

## Communications Primer Step 1: Determine Your Goals



Begin by defining specific and measurable goals. One of the most common mistakes non-profits make in crafting a communications strategy is choosing a goal that is too general or elusive. Here's an example of a goal that probably won't be helpful in crafting your communications strategy: "Increase public awareness of habitat destruction." And here's one that could be: "Increase public support for wetlands protection at town meetings in St. Charles County, MD." Your goal should be specific enough that you can 1) assess whether you have adequate resources to accomplish it, and 2)

make important strategic decisions, such as choosing one audience, pitch, messenger, or media outlet, over another. And your goal should be measurable so you can judge whether you're making headway or need to revise your strategy.

This doesn't mean that you can't aim high. Indeed, believing we can achieve a very different future – a future in which, for example, the general public *is* more conscious of habitat destruction and, consequently, actively promotes public policy to protect valued natural places – is arguably central to effective and sustained environmental and social change work. The solution is to craft a communications strategy that accomplishes your short-term, achievable goals while moving you towards your desired long-term outcomes.

You may have more than one communications goal, and they may relate to your organization's program work and/or development. You may be working to get a new piece of legislation passed, to strengthen enforcement of an existing law, or to directly change individuals' behavior (e.g. reduce homeowners' pesticide use, increase boat users' sensitivity to the spread of aquatic invasive species, etc.). Or perhaps you want to enhance your organization's visibility, increase your fundraising, or recruit more volunteers.

Here are a couple additional things to keep in mind when choosing your goals:

- Recognize that some of your goals may be complimentary, while others may not. For example, if you're working in coalition to pass a particular piece of legislation, partners may feel the work is compromised by efforts to raise your organization's visibility (and they may be right!).
- There may be other communication campaigns addressing issues related to your own. Consider who's already in the field, and how you can capitalize on what they're doing and/or play a complimentary role.

Once you've got your goals set, you're ready to [determine your audience](#).

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