated.** You need to have a shared understanding of where a program or intervention is going and what the big picture outcome is. A lack of shared understanding can cause misalignment and a break in how the relationship with your programs team progresses.

➤ **Provide Useful Insights.** Once you have a shared understanding that is clearly defined, it is very critical to ensure that you constantly provide useful insights based on your expertise and past experiences. This means that as you engage with your programs team, you need to give useful insights on contextual details they ought to bear in mind and provide guidance on how relevant stakeholders should be engaged.

Strategies for Getting Stakeholder Buy-In

➤ **Embracing Authenticity.** Whenever you engage with stakeholders, do your best to be your authentic self. Understand your strengths and what comes easily to you, so that you can be comfortable when you engage with stakeholders to get their buy-in.



Tip: Know yourself, play to your strengths and always be clear about what it is you are trying to achieve from your engagement with a stakeholder.

➤ **Understanding Your Audience.** Your stakeholders will have different priorities. They will also have different engagement styles. It is, therefore, important, to know how each stakeholder likes to be engaged. What are their interests and priorities? If you understand the specific objective of each stakeholder, it will make the conversation and journey easier.

➤ **Using The Power of Emotional Intelligence.** Becoming self-aware and knowing how people respond to you will help you to make the necessary tweaks to your approach. This will help you to engage your stakeholders better and get their buy-in.

Resources

Use the following resources to gain deeper knowledge of the topics covered in this Guide:

- [Development Communications Toolkit](#)
- [Navigating Development Communications Guide](#)
- [Comms Career Cheat Sheet](#)
- [Breaking Down the Communications Planning Process](#)
- [Strategic Communications Bite-Sized Course](#)
- [One-Third of PhD in Evaluation in Less Than One Hour](#)
- [International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication](#)

ABOUT THE MASTERCARD FOUNDATION

The Mastercard Foundation is a registered Canadian charity and one of the largest foundations in the world. It works with visionary organizations to advance education and financial inclusion, enabling young people in Africa and Indigenous youth in Canada to access dignified and fulfilling work.



Established in 2006 through the generosity of Mastercard when it became a public company, the Foundation is an independent organization with offices in Toronto, Kigali, Accra, Nairobi, Kampala, Lagos, Dakar, and Addis Ababa.

Its policies, strategies, and program decisions are determined by the Foundation's Board of Directors and Senior Management.

Vision – Opportunity for all to learn and prosper.

Mission – To advance youth learning and financial inclusion to catalyze prosperity in developing countries and to support Indigenous youth in Canada.

Values – Humility, Listening, Kindness & Respect, Co-creation, Impact.

Learn more about Mastercard Foundation – www.mastercardfdn.org

ABOUT THE COMMS AVENUE

The Comms Avenue is a pan-African capacity-building and networking platform for communications professionals. We currently have over 1800 communications professionals from 35 African countries in our community.



The
Comms
Avenue

Using a collaborative community approach, our work is focused on enhancing communications talent in Africa by providing training, mentorship, resources and access to opportunities for professional development and career growth.

Our Vision - To raise the standard for Comms talent in Africa and build a strong community of communicators who are empowered to contribute to positive change in various industries, across Africa and globally.

Our Mission - To equip communications professionals across the African continent with the skills, knowledge and opportunities to excel in their role as communicators.

Our Pillars - Community, Capacity-Building, Networking

Learn more about The Comms Avenue : www.thecommsavenue.com.

Have questions about this guide? Contact us!

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