

## Overview

Welcome to this toolkit on developing an internal communication strategy for your organisation. The aim of the toolkit is to help organisations to improve their efficiency and effectiveness through the creation of internal communication processes that create a cohesive organisational culture.

Civil society organisations are focused on specific issues, on improving situations and having a real impact in addressing the many challenges facing the world. Often, the focus is so exclusively on what is going on 'out there' that very little attention is given to what is going on within the organisation. Communicating and sharing information with colleagues is overlooked as everyone concentrates on getting work done and achieving the organisation's objectives.

Within communication strategies, internal communication is often overlooked, yet it is vitally important. It is the communication that relates directly to the foundation of your organisation: the people – staff, management and volunteers – that give your organisation its ability to function. Developing sound internal communication processes and evaluating these processes on a regular basis is the same as making sure your car runs smoothly and is serviced regularly. If the many different pieces of your car do not fit smoothly together, you will not get where you are going very quickly, if you get there at all. Similarly, if the people that make up your organisation do not work together effectively, your organisation will not achieve its objectives as fast, if at all. An internal communication strategy is the key to ensuring a cohesive organisation focused on achieving its goals and objectives.

Your internal communication strategy should emerge from, and be guided by, your organisation's overall strategic plan. This is because strategic internal communication is simply a step towards helping your organisation achieve its aims more effectively.

Improving your internal communication requires careful thought, creativity and detailed planning. As well, monitoring and evaluation must be built into your plan. As your internal communication plan should be integrated within your organisation's overall structure and strategic plan, you may find these other CIVICUS toolkits (available at [www.civicus.org](http://www.civicus.org)) useful in starting the planning process:

- Strategic planning
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Action planning
- Overview of planning
- Budgeting

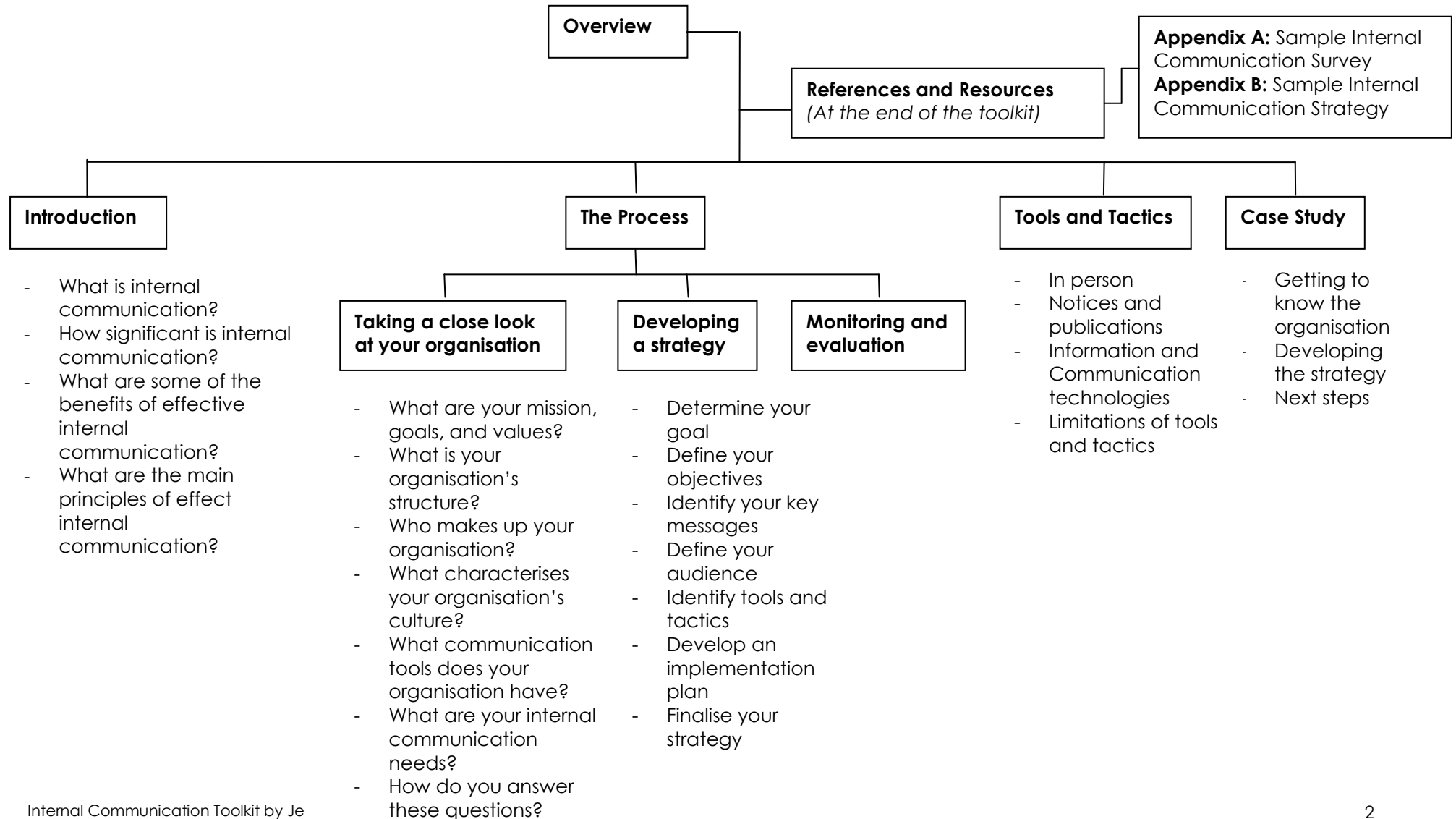
CIVICUS also offers two toolkits to assist your internal written communication: 'Writing effectively and powerfully,' and 'Writings within your organisation'. In addition, the following three toolkits will help you plan your external communication, which should be done in conjunction with your internal communication plan:

- Promoting your organisation
- Handling the media
- Producing your own media

We refer to these toolkits and sections within them throughout this toolkit.

**Note:** this toolkit focuses primarily on staff-management communication and not inter-management, staff/management-board or inter-board communication. In addition several important and in many cases sensitive issues such as change management, social exclusion, harassment and multi-cultural communication are not discussed in detail. This toolkit should be taken only as an introduction to internal communication and not a complete guide to all the issues that arise in this area.

## Site Map – Internal Communication Toolkit



## Who will find this toolkit useful?

This toolkit will be useful for all organisations that want to improve their internal communication. In particular, it will be useful for those organisations that want to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their organisation by creating increased cohesion among staff, management and volunteers. In addition, the toolkit also offers food for thought and some tips for organisations that may already feel that they have effective internal communication process but want to ensure that these are maintained and utilised consistently.

## A brief description of the toolkit

This toolkit offers you an opportunity to think hard about whether your organisation needs to improve its internal communication. If you decide you need to, it offers practical guidance on how to do it.

On this site you will find:

- **Introduction**

Here we look at what internal communication is, why it is important and the benefits of having effective internal communication. In addition, we discover some of the key principles of successful internal communication.

- **The strategic internal communication process**

Here we look at the three steps in the strategic internal communication process: taking a close look at your organisation, developing and implementing a strategy and monitoring and evaluation. We discuss the questions you need to ask of your organisation before you develop an internal communication plan and how to go about finding the answers. Then we go step-by-step through the process of developing an internal communication plan and implementing it. Finally, we discuss the need for monitoring and evaluation the process in order to ensure that it achieves the desired goals and adapts to meet changing circumstances and needs.

- **Tools and Tactics**

Here we discuss the different tools and tactics that you can use to improve internal communication. Tactics can use tools that require face to face meetings, written notices and publication or information and communication technologies. We discuss the benefits of each type and elaborate on some of the different tactics that can be used. Finally, we highlight some of the limitations of tools and tactics in general

- **Case Study: Building a cohesive organisation**

Based on a real experience, this case study looks at how one organisation undertook the strategic internal communication process. Particular attention is paid to how the organisation adapted the process to meet its own circumstances and needs.

## Introduction

### What is internal communication?

Internal communication does not refer only to those few "official" channels of communication within your organisation, such as internal newsletters, notice boards or staff meetings. It is not a process that goes from the top, the Chief, to the bottom, the intern. Rather, internal communication refers to the almost constant interactions within your organisation that convey meaning. Therefore, internal communication encompasses both overt communication like meetings, memos etc, and more casual forms of communication such as gossip, pleasantries and body language.

### How significant is internal communication?

Internal communication is significant in any organisation because it is the building block of the organisational culture. The organisational culture is the atmosphere of the organisation based on its values, mission and work processes. When every member of the organisation holds the same values, understands the work policies and procedures in the same way, and is focused on the same mission, the organisational culture promotes much more effective use of resources than under a culture that is more diffuse in its interpretation.

Within the non-governmental community, internal communication and its effects on organisational culture is just as important as in the corporate sector, perhaps even more so. Just because your organisation has what you believe to be a clear mission, based on basic values of human dignity and human rights, does not mean that all members of your organisation interpret that mission and those values in the same manner.

**Example:** *An adult literacy organisation has a mission to "assist disadvantaged adults obtain their high school diplomas." The executive director of the organisation assumes that to be illiterate is to be disadvantaged, and therefore sees the organisation as assisting all illiterate adults. Meanwhile, a project manager interprets disadvantaged as having something in addition to being illiterate, such as a learning disability and/or substance abuse problem. Therefore, in designing and implementing a project, the manager carefully targets a select group of people who have these problems. The executive director is then left wondering why the organisation is not achieving the goals she or he has set for it.*

Within this hypothetical organisation, there is no communally held interpretation of the organisation's mission. The executive director and the project manager may not necessarily be working at cross-purposes, but they are not working as effectively together as they could be. Effective internal communication can ensure that all members of an organisation are working towards a common goal and assisting each other effectively.

### What are some of the benefits of effective internal communication?

When your organisation is communicating effectively with its internal stakeholders, whether they are employees, management or volunteers, it develops a cohesive culture where everyone is focused on the same goals and has the same objectives. By working within a cohesive culture, your stakeholders can work more efficiently together and collaborate more effectively. Some specific benefits that can result from effective internal communication include:

- Employees can make more decisions themselves since they have the tools and knowledge to know the "right" decisions in line with the organisation's goals;

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- Staff can identify better with the goals, mission and procedures of the organisation, which can result in a sense of "making a difference" and increase effort and efficiency;
- Programmes and departments share more resources and information resulting in less duplication of work and stronger impact as a whole organisation
- Day-to-day conflict can be reduced since a lot of conflict is the result of conflicting ideas on what is important to the organization;

Although effective internal communication may not bring about all of these results for all organisations, it can go a long way towards building an organisational culture where people work together effectively towards a common goal.

### **What are the main principles of effective internal communication?**

Unlike with external communication, organisations often fail to strategically plan their internal communication. In other words, internal communication is usually either arbitrary or incomplete and if planned, tends to be planned only in reaction to specific events (downsizing for example). However, effective internal communication is planned, not only to deal with specific issues, but for the long-term well-being of the organisation.

Some basic principles to keep in mind when creating your strategic internal communication plan are:

- Develop a long-term focus
- Identify clear values for your organisation
- Define the specific goals for your internal communication strategy
- Use comprehensive, pervasive methods
- Be consistent in your messages

The rest of this tool kit will guide you through the step-by-step process of developing a strategic internal communication plan that is based on these principles.

## The Process

### Taking a close look at your organisation

The first step for an internal communication plan is the same as for an external communication plan. You must start by taking a good hard look at your organisation. The following is a list of questions that you should answer before developing an internal communication plan:

#### **What are your organisations mission and goals?**

These should be specific and clearly defined. If your organisation does not have a mission or goals, your organisation should first develop a strategic plan.

**Resource:** CIVICUS Strategic Planning Toolkit can help you with this process.

#### **What is your organisation's structure?**

Here you should look at how your organisation is structured. Some questions to consider are:

- How many people comprise your management team? How does this compare to the number of staff?
- What type of staff do you have? Are most people full-time, part-time, volunteers?
- Who sits on your board of directors? How are they related to the organisation or the organisation's mandate?
- Where do staff work? At a central office? At home? On site? In satellite offices across the country or around the globe?

#### **Who makes up your organisation?**

Here you would identify not the structure of the organisations (the positions) but the make-up (the actual people). You would want to identify the age, gender and cultural diversity of the organisation.

#### **What characterises your organisational culture and internal communication?**

Identifying organisation's culture can be a difficult task as it is not easy to pin-down. To assist in this task, it is useful to look at the current state of internal communication. The following are some questions you should consider:

- How familiar are staff with the missions and goals of the organisation?
- How are decisions made in your organisation? Do staff have the ability to make necessary decisions to do their jobs effectively?
- How is information shared between staff? What is the primary form of communication?
- How formal is internal communication? Do staff interact on a social level?

#### **What communication tools are used within your organisation?**

It is important to establish which tools staff and management are currently using to communicate amongst themselves and with each other. In so doing, you will be able to identify potential tools that are missing or that are underused for some reason but which may have the potential to address a need.

#### **What are your internal communication needs?**

Finally, you will need to identify where your organisation's internal communication needs improvement. This will vary considerably from organisation to organisation. For example, one organisation may not effectively communicate board decisions to all staff while another may not inform the board effectively on programme outputs. It is likely that you will find that your organisation has a number of areas where internal

communication can be improved, with some being more important than others. These needs, and their varying level of importance, will directly inform your internal communication strategy.

## How do you answer these questions?

In taking a closer look at your organisation, some of the answers to these questions will be obvious whereas others may be much more difficult to uncover. Depending on the size of your organisation and its organisational culture, you can consider several tactics to uncover the information you need to know. If your organisation is small and has a culture that allows for open and frank discussion, you could consider raising these questions in an all-staff meeting. However, if your organisation is larger, or you find that staff do not feel comfortable speaking about these issues in large groups, you could consider holding small focus groups or administering a staff survey.

**Tool:** Appendix A provides a sample staff survey. This sample provides a starting point to create a survey that meets the particular circumstances of your organisation.

## Developing a strategy

Now that you are familiar with the characteristics of your organisation, you can start developing a strategy. The information you uncovered in the previous section should and will inform all the decisions that you make with regards to the different sections of your strategy. The following are the necessary steps in this process. Note that while they are described as steps, each step would also form a section of your strategy.

### 1. Determine your goal

Here you should identify what is the overarching goal for your internal communication strategy. It should answer the question: "What do you want your organisation to look like in the future?"

**Example of a goal:** To ensure that individuals/departments within the organisation have access to all the information they require to make informed decisions and maximise their output.

### 2. Define your objectives

Your objectives differ from your goal in that they are more specific and measurable, and should all build towards your goal. In selecting your objectives, make sure that you pay close attention to those shortcomings in your internal communications that were identified when you took a close look at your organisation.

**Example of an objective:** Ensure that all staff is aware of the organisation's vision, mission and values and of its key organisational developments.

### 3. Identify your key messages

While the millions of formal and informal communications that take place within your organisation on an annual basis do not all carry the same messages, your work, as you strive to improve the internal communication processes, should strive to convey a few key messages. These messages do not have to be complex; it could be something as simple as 'it is important that the staff is aware of how the organisation is moving forward.' Similarly, the message does not have to be explicit in every communication, rather, the context, medium, frequency etc. of the communication should imply the message.

**Example:** A key message could be 'Staff input in management decisions and organisation direction is valued and important.' This message does not need to be explicitly stated in a communiqué to staff, rather the communiqué should encourage staff to send back their comments and concerns.

#### 4. Define your audience

Based on what you learned when you took a close look at your organisation, you should be able to provide a pretty accurate description of what your internal audience looks like. Having a clear picture of your audience is particularly important when you come to the next section of your toolkit 'Identifying tools and tactics.' Knowing whether your audience are paid staff or volunteers, located in a central office or dispersed around the world, have access to the internet or email on a regular basis, among other factors, will all have a profound impact on the tactics you can use to communicate with them.

#### 5. Identify tools and tactics

It is here that you actually identify how you are going to communicate with your audience. A following section in this toolkit will provide a potential list of tools and tactics that you could consider using; however, there are several things you must keep in mind when selecting the tools and tactics you will use. To start, a tool is a medium of communication, the instrument that you can use to reach your audience, while a tactic is the manner in which you use the tool.

**Example:** Email is a tool while sending out the minutes from management meetings using email is a tactic.

It may be useful to first create a list of all the tools that are available to you to reach your specific audience. This list could include things like email, newsletters, telephone, regular post and many more. In putting together this list, it is important to be creative and try to come up with as many tools as possible. This will allow you to better identify the best tactics to reach your particular audience. The audience is the key factor when you select those tools that are available to you and therefore your list of tools should be cross-checked to make sure that it is appropriate for the characteristics of your audience.

**Example:** Email is not an appropriate tool for an organisation whose staff/volunteers have no or irregular access to the internet. Meanwhile, face-to-face staff meetings are obviously not going to work for staff who are not based in a central office.

The tactics you identify need to be very specific actions. In other words, a tactic is not a general statement of something that needs to be done, but rather a specific action that someone can take to achieve a particular aim.

**Example:** 'Share board decisions with staff' is **NOT** a tactic – 'provide an overview of board decisions at monthly staff meeting' is a tactic.

When selecting a tactic it is important to not only consider the audience but also to focus on your objectives. A useful way to identify potential tactics is to take each objective separately and brainstorm as many different ways you can use the tools available to you to achieve your objective. Once this is done, you can select several of the best available tactics for implementation. Note that it is important that your tactics are realistic. Do not choose a tactic, or several tactics, that your organisation simply does not have the resources, whether in terms of staff time or money, to



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complete. It is often better to implement one or two very simple tactics than to select one grand tactic or many little ones that your organisation simply cannot complete.

**Example:** Producing and mailing (regular post being the tool) a quarterly twelve page print newsletter that provides all the details on staff movement, current projects and the organisation's strategic direction may ensure that you achieve your objective. However, if your organisation realistically only has the resources to produce this newsletter once a year, it would be more effective to send brief letters with the key information every other month.

**IMPORTANT:** Identifying and selecting tools and tactics does not have to (and in fact, should not) be the responsibility of one person or department. Rather, as many people as possible should be asked to recommend ways to achieve the objectives as this is the best way to identify creative tactics that are realistic in terms of the organisations resources. If you are conducting a survey or focus groups as part of the 'taking a close look at your organisation' process, make sure that seeking recommendations for specific tactics is part of the process.

### 6. Develop an implementation plan

Here is where you get into the detail: who is going to do what and when? For each tactic you have selected, you need to identify whose responsibility it is to complete it and a timeframe for its completion (or a schedule if it is a regular task). Note that all the tactics will not necessarily be completed by the communication or human resources department (if your organisation is large enough to have one) or by just one person. Often, different tactics will be completed by different people, with some being the responsibility of management and others of specific staff members. As this is the case, it is again very important to make sure that tactics and their implementation are selected in consultation with the staff and management of your organisation.

### 7. Finalise the strategy

Once you have completed these six steps and have put together a complete internal communication strategy, you will need to collect feedback from others in your organisation and finalise the strategy. Depending on the size and structure of your organisation, this may mean circulating the strategy to staff for comment or simply discussing it with a few key people. In either case, you need to control this process and set deadlines for when people need to get back to you. Similarly, do not automatically incorporate all comments into the strategy if they do not take into account many of the issues that have been discussed above. Rather consider all comments and modify the strategy to best address the issues raised while maintaining a realistic implementation plan. Once this process is complete and you have received the approval you need, the time has come to turn words into action!

**Tool:** Appendix B is a sample internal communication strategy. While this strategy can be used as a guide for your strategy, it will need to be modified to meet the specific needs and objectives of your organisation.

### Monitor, evaluate and update

You may have completed and implemented your internal communication strategy, but that does not mean that your work is done and you can file your strategy away. As with any organisation or communication strategy, an internal communication strategy requires continual evaluation and up-dates.

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To start with, you must monitor the implementation of your strategy. This means making sure that your tactics are being implemented on time and as planned, and making any adjustments necessary to achieve this. Second, you must regularly evaluate whether your tactics are actually helping you achieve your objectives and your overall goal. This can be done informally, such as through general observations and casual conversations, or formally such as through a staff survey and discussion groups. In any case, you should implement an annual evaluation process to determine the progress being made towards your goal.

**Example:** If you conducted a staff survey prior to completing a strategy, you should consider conducting a similar survey one year later. This will allow you to see whether any areas have improved. It may become apparent that one of the main problem areas has improved immensely but that one of the positive areas is now having considerable problems.

Following the evaluation process is the updating phase. As you identify problems with your strategy, you will need to update it to address the issues. This may mean modifying the tactics that you are using or developing new objectives. Again, while changes can be made throughout the year, a formal review process should be completed on a yearly basis to ensure that the strategy evolves to meet the current needs of the organisation.

## Tools and Tactics

As mentioned above, a tool is a medium of communication, the instrument that you can use to reach your audience, while a tactic is the manner in which you use the tool. The following is an extensive, although by no means complete, list of tools and tactics you can consider using to improve the internal communication at your organisation. For each tool, we have listed its advantages and disadvantages, and then provided a number of different tactics that can be undertaken using that tool.

### In-person communication

#### *Advantages:*

In-person communication has the advantage that it is personal, direct and conducive to two-way communication. In particular, face-to-face meetings allow for the discussion of sensitive issues that require more subtlety because the use of body language and other social conventions are visible. In-person communication is the ideal tool for holding discussions on important issues and getting feedback from your audience. In addition, in-person communication can also be more informal and have more social aspects than many other forms.

#### *Disadvantages:*

The main disadvantage of in-person communication is that your audience must be physically present in one location. Other disadvantages is that it can be a time-consuming form of communication, staff may not be honest in their communications because they can not be anonymous and therefore may feel 'unsafe' and they may not want to lose face. Office politics can also often play a large role in in-person communication and can therefore provide additional complications to tactics that use this medium.

### Sample Tools and Tactics

#### *All staff meetings:*

If your organisation is not too big, all staff meetings can be an ideal way to communicate key information to staff. These meetings can be used to communicate updates from different programmes and departments, welcome new staff and say farewell to staff who are leaving, provide staff with an overview of the organisation's strategic plan, and share management and board decisions. In addition, staff meetings can be the perfect place to seek feedback from staff and discuss important issues. Finally staff meetings can include team building activities and other training exercises to improve the functioning of your organisation.

#### *Individual meetings:*

Individual meetings are a good tool when you need to communicate sensitive issues. Issues to do with continued employment, sub-par performance, training needs or other behavioural issues are often best dealt with on an individual basis.

#### *Recognition programmes:*

Recognising the contribution and achievement of staff is a key part of ensuring a high morale in the workplace. High morale translates into dedicated staff who are more efficient and effective in their work. When establishing a recognition programme, you must first consider what it is you want to recognise: length of service, success in a project, innovative ideas etc. You must also decide whether you want to give out monthly awards or have a yearly programme. In addition, will there be prizes or is it

simply a certificate and a nice pat on the back? A well thought-out recognition programme can go a long way towards making your staff feel valued.

### *Social events:*

Social activities can have as much impact on your organisational culture as any formal meeting. Often, these events can build team spirit, increase morale, and deepen the connection between the staff and the organisation. Some options for you to consider are:

- Birthday celebrations: Let everyone take a half hour break in the afternoon and enjoy some cake!
- Shared Lunches: Each staff member brings a different dish to share at lunchtime. This can also be a good opportunity to learn about the culture of your colleagues through their different culinary dishes.
- Friday afternoon social outings: Invite staff to meet for a drink and snacks at a local café or restaurant at the end of the day on Friday.

**Resource:** The CIVICUS toolkit 'Promoting your organisation' provides some useful tips on speechmaking that could assist you with your in-person communication. In addition the CIVICUS toolkit 'Producing your own media' gives you advice on putting together a successful presentation.

## Printed Communication

### *Advantages:*

Print communication has the main advantage that it is an easy way to communicate a large amount of information that your audience can access in their own time. It is long lasting communication that people can access whenever they are in the office. Similarly, they can be posted in strategic locations to attract the maximum of attention. Finally, using the traditional postage system, printed communication can reach around the world, even to those who do not have access to internet and email. Also of importance is the role printed communication plays in meeting legal requirements and other tasks such as contracts, invoices and accounts.

### *Disadvantages:*

Printed communication does have several disadvantages. To start, printing and disseminating communication in print can be prohibitively costly in any large quantity. Second, your audience has the option to simply discard your communication as soon as they lose interest, if they even pick it up in the first place. In addition, preparing print material can be a lengthy process and time consuming, and is primarily conducive to one way communication. Finally, printed communication can carry more weight than more casual communication. It can have legal implications and can create issues of privacy.

## Sample Tools and Tactics

### *Internal newsletter:*

An internal newsletter is different from your organisation's regular newsletter in that it contains information that is directly relevant only to your organisation's staff. As such, an internal newsletter can be an ideal way to communicate information such as new staff, changes in policies and procedures, programme updates and organisational developments. In addition, the newsletter could run a column from your executive director and be used to recognise staff contributions. In creating a newsletter you will need to consider the following questions:

- What information will it include?

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- Who is responsible for writing the content?
- Who is responsible for compiling and editing all the stories?
- How will you disseminate it? (Put copies in the lunch room, mail it out etc – note that this could also be made into an electronic publication)
- How frequently will it go out?
- Who will be responsible for approving the content?
- And many more...

### *Staff handbook:*

A staff handbook should be used as resource that staff can turn to when they have a question about the organisation's policies and procedures. While it is not a good place to include information that may change on a regular basis, it is a good tactic to use to ensure that staff are clear on their rights, entitlements and responsibilities, and can help ensure a smooth relationship between staff and the organisation.

### *Resource library:*

Many organisations have large collection of books, journals and newsletters that they have collected over the years. Often, however, these resources are distributed haphazardly around the organisation with one or two people using a small selection and the rest not even knowing the resources are there. To make information sharing more effective, you could consider creating a central resource library. This library would bring together the many different resources into one location and which are organised in a logical manner (by subject, alphabetically etc).

### *Notice board:*

Notice boards are a simple and easy way to keep people informed of important issues. By putting a board in a high traffic area in your office and making it visually attractive, you can grab the attention of all the staff that pass by it. This tool is most effective for conveying event announcements, brief but interesting news stories and other short items. Your notice board could also include an employee recognition section and a feedback box. Note, however, that if your board is located somewhere where the public has access that you make sure it does not contain any confidential information.

**Resource:** CIVICUS has three additional toolkits that can help you with your written communication – 'Producing your own media,' 'Writing effectively and powerfully' and 'Writing within your organisation.'

## Information Technology based Communication

### *Advantages:*

Information technology based communication has the advantage of being fast, cheap and with a reach that stretches all the way around the world. New media make it easier than ever for organisations with sufficient technological capacity to reach a large audience with a minimum amount of resources.

### *Disadvantages:*

The major disadvantage of information technology based communication is that not everyone has access to the necessary technology whether because of location, cost or position with an organisation or skills. In addition, information overload – meaning that many people who regularly use this form of communication receive more information than they can effectively handle – increases the chance that your communication will be missed by its intended audience.

## Sample Tools and Tactics

### *Email:*

Email is a relatively cheap easy and quick way to send information. However, as people become ever more inundated with information, it is important to use email strategically as well. You should consider establishing a monthly or bi-weekly e-newsletter for your staff, rather than sending out an email for each item that needs to be communicated. This will make it easy for your staff to recognise the newsletter as worthy of being read and not to relegate it to the rubbish bin, as so many others are. See the note above for some tips on developing a newsletter.

### *Listserve:*

A listserve sends out an email message to everyone who is subscribed to the list. The list can be moderated, in that one person, the moderator, controls all that goes to the list, or open, in that anyone on the list can send a message to the list. Listserves can be used to distribute messages to all staff about upcoming events, announcements, meetings etc. However, a listserve can also be used as a discussion forum with staff posting interesting resources and stories they may have found and respond to those posted by others.

### *Tele/video conferencing:*

Tele/Video conferencing is the best way to simulate a face-to-face meeting when that is not possible. Its main advantage is that it can overcome distance but has the disadvantage of requiring technology which in many areas is not very accessible. Tele/Video conferencing can be used to conduct small group discussion and get feedback from people who may work in the field or satellite offices and not be able to partake in staff meetings in the main office.

### *Intranet/Website:*

An intranet site is different from a website in that it is usually protected by a password and only accessible to the staff of an organisation. An intranet site can be used to provide access to shared files, resources and other information to staff who are located all around the world but have access to the internet.

**Resources:** The CIVICUS Toolkit 'Writing within your organisation' contains a section with tips on using email.

### **Get Creative!**

Each organisation has its own unique challenges when it comes to internal communication, and each unique challenge has its own unique solution. Therefore when choosing tactics get creative! The following is just a sample of the creative ways you can use the tools available to you.

#### **In-Person Communication: *Smells like team spirit!***

If your organisation is lacking in team spirit, there are a lot of creative ways to improve the situation. Whether incorporated into regular staff meetings, a half-day of training or a week-long retreat, team building exercises can increase your organisational cohesion and the morale and effectiveness of your staff. One exercise that helps develop team work skills that includes communication and problem-solving skills is the 'Great Egg Drop'. To conduct this activity you will need to:

- Divide your organisation into teams of four or five. Try to make sure that teams include members from different programmes and from different levels within the organisation.

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- Give each team an egg. Tell them that they have an hour to create a package that will prevent the egg from breaking when dropped.
- After the hour, gather all the teams together for the great egg drop. Consider having rewards for those teams whose eggs do not break.

This exercise requires staff to work together and use their problem-solving abilities to develop a collaborative solution. While it may not be an ideal activity for all situations, it is an example of a creative way you can try to improve team spirit at your organisation.

### **Print Communication: *Wall of Debate!***

Notice boards can be an excellent place to announce upcoming events or provide tips on work-related problems. However, it can also be an excellent way to engage your staff in two-way communication. If your staff is located in a central location, consider establishing a 'wall of debate.' This wall would be a notice board with questions and answers from staff and management on all types of issues. You can establish a formal process where staff submits a question and management posts a reply. More interestingly, and perhaps more effective in creating a sense of community discussion, simply let anyone write up a question and anyone respond. The board should be located somewhere staff visit regularly and ideally where they must wait. You may need to get things started by posting some interesting questions, and you should plan on monitoring the board regularly for inappropriate material, but ideally this will be an organic process that draws your audience into debate and creates a sense of community.

### **Information Technology-based Communication: *Meeting in a Box!***

With busy, international staff, it becomes increasingly difficult to find the time for meetings that fit into everybody's schedule and time zone. If this is your situation, consider holding a 'meeting in a box'. Using the power of email, a meeting in a box, while not the same as a real meeting, can overcome issues of time and distance while still providing some discussion of issues and collaboration in decision-making. To hold a meeting in a box, you need to complete the following steps:

- Decide who you want to participate in the meeting and develop a list of participants including email addresses.
- Develop an agenda. The agenda should be quite detailed and include background information on the items that are up for discussion. Basically you need to include any information that you would provide if you, as chair, were introducing the item in a real meeting.
- Attach the agenda with any relevant background documents to an email and send it to the first person on the participants list. That participant includes his comments and opinions on the agenda items and then forwards it to the next participant until all participants have had a chance to comment and it is returned to you, the chair.
- Summarise the discussion and provide final decisions and action points.
- Circulate the agenda again so participants have an opportunity to raise any objections to the decisions.
- Finalise the minutes of the meeting and send to all participants for acceptance

Note that this tactic is only really appropriate for up to 5 people and that, as chair, you will need to set deadlines for the amount of time each person has to review the agenda (try 24 hours after receipt of the email). A meeting in a box does not allow for the same discussion and interaction among participants as an actual meeting does but it can be a creative way to address certain issues and circumstances.

### Limitations of Tools and Tactics

Different tools and tactics, as the section above illustrates, are able to overcome a wide range of practical problems, such as distance, literacy, and the technological divide amongst others. However, tools and tactics are limited by human and social factors. Primary amongst these are the attitudes and culture of staff and management. If staff are not open to the communication being offered, whether based on past experience or the organisation's culture, it does not particularly matter which tool or tactic is being used, it will not be effective.

**Example:** Over the last year, staff at an HIV/AIDS awareness organisation has repeatedly raised concerns regarding the security policy at staff meetings but management has not acted on any of the suggestions. When management decided to conduct voluntary focus groups to discuss the situation, only two staff members attended. When asked why other staff did not attend, they responded that they felt it would be a waste of their time. Staff simply was not open to the tactic being used by management.

Frequently, management behaviour and decisions, or more specifically, how management behaviour and decisions are perceived by staff, can have a profound effect on an organisational culture. The problem may not always be the issue of consultation and transparency in decision-making, but could relate to such problems as inconsistency of actions or treatment and appreciation of staff/volunteers amongst many others. In order to be able to address these issues, you must 'first admit you have a problem.' In other words, management must recognise that there is a problem with their internal communication, and must be willing to implement a strategy to improve the situation. Once the backing is there, a strategic internal communication plan can start to work to improve the organisational culture. While change and improvement may not be instantaneous, consistent implementation of your tactics, backed by consistent decisions by management, which are all in line with your key messages, will bring about long-term change.



## Case Study: Building a cohesive organisation

*The following case study is not designed to provide you with a guide for exactly how to roll out the internal communication improvement process in your organisation, but rather to give you an example of how the process can unfold and some of the issues you may encounter. As you read the case study, try to identify how the steps taken, and the strategy developed, have been modified to fit with the organisation's particular circumstances.*

**Note:** *This case study is based on the experiences of a real organisation; however the name and activities of the organisation have been modified.*

Novus Mater, an international alliance dedicated to supporting young mothers, has a staff of approximately 35 people of whom 30 are based in their main office in Mexico City and the rest are located in three satellite offices in London, Johannesburg and Seoul. The organisation had several very successful programmes. For example, there was one working with grassroots organisations to identify ways for HIV positive mothers to provide for their children and another looked for innovative solutions to assist young mothers attain an education. However, senior management had noticed that there was very little interaction between the programmes. Each programme seemed to operate as its own mini-organisation. Across Novus Mater, there was only minimal sharing of information and resources. Not only did this result in duplication of work, but it also hurt Novus Mater's external image because staff often were unable to assist a stakeholder with information on another programme. In order to address these issues, management decided to develop an internal communication strategy.

### Getting to know Novus Mater

Management's first step was to see whether staff agreed that there was a problem with inter-programme communication. In addition, management was to find out from staff whether there were other problems in Novus Mater's internal communication process. To get this information, management decided that an anonymous survey would be best. A survey allowed the communication department to collect standard, comparable information with only a minimum amount of disruption to staff work hours. By making it anonymous, the department hoped that staff would raise issues and problems that they may not be comfortable speaking about directly with management or amongst themselves.

### Creating the survey<sup>1</sup>

In developing the survey, Novus Mater had two goals in mind: to identify problems with inter-programme communication and to identify any additional problems with its internal communication. Therefore, the communication team developed a survey with six parts:

1. Connection to Novus Mater (did staff understand the organisations goals and feel they were an important part in attaining these goals?)
2. Policies and procedures (did staff understand the established work process and feel that they allowed the staff to complete their tasks effectively?)
3. Current processes (how effective are current communication processes at sharing necessary information?)
4. Decision-making processes (how are decisions made, how do staff feel about the decision-making processes and how well are decisions communicated?)
5. Inter-programme communication (how effective is the sharing of information between programmes?)

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix A contains a sample survey similar to the one developed for Novus Mater

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### 6. Identifiable needs (What areas does staff feel requires more work)

The communication team also decided to take advantage of the survey to obtain suggestions on how to improve the communication process. Therefore each section also included a space for staff to provide suggested solutions.

Many of the questions on the survey asked staff to put their answer on a scale of one to five. This was to allow the communication team to compare answers between staff and develop generalisations on many of the issues. However, the team also took advantage of the relatively small size of Novus Mater and asked staff to expand on many of their answers. This provided much richer information for management to use to establish the internal communication strategy.

#### **Administering the survey: A low response rate**

Staff and management were initially given two days to complete the survey, although this was later extended to a week in order to try to increase the response rate. All staff in the Mexico City office was given a hard copy of the survey and an envelope was placed at reception in order for them to submit their surveys anonymously. Staff based in the satellite offices was emailed the survey; however, they were unable to submit their surveys anonymously.

Of 35 staff members, only 16 surveys were returned. The communication team was disappointed in this response as the survey was an ideal time to hear the views of all members of staff, and the internal communication strategy would be much more effective if staff felt that it incorporated its views. Several reasons for the low response rate were identified:

1. Staff claimed to be too busy and the survey was not a priority
2. Staff did not trust the anonymity of the survey
3. Staff did not believe that their input would actually be considered and valued

The communication team recognise that more time should have been put into ensuring a high response rate. Some potential steps that they had omitted and, following the administration of the survey, realised they should have considered, included building greater buy-in from staff by better explaining the project, creating a stronger structure to preserve anonymity (even to the point of considering an external party to administer the survey) and providing more information as to how the information collected would be used. The Novus Mater communication team made note of these issues in order to improve the process when they re-conduct the survey as part of the evaluation process in a year's time.

#### **Creating a strategy**

Once the responses to the survey had been compiled and analysed, it was determined that there were three main areas where Novus Mater's internal communications needed improvement: organisational decision making, policies and procedures and inter-programme communication/organisational cohesion. For each area, several tools and tactics were identified to address the problems, many of which were based on suggestions from the survey.

*Note:* As several members of Novus Mater staff are not located in the main office, at least some tactics for each problem should be able to work across distances as well as with the majority in the office.

#### **Organisational decision-making**

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Two main issues with the organisational decision-making process were identified: lack of opportunity for staff to contribute to the decision-making process and ineffective communication of decisions once they had been made. For both problems, two tactics were agreed upon by management, based on recommendations from staff:

### *Staff contribution to decision-making*

**Tactic #1:** Senior management will distribute by email a brief agenda/summary of items up for discussion prior to board meetings in order to solicit staff feedback.

**Tactic #2:** A staff representative will be appointed to meet with the Board and management team to provide a staff perspective on issues.

### *Communication of decisions*

**Tactic #1:** Edited minutes from management and board meetings will be distributed to staff by email following each meeting.

**Tactic #2:** A senior management representative will provide an overview of board decisions at monthly staff meeting

### **Policies and procedures**

From the survey, it became clear that staff was either unaware or unsure of certain policies and procedures and felt that others were a little cumbersome. To address the first issue, the human resources department developed a staff handbook that contained all of Novus Mater's official policies and procedures to provide staff with a single reference guide. For the second point, management undertook to review those policies identified as cumbersome and identify potential ways to make them more efficient.

### **Inter-programme communication/organisational cohesion**

The majority of staff agreed with management that communication between programmes was ineffective and resulted in a lack of cohesion within the organisation. To improve this situation, the following tactics were identified and put in place:

**Tactic #1:** The editors of programme e-newsletters will ensure that each issue goes to every member of staff

**Tactic #2:** The communication team will produce a monthly internal e-newsletter with programme updates and staff news

**Tactic #3:** The communication team will provide all staff with a branding and style guide for the Novus Mater look

**Tactic #4:** Programme managers will provide programme updates at monthly staff meeting

**Tactic #5:** The human resources team will organise a monthly social gathering for staff

### **Next steps**

By implementing the above measures, Novus Mater hopes to improve its internal communication. After the tactics have been in place for a significant period of time, the communication team will evaluate their effectiveness, either informally or formally through another survey. In this manner, the team will be able to determine if the internal communications is improving, and what tactics may need to be changed to ensure continued progress.

## References and Resources

*We used the following resources in developing this toolkit. We acknowledge the authors' valuable work and recommend them to you.*

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## Appendix A

### Sample Internal Communication Survey

Please complete survey by \_\_\_\_\_. Completed surveys can be submitted anonymously by placing it in the box at reception.

**Note:** If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the communication team at ...

#### 1. Connection to the organisation

1.1. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I understand the organisation's mission, vision and objectives					
I understand how my work contributes to the achievement of the organisation's objectives					
I am an important part of the organisation					
I am committed to the organisation's mission					

1.2 Do you feel you are an important part of the organisation? If yes, why? If no, why not and are there any changes you could suggest to improve the situation?

#### 2. Policies and Procedures

2.1. Please rate how familiar you are with the organisation's policy on:  
(1= very familiar, 5= didn't know there was one)

	Very Familiar	Familiar	Somewhat familiar	Aware one exists	Didn't know one existed
Purchase orders					
Stationary requests					
Leave requests					
Email/Internet/VoIP					
Security					
First Aid					
Emergency response					
Logo use/branding					
Recruitment					
Other: _____					

2.2 Are the organisation's policies and procedures generally easy to follow? If not, how would you improve them?

2.3 Do any policies and procedures impede your ability to do your job? If so how?

2.4 Should other policies and procedures be developed that would help you do your job? Which?

### 3. Current Processes

3.1 Please rate how important the following media are to you for communicating and sharing information between members of staff on a regular basis

	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Not important	Never use
Formal Meetings					
Informal Meetings					
Email					
Telephone					
e-newsletter					
Programme e-Newsletters					
Notice board					
Print Resources					
Intranet					
Shared Drives					
Website					
List serves					
Policies and Procedures					
Other: _____					

3.2 Please rate how effective current internal communication processes are at conveying the following information:

	Very good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Board decisions and directions					
Senior management decisions and directions					
Organisational news and initiatives					
Programme updates/outputs					
Relevant external news					
Office policies and procedures					
Staff news					
Other: _____					

3.3 Do you have any suggestions to improve the dissemination of the above information?

## 4.0 Decision-making Processes

4.1 Are management decisions generally communicated to you effectively?

4.2 Do you generally understand the rationale for senior management decisions?

4.3 Are you generally able to make the necessary decisions to do your job effectively? If not, please explain.

4.4 Do you generally feel that you are sufficiently consulted by management? If not, what would you like to see happen?

## 5. Information/Resource sharing between departments/programmes

5.1 How often do you use the following to communicate (share/receive information) with other programmes:

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never
All-staff meetings					
Staff list-serve					
Individual emails					
Formal meetings					
Informal meetings					
Print materials (i.e. letters, memo, newsletters...)					
Programme newsletters					
e-Newsletter					
Phone					
Other: _____					

5.2 How important is the work of other programmes to your work?

5.3 Do you take advantage of other programme resources/knowledge/skills for your work? If yes, how? If no, why not?

5.4 **A** How often do you communicate/share information about your programme with other programme staff? Circle one

*Daily      Weekly      Monthly      Rarely      Never*

5.4 **B** How?

5.5 Is information about different programmes shared effectively across the organisation?

## 6.0 Resources

6.1 Are you familiar with the following resources, and how often do you use them (Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Rarely, Never):

	Familiarity		Regularity of use				
	Yes	No	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never
Staff List serve							
Intranet site							
e-Newsletter							
Annual Reports							
Books							
Journals							
Newsletters							
Website							
Staff handbook							
Programme factsheets							
brochures							
Toolkits							
Photo collection							
Logo and style guide							
Other: _____							

6.2 For any of the resources listed above that you are not familiar with, would use them if you knew more about them?

6.3 Would you use a central resource library of print and multi-media resources organised by category?

6.4 Would you use an Intranet (Internal website)? What features would you use most?

6.5 Can you think of any other internal communication resources which would be useful to you?

## 7.0 Identifiable Needs

7.1 What area of the organisation's internal communications needs most improvement?

7.2 Do you have any suggestions on how to address this?



## Appendix B

### Sample Internal Communication Strategy

#### Goal

To ensure that individuals/departments within the organisation have access to all the information they require to make informed decisions and maximise their output.

#### Objectives

1. All staff are aware of the organisation's vision, mission and values and of its key organisational developments.
2. All senior management and Board decisions are communicated effectively to staff.
3. Staff understands and knows how to follow all policies and procedures related to his/her job.
4. Staff is familiar with the resources available in, and the updates and developments of programmes other than their own.
5. Staff are able to provide feedback to management through formal channels.

#### Key messages

- Sharing information and collaborating between members of staff is an important activity and is encouraged
- Senior management is committed to open and transparent decision-making

#### Audience

Total: 35

Composition: 25 staff, 6 managers, 3 senior managers and 1 executive director

Location: 30 in Mexico City, 2 in London, 2 in Johannesburg, 1 in Seoul

Working Language: English

Native Language: 15 English, 10 Spanish, 5 French, 1 Korean, 1 Xhosa, 3 German

ICT access: All staff have access to the internet and email on a regular basis

#### Tools and tactics

Objective #1:

- Human resources will develop a backgrounder on the organisation to be included in all new staff induction packages
- Once a year, the communication team will organise a half-day workshop where staff can discuss the organisation's mission and values as they relate to their work. Staff outside the main office to be included via teleconferencing

Objective #2:

- The executive director's office will coordinate the dissemination of the minutes from management and board meetings by email to all staff
- The executive director or another senior management representative will provide an overview of the main Board decisions at a monthly staff meeting

Objective #3:

- Human resources to develop a staff handbook that includes all the organisation's policies and procedures. The handbook will be distributed to all staff.
- The Communication team to develop a monthly internal newsletter, to be distributed by email, that will include a section from human resources highlighting and explaining a policy or procedure to staff.

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### Objective #4:

- Each programme manager to include an update on their programme or a profile of resources or skills their programme has in the monthly internal newsletter
- Each programme manager to provide an update on their programme at the monthly staff meeting
- Editors of programme newsletters will ensure their newsletter is distributed to all staff

### Objective #5

- The chair of the monthly staff meeting to ensure that there is ample time for staff to provide feedback on the items presented
- The senior manager to circulate the agenda for upcoming board meetings to give staff the opportunity to submit their feedback on issues
- Human resources to organise the election of a staff representative to advise management and board discussions

### Implementation plan

Tactic	Responsibility	Timeline
<b>Objective #1:</b>		
Backgrounder on the organisation for inclusion in all new staff induction packages	Human resources manager	Completed by 30 January
a half day workshop where staff discuss the organisation's mission and values as they relate to their work	Communication manager	First workshop to be held on 1 March and then yearly thereafter
<b>Objective #2:</b>		
Dissemination of the minutes from board and management meetings	Executive director's executive assistant	Within 1 week following each meeting
Overview of the main Board decisions at a monthly staff meeting	Executive director or another representative of senior management	To be done at the first monthly staff meeting following each board meeting
<b>Objective #3:</b>		
A staff handbook	Human resource manager	To be completed and sent to staff for feedback by 1 May
Internal newsletter with policy and procedures section	Communication manager/human resource manager	First issue to be disseminated on 15 February
<b>Objective #4:</b>		
an update on the programmes in the monthly internal newsletter	Programme managers	To be submitted to Communication team 2 days before the newsletter is disseminated. First issue is 15 February.
An update on the	Programme managers	At each monthly staff

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programmes at the monthly staff meeting		meeting
Distribution of programme newsletters	Editors	Immediately following the release of each issue
<b>Objective #5</b>		
Ensure that there is ample time for staff to provide feedback on the items presented at the staff meeting	Human resource manager	At each monthly staff meeting
Circulate the agenda for upcoming board meetings	Senior manager	At least one week prior to board meeting
Election of a staff representative to advise management and board discussions	Human resource manager	Election to take place on 10 February



## Internal Communication Toolkit

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation is an international alliance established in 1993 to nurture the foundation, growth and protection of citizen action throughout the world, especially in areas where participatory democracy and citizens' freedom of association are threatened. CIVICUS envisions a worldwide community of informed, inspired, committed citizens in confronting the challenges facing humanity.

These CIVICUS Toolkits have been produced to assist civil society organisations build their capacity and achieve their goals. The topics range from budgeting, strategic planning and dealing with the media, to developing a financial strategy and writing an effective funding proposal. All are available on-line, in MS-Word and PDF format at [www.civicus.org](http://www.civicus.org) and on CD-ROM.

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