

Communicating your COST Action

How-to kit

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01. YOUR ACTION'S COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Make sure you plan your efforts strategically so your Action is as impactful as possible

Try to answer these questions as well as you can. The answers are the building blocks of your communications strategy and will help you plan your communication efforts.



Whom are you trying to reach?
(outside your research community)

These people could be policymakers (EU or national, regional institutions and government authorities), industry & SMEs, regulatory authorities, patient groups, NGOs, standardisation bodies, lay people, etc. Try to figure out what their interests are and how the Action's work can help them achieve their goals.

Be specific with what you want to achieve and stick to a few measurable objectives. That way you will be able to evaluate and readjust your evaluation.



What messages do you have for them?

Maybe there is an overarching message? Try to be short and clear, so that your message is more impactful. Always tailor messages to your audiences! Find out what matters to them and offer solutions.

What are you trying to achieve by reaching out to these people?

Change opinions?
Raise awareness?
Improve legislation?

01. YOUR ACTION'S COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

How and when will you achieve that? What strategies & tools (online/offline) will you use?

Do you need the media to pick up on your messages? Try to think of which media. Where? Why? What is newsworthy about your Action? Try to think like a journalist would. Identify colleagues in your Action who have media experience.

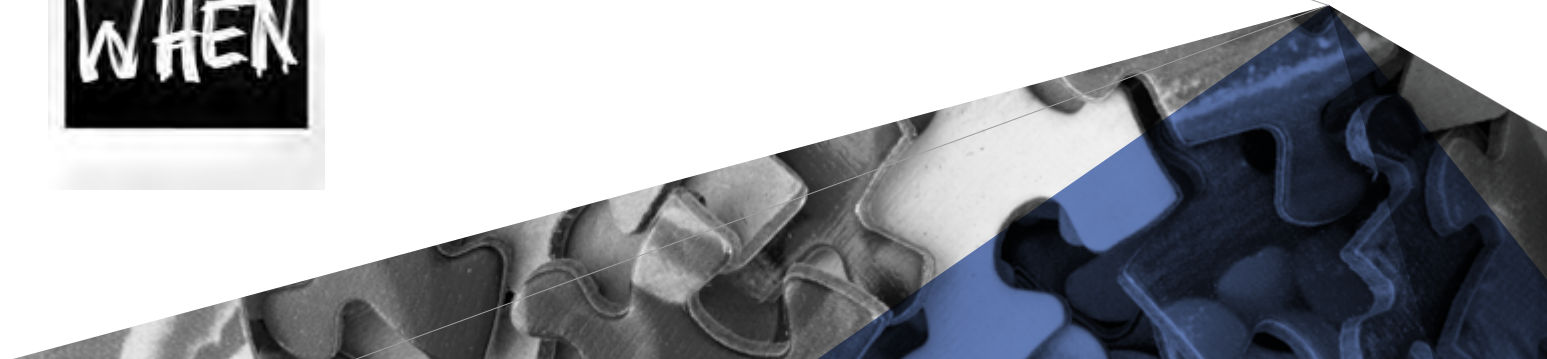
Press conferences at science conferences – a great way to reach your audiences via the press.

Think of thought leaders/press offices/renown research centres in your countries – they could share your message/stress why your work matters.



Why are you doing it (issue/challenge the Action is trying to address)?

A short, single phrase can reflect the reason behind your Action, and how you plan to tackle the issue you are facing. Think of your audiences and match your message to their interests. How is your Action's work on that specific challenge going to help policy-makers/industry/ society as a whole/perhaps a specific community and specific individuals?



01. YOUR ACTION'S COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY



How will you achieve that? What strategies & tools (online/offline) will you use?

Social media can help you reach what you want to achieve offline – your network can grow and your messages have more impact. Use the platforms where your audiences are!

Think of joint events with Actions working on similar topics or events targeting policy makers (locally or at EU level).

Regular web content is key – build your Action website and social media presence.

Videos (animated, educational) are extremely efficient in explaining complicated backgrounds.

Timing is crucial! Plan events or online content around relevant dates (world environment day, etc.).

02. STORYTELLING

Getting started

Everyone enjoys a good story.

Always focus on the stories of your Action, and your message will be a lot more impactful.

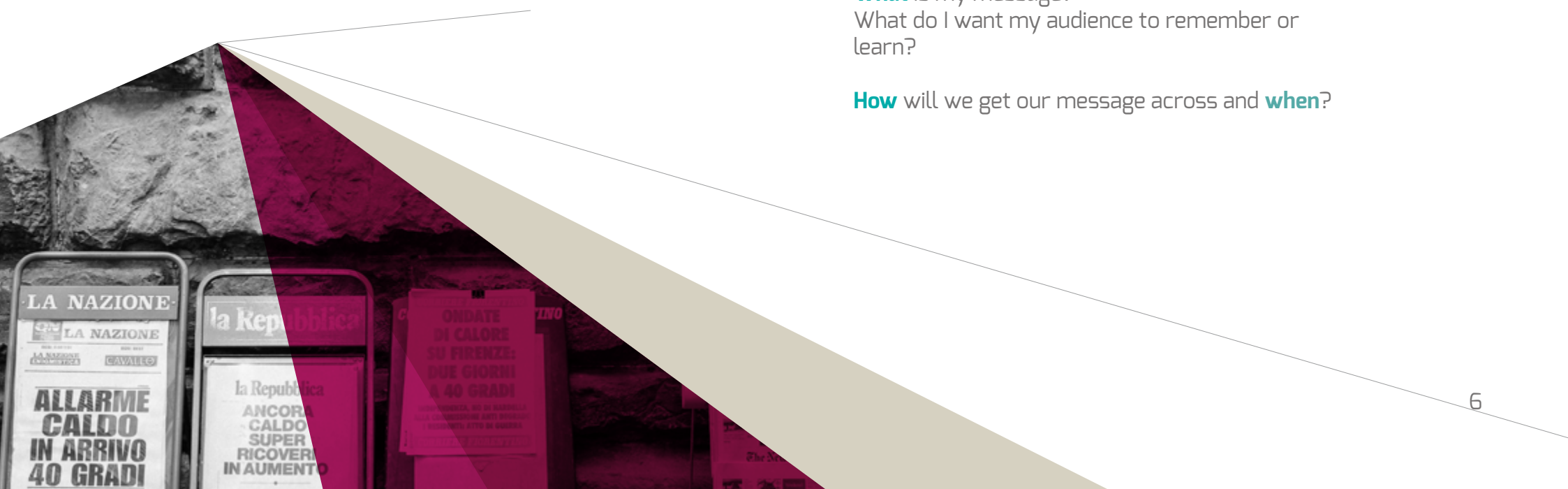
Just like with your communication strategy, answer these questions before you even begin telling the story:

What do we want to achieve, as a group?
Raise awareness of a societal issue/research topic and its link to societal issues?
Change views and behaviours?
Influence policy-making (nationally/EU-wide)?

Whom are we trying to reach?
What is our audience's level of knowledge about the topic?
What questions will they have for us?

What is my message?
What do I want my audience to remember or learn?

How will we get our message across and **when**?



02. STORYTELLING

So you have a story for the press. Here is how to structure it

Your news story focusses on your Action's findings and on answering the "so what?" question, first. Once you've caught the reader's interest, you can continue explaining the details of your research. It's the exact opposite of a scientific paper.

Headline

Needs to be catchy and reflect your main message.

First paragraph

Needs to feature your main findings and why that matters to the journalist and your target audience. Stick to 70 words maximum, it helps readers scan the story.

Next paragraphs

What is the background/issue/struggles at hand?

How did your Action handle that?

Enlarge on results, benefits behind networking, the European added-value, etc.

Go in more detail about the findings (methods, links to other projects)

Conclusion

Where does this take you? What is the next step in your research?

Insert informative contents (so that journalists can use them)



02. STORYTELLING

More tips and tricks

Avoid jargon

Jargon makes your text/interview difficult to understand for non-scientific audiences. Journalists will most likely lose interest in your press release. Try to use simple, everyday words as much as possible, or explain the jargon word, if you need to. Be aware of pitfalls! Some words you might use on a regular basis in your research may not mean the same thing to your readers.

[Here are some examples.](#)

Use analogies or metaphors

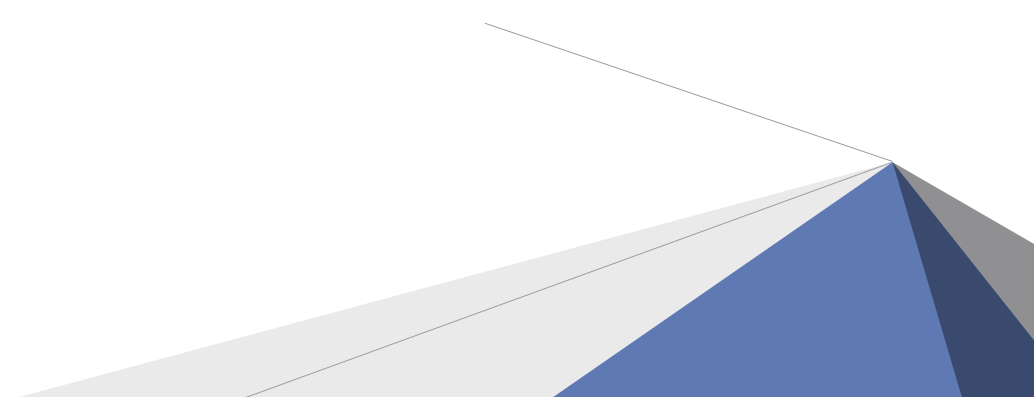
People are generally curious about science and the world they live in. Try to come up with associations or links that would catch your audience's attention.

Be selective

Try to focus on what your audience is more likely to be interested in. Don't try to cover everything about the research or the Action - that is not the point. Stick to your messages and that way you will achieve more impact. You can safely assume your non-specialist audiences generally have the science knowledge of a 15-16 year-old.

Use active sentences

Try to avoid passive sentences like "The apple was stolen by the boy", and go for active language instead: "The boy stole the apple". This will make your writing sound livelier and more engaging. If you can, don't forget to add a call to action (upcoming conference, event, etc.).



03. STORYTELLING for policy-makers

Share your stories with us if you are trying to reach EU/national policy makers. Here are some examples that could make good stories.

Network members who got ERC grants, worked with big European companies or research centres like CERN, etc., and established long-term collaborations thanks to their participation in a COST Action.

SMEs that were engaged in short-term scientific missions (hosting or sending institution) and had positive results for the company (e.g. new product development).

Young researchers whose careers got a boost thanks to their participation in COST capacity building activities (training schools, short-term scientific missions).

Fruitful collaborations established with strategically important Near Neighbour Countries (or other International Partner Countries) within a COST Action.

New research topics, new scientific fields, breakthroughs or innovations emerging from the networking activities of a COST Action.

Researchers/stakeholders providing policymakers and governmental authorities with scientific advice for new legislation or for developing new standards.

Researchers/stakeholders developing high-impact citizen engagement initiatives with local communities.

SMEs that found partners and successfully applied for EU or national research funding, as a result of their participation in a COST Action.

Young researchers who gained new insights with a strong impact on their research project(s) or who were able to secure a long-term position in academia or industry (in their home country or abroad).

04. WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

What is news? What makes science - and your Action - newsworthy?

Your Action's results in a scientific journal

Is it new research? How does it impact on people's everyday lives?

Announcing results at a scientific conference, followed by a press conference

It could be your final Action conference or any other scientific conference where you intend to present your network's achievements/importance of a research topic.

[Communicating why pollinators matter could help save them and ensure food security worldwide, researchers say](#)

The start of your Action

[European researchers tackle the global challenge of chronic kidney disease](#)

[New COST network to trace the evolution of the universe](#)

The end of a study or important policy recommendations (white papers, guidelines, handbooks...)

[Researchers uncover the origins of ash tree dieback and set out ways to fight it](#)

[The first reference for sign language grammar writing empowers signers all over the world](#)

Findings that challenge existing or long-established studies/theories

[A changing Sun, a changing climate?](#)



04. WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Journalists' criteria for picking a story. Make sure you tick at least one of these boxes before writing your press release

Novelty

Has your study been done for the first time?
What insights did it reveal?

[Mobile health applications put millions of users' privacy and security at risk, researchers find](#)

Timeliness

Link your story to current events, if you can (e.g. forest fires in Europe). This is how you find a news peg - what makes the story timely or newsworthy now.

[We are all stardust: top women in science trying to unlock the mystery of our stardust origins](#)

Identification or human interest

Give the journalist the chance to identify with your message. How does my network/research affect people's everyday lives?

[Smart approaches to ending energy poverty](#)

[Mobile health applications put millions of users' privacy and security at risk, researchers find](#)

Importance or impact

Your story is of public importance, essential information everyone should know about because it impacts on their lives. .

Fascination or surprise

The "wow" factor

Conflict

Provide an alternate or conflicting position to other professional opinions, positions or knowledge?

[A changing Sun, a changing climate?](#)

Local factor

Don't forget about local media: chances are they will pick up on a good local story. For instance, your final Action conference:

[Expertos de 31 países avanzan en Granada sobre biodiversidad de bosques](#)

Myth busting

How does my scientific knowledge counter beliefs generally accepted by the public/society?

04. WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

10 tips for a perfect press release

First things first

Make sure the first paragraph (18-30 words) of your press release answers the reader's questions: who, what, when, where and why. Answer the journalist's "Why should I care?" question.

Grab the journalist's attention

Have 1 or 2 clear and powerful messages in the first two paragraphs. By then, the journalist will have decided if it's a story worth covering. Avoid long sentences.

Avoid jargon

Use simple, layman's language. Don't include technical or professional terms. Journalists and readers will most likely not be familiar with your technical terms.

Your angle may not be the only angle

Journalists might find another more interesting angle to your story. Is your story controversial? Is it really new? Maybe there's a national angle to it?

Keep it simple

Journalists will need to do the same with their readers. Be short and concise, and include the catchy title in your email subject line.

Include a good image

A striking image can boost the chances of your press release getting media interest. It makes the story more attractive and more likely to be shared online.

Find a human interest angle to your story

Your press release will stand a much better chance of getting picked up if the journalist is given a reason why his audience would be interested in reading or hearing about the story.

Timing is crucial

If your story can be linked to a bigger media story running at the same time, your press release will be more likely to draw attention. Consider embargos when communicating a research paper.

Key background material and quotes

Do include key background material in a separate briefing so that journalists can easily access it in case they need it. Only include valuable, informative quotes that journalists can actually use.

Explain the issue

Offer context, because most journalists are generalists. Explain your issue in a simple way, so you grab their attention and ensure they don't misunderstand you.

04. WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

A few tips to help you work efficiently with journalists

Think like them!

Journalists need to 'sell' your story to their editor

Before an interview or drafting an article, try to think like a journalist - who is their audience? Is your angle going to make the story worthwhile for those readers/listeners? Journalists will need to sell your story to their editor before they can even start writing it. For instance, a science story in a financial weekly will very likely focus on the financial benefits of certain findings or the financial risks of not investing in a certain field of research, as the case may be.

Preparation is key, but do get back quickly

If a journalist contacts you for an interview or comment on a topic, take some time to prepare your message(s) and see what kind of articles the journalist has written and on what topics. Make sure you know their deadline, and try to get back to them as soon as possible. Journalists work around tight deadlines.

Use pan-European media

Brussels-based outlets (The Parliament Magazine, Euractiv) and [journalists](#) can help you reach EU policy-makers, so think how you can use this opportunity, especially given your Action's European added value.

Stay in touch and anticipate events

Try to establish contact with those journalists who cover your field of expertise, even before you know you have a story for them. Ask them what they're interested in covering at that moment. You want them to contact you in the future, and this way you will become a trustworthy source in their eyes.

Talk to your institution's press officer

Your university's press officer's job is to guide you throughout your media activities, especially since your media work impacts on your institution's reputation. Share your press release with them if you think you have something newsworthy to share. Try to plan ahead for press releases and use embargoes when needed, in the case of scientific papers.

04. WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Become a contributor!

[The Conversation](#) is an online newspaper in which scientists publish [opinion pieces on a topic of interest](#) or to talk about your [latest research](#). The [London School of Economics blogs](#) work in a similar way.

Science journalists often republish such pieces in mainstream media (BBC, The Guardian): [How perfectionism leads to depression](#)

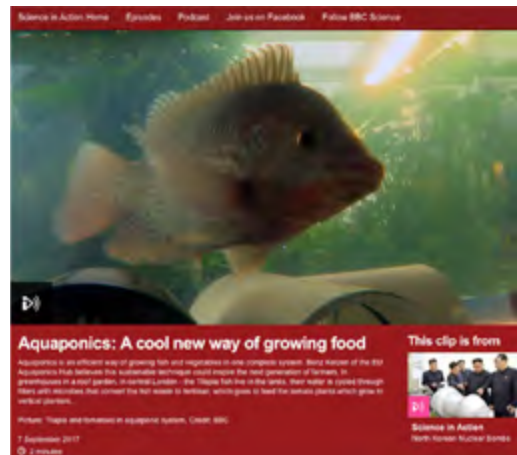
Although requirements usually vary, here are a few general tips on [how to pitch your own opinion piece](#).

[More tips on media work](#) (Science Media Centre)



05. COST ACTIONS MAKING HEADLINES

Here are some examples of several Actions' media work - click on the images to learn more!



06. REACHING POLICY MAKERS & INDUSTRY

Again, think about your audience:

Who are they? Identify those decision-makers you want to engage with and keep in constant contact with them.

What are the important topics of their agenda? Stay up-to-date with the policy environment!

What can you help them achieve in their short term in office? Focus on human interest stories!

Be pro active and get involved - reach and interact with them from the very beginning of your Action, if they are a key audience.

Just like with journalists - think of whom policy makers represent, focus on human stories!

Have clear, concise messages and use the media to reach policy-makers

Don't focus so much on the minute details, but on the wider impact of your research /benefits of investing in certain topics/technologies/research.

Plan meetings with national MPs and events with Members of the EU Parliament.

Talk to your universities/institutions, they need to invest in such relationships (campus visits, events).

Build awareness of the Action within the companies you are targeting

Think of developing long-lasting developments (the Action is only your starting point)

Read more:

[Research impact: how academics can grab policy makers' attention](#) (The Guardian)

[Research collaboration between universities and industry: Five practical principles to make it work.](#) (LSE Impact Blog)



07. SHARING YOUR RESEARCH ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Creating impact and reaching your audiences

Most of the conversations that would usually take place at science conferences and events have moved online, on social media platforms. They offer perfect opportunities to engage with audiences beyond your science community.

Do you have your objectives set? How will you ensure time invested in social media is not wasted time?

Build your strategy by finding out:
whom you want to reach
what platforms they are on
which social media networks can help you get most impact (blogging? Twitter?)
how you can make the best of your social media work

Time investment in social media: the more you tweet/post, the bigger your network (two tweets a day, a Facebook post every day).

Time investment in social media: the more you tweet/post, the bigger your network.

Always **go where your audience is** - don't assume everyone is using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram just as much and in the same way.

Twitter is usually a great social media platform for science conferences: start conversations, see who is attending by following hashtags (#ESOF2018). Track hashtags on Storify to get the bigger picture.

Build a **targeted profile** so that you engage with what you consider the right people. This could be a Twitter account (personal or for your Action).

On Twitter you can follow other academics and get involved in conversations. Ask your questions, share your papers and future Action events!

COST Actions and Action members on Twitter:

[@COSTNewSpeakers](#) [@stefanbuzar](#)
[@Maths4Industry](#) [@dwyerbe](#)
[@digilitey](#) [@omurphy16](#)
[@populistcomm](#) [@claudiorlandi](#)
 [@BernORourke](#)

More resources

[Twitter for researchers \(SlideShare\)](#)
[Social media strategy template](#)
[Sharing your research on social media \(Nature\)](#)

08. SHOOTING YOUR COST ACTION VIDEO

Short videos with strong messages are best for online engagement

Video is by far **the most effective type of content online**. YouTube is the second most used search engine, which is why your Action can benefit tremendously from well scripted videos.

Your don't need expensive equipment to create fresh, interesting video content. Most smartphones can now shoot HD (1080p) video.

[How to shoot professional videos with an iPhone](#)

You can also ask your institution's communication department if you can borrow any equipment (reflex cameras and tripods).

Writing your video script

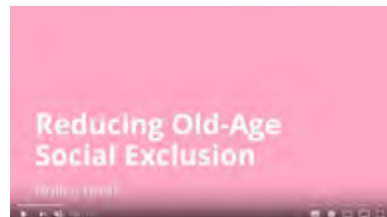
It all comes down to your messages and what you want to achieve with them.

Start with the context/challenge if needed, then introduce the Action's work and results, if possible.

Soundbites and a short (average video duration on YouTube is 2mins), strong message work best.

Besides science videos for the science community, COST Actions usually go for policy messages, educational, animated videos or 'talking heads' videos on the successful networking activities of the Action.

Here are a few examples:



09. SCIENCE COMMUNICATION TRAINING

The Science communication trainings are practical courses targeted at the science communication managers of the COST Actions, who are responsible for dissemination and promotion of their network. Within the science communication trainings COST Academy offers trainings on the following topics:

- Using social media to communicate your research.
- Working with the media. Mastering media interviews.
- Storytelling: spotting and writing a good story.
- Shooting and editing a video with your mobile.

Join us for the next courses on science communication, brought to you as part of our COST Academy!

Got a question about our courses?
Contact us at costacademy@cost.eu.



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