

SESYNC COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

SESYNC developed this toolkit to guide interdisciplinary researchers in communicating their findings to a variety of audiences. Founded on principles and practices from the communication field, this resource is a step-by-step guide to building a strategy for communicating research and results.

This toolkit goes over the key components needed to build a communications strategy, including: establishing communication goals, identifying your audiences, choosing your communication channels, and writing clear and compelling messaging.

Introduction

- **Step 1: What Are Your Goals?**
- **Step 2: Who Are Your Audiences?**
- **Step 3: How to Reach Each Audience?**
- **Step 4: Crafting a Clear Message**
 - **Writing Tips**
 - **And, But, Therefore Statement**
 - **Elements of a Story**
- **Step 5: Follow-Up: How Is Your Strategy Working**
- **Worksheet**

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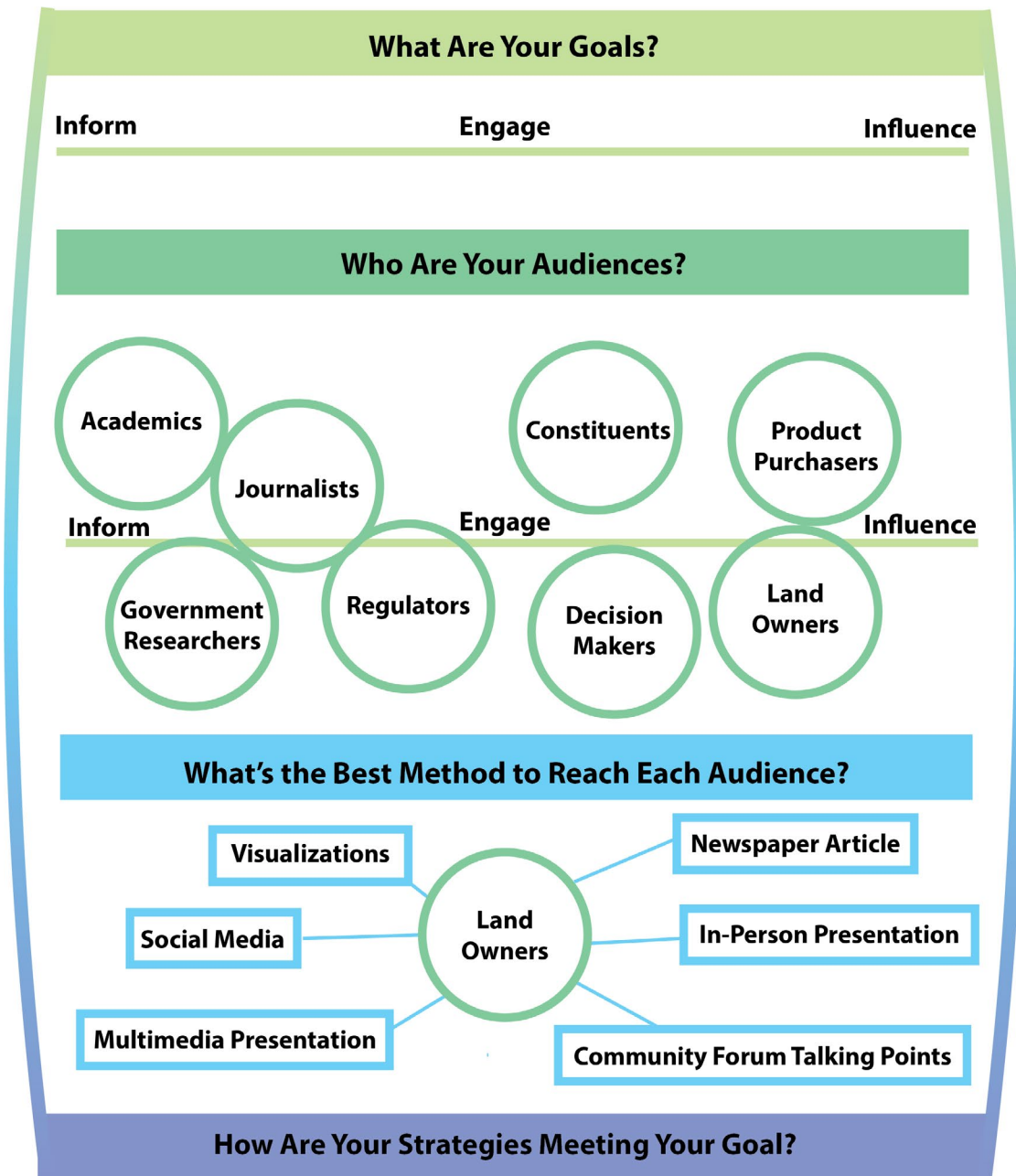
With additional editing provided by Alaina Gallagher & Erin Duffy



INTRODUCTION TO THE TOOLKIT

Research in general and interdisciplinary research in particular exist along a spectrum—from advancing an academic idea to informing decision makers and changing behavior. Thus, an effective communication strategy will also fall along a spectrum—from informing people about a problem, to engaging stakeholders in knowledge co-creation, to influencing legislators to adopt science-backed policies. Only you and your team can determine what level of engagement is necessary. No matter where your research and communication goals fall upon the spectrum, you can tailor a communication strategy to fit your specific needs.

TOOLKIT OVERVIEW



Why should you develop a communication strategy for your research?

- Researchers often convey their findings using technical language in scholarly journals. However, many research findings have broader applications.

- By translating your work to broad audiences and thinking about communication throughout the life cycle of the research process, you can simultaneously meet research goals, convey knowledge to the people who need to know it, and achieve greater impact.
- Robust communication work goes beyond the ability of researchers to speak more clearly about their findings. A broader goal is to build a more dynamic relationship between science and society, where knowledge can be exchanged as part of the research process between investigators and the broader community of decision-makers.

Acknowledge research teams face many communication challenges.

- Language specific to disciplines can create communication barriers between and among those working in boundary organizations such as non-profits, the private sector, stakeholders, and others who use knowledge to inform decisions.
- Because effective team science requires diligent and open communication to solve critical problems, it can be challenging to also translate your work to broad audiences.
- We designed this toolkit to overcome some common challenges and we hope this information will enable science teams to engage with audiences to achieve research goals.

When should you start thinking about your communications strategy?

- Begin a communication strategy at the start of your research process and revisit it throughout. Teams who have continually updated their messaging or communication strategy throughout the research process have found it helpful in refocusing the team's direction around their research questions.
- For example, as you move forward with your research you may envision new audiences with whom your research might be useful; and as new audiences emerge, more specific goals might become clear and vice versa. Additionally, your research focus may change throughout the process as well, which may open up new goals and audiences. This process is not linear, but rather cyclical, requiring revisiting and refining throughout the research process and beyond.

Draft a communications strategy to engage beyond disciplinary boundaries.

- This toolkit aims to be a resource for anyone in the interdisciplinary research community to develop a communication plan that is accessible, relevant, timely, understandable, and credible.
- Communicating about your work is crucial to achieving broader impacts. Whether the goals are raising the understanding of your interdisciplinary efforts on human and natural systems with specialists outside your area of expertise, or growing understanding of your science among targeted stakeholders and the public, it is important to strategize how to translate your work.
- The following resources will help you formulate a plan to inform, engage, and/or influence specific audiences to reach your desired goals and achieve greater impact.

STEP ONE: WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS?

How to Establish Your Communication Goals

1. Align your communication goals with your research plan.

Your research plan likely includes short- or long-term outcomes that may aim to inform policy or test the understanding of a specific model or theory. These outcomes likely exist along a spectrum of engagement, from advancing ideas and educating audiences to influencing behavior change, and they can guide you in designing your overall communication strategy.

2. Thinking broadly: What is the problem, issue, or question that you are asking and addressing in your research?

- Why is that problem interesting and important? (i.e., So what?)
- How does your work connect with a broader disciplinary conversation about this topic/problem in your field, and what does your synthesis work add to that conversation?

3. Identify concise and specific goals.

- As in any goal setting process, it is useful to employ the S.M.A.R.T technique, creating goals that are: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound. Below are a few examples of goals that may be relevant to the different types of research you may be conducting ranging from basic, to applied (using existing knowledge to find solutions), to actionable (a subset of applied research that engages stakeholders and is iterative in nature).

What Are Your Goals?

Inform

Engage

Influence

- For example, if you conduct basic research, it is likely to be quite technical. Therefore, a specific informational goal may be to create a table of synonyms, descriptions, or metaphors that can be used to replace jargon terms in your research when communicating with those outside of your field.
- If your research is more applied and seeks to better understand, for example, the ecological impacts of dams across North America, a specific engagement goal could be to meet with policy makers in order to provide critical information revealed in your research process that formerly was not confirmed.
- Another research goal might be to change the business practices of a specific industry along a supply chain, and the communication goal might be to inform stakeholders at a specific company in the industry

of how the practices are impacting them, the environment, and society.

4. Use the concept of “Actionable Science” as your guide.

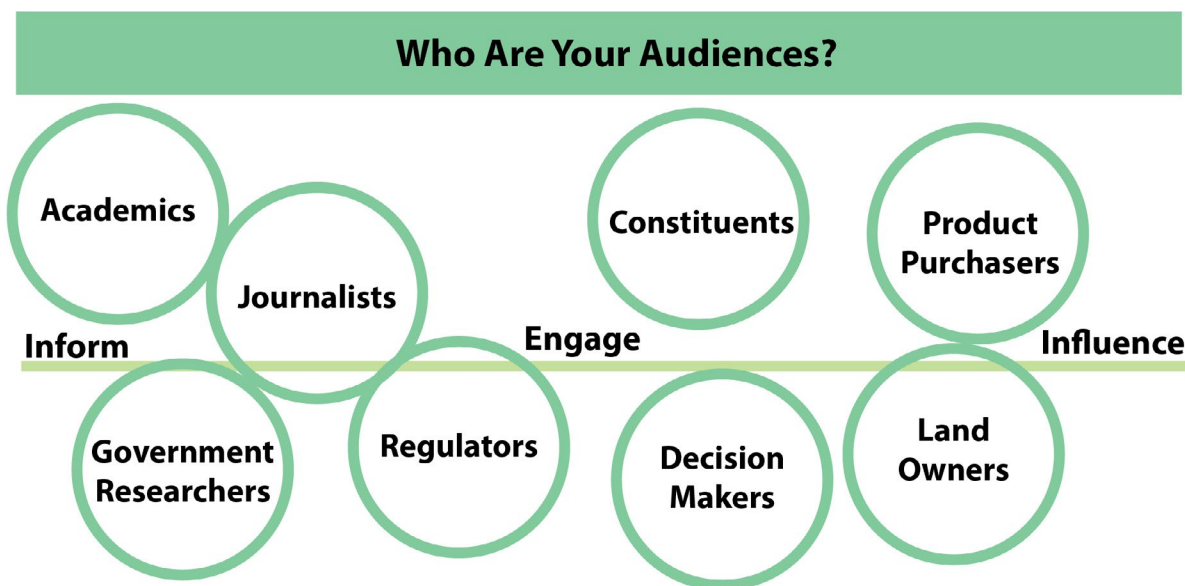
- SESYNC encourages researchers to integrate knowledge users, including practitioners and decision makers from outside academia, directly into the research process. Co-development of research questions and agenda can ensure your outcomes are actionable. Forging relationships with knowledge users is a critical strategy for actionable science; however, it may not be possible to integrate everyone. Your goals for actionable science can be a template as you design your communication products, preferably at the beginning of a synthesis process.
- Some goals of Actionable Science include:
 - Inform decisions at the government, business, and household level.
 - Improve the design or implementation of public policies.
 - Influence public and/or private sector strategies, planning, and behaviors that affect the environment.
- Visit SESYNC’s website for more information about Actionable Science.

STEP TWO: WHO ARE YOUR AUDIENCES?

Audiences for your research are the building blocks for bridging knowledge to actionable science.

To develop a strong communication strategy and determine a multi-faceted approach, you will need to understand with whom you wish to communicate.

- Many audiences will be interested in your research.
- Each will require different approaches to engage them effectively. The form of communication that works with one audience will flop with another.
- It is important to recognize and understand the different perspectives of each audience and how they might engage with your research.



Doing an Audience-Centered Analysis

An Audience-Centered Analysis can help you think about the perspectives and motivations of each unique audience. This analysis involves identifying an audience and adapting a communication product (for example, written commentary, speech, or graphic) to their interests, level of understanding, attitudes, and beliefs.

The following list of questions (which is also found in the worksheet at the end of this document) will help you better understand each unique audience and inform appropriate methods of communication that serve the needs of your audience(s). Routinely update the analysis throughout your research as your agenda shifts in focus and scope or as you identify new audiences or goals.

A prepared spreadsheet can be found at:

AUDIENCE-CENTERED ANALYSIS

STEP 1:

Brainstorm Potential Audiences & Their Unique Characteristics:

Brainstorm many unique audiences. Approach this step with careful consideration. Try to avoid “general public” and, instead, focus on a narrow audience to understand their biases and values.

- First, write down broad categories or groups of people, e.g., other researchers, policy makers, community members, etc., with whom your research may be relevant.
- Next, try to be more specific within each category—are there certain institutions or faculty who would benefit from your research? Are there particular policy makers who are relevant to the decision-making surrounding your topic of interest? Are there any communities that you could partner with as you develop your research questions or that would benefit from your findings?
- Then, list what you believe to be some of the values, motivational forces, and/or needs of each group and how your research intersects with some of these entities.
 - Do any groups need to make decisions that

could be informed by your research?

- Finally, begin to rank each group by relevance to your research and write them in descending order in the boxes provided on the worksheet.

STEP 2:

Consider Your Relationship with the Audiences:

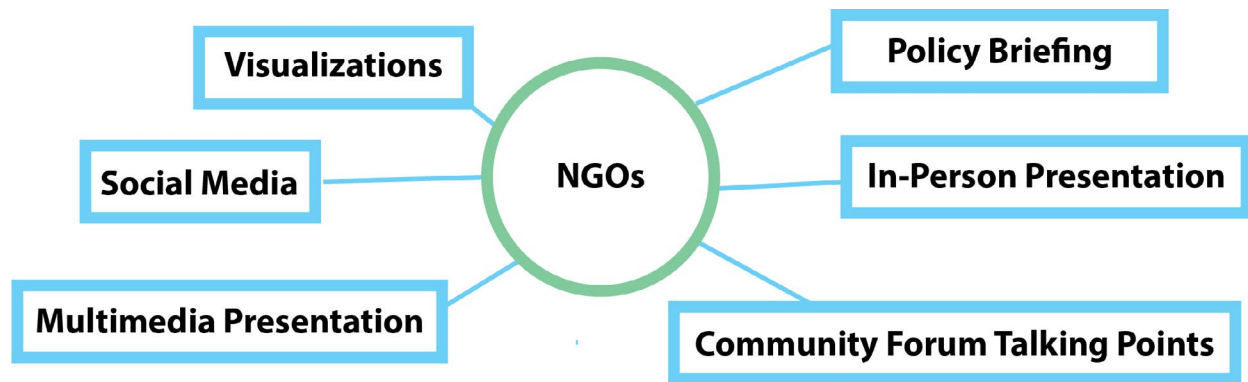
- What is your relationship to each audience?
- How much credibility do you have with the audience?
- What are the sources of that credibility? E.g., Your position within an organization? Your technical expertise? Your track record? Your relationship with key people? Your personal characteristics? Your shared values with the audience?
- How can you increase or reinforce your credibility with the audience?
- Who are other relevant influencers of the audience(s)? How do they connect to your audience and what do they know? How do they portray different issues? How might these outside groups react to your messages?
- Does the audience have any biases about the subject?
- Are there any political factors that need to be taken into account?

STEP 3:

Determine Your Audience-Centered Goals:

- What does the audience already know about the subject? How are they involved in the matter?
- What’s in it for the audience? Are you solving a problem? Are you raising awareness?
- What is the objective of the communication—to inform, engage, or influence? Or some combination of those?
- What is the desired response from this audience? Are they simply taking in information? Do you wish to collaborate? Are you looking to change their behavior? What would you like them to do as a response to your communication?
- If your goal is to inform, what key points do you wish to share?
- If you wish to collaborate, why might that be useful to them?
- If you wish to change or influence their behavior, what information revealed in your research may sway them to do that?

STEP THREE: HOW TO REACH EACH AUDIENCE?



Understand each audience.

- Understand your audience(s). Each audience may require a different message, or you may need to vary your message to appeal to each audience. Determine the form of communication most effective to convey your ideas.
- For example, maybe you have determined that your audience is a small community on the verge of deciding whether to let a power plant expand development, and they are having a public forum. Your most effective communication strategy might be to develop a one-pager with pertinent facts about your research that will aim to inform their decision-making process.

Clearly communicate research results to audiences.

- One of the most difficult things you will do is distill your complex research results into evidence-driven communication products that are accessible and practical for your audience(s). However, in order to support evidence-driven public discourse your audience needs to understand the key components of your research and why it matters to them.
- Below we provide some information on different ways to communicate your work and, for each, we also provide links to some useful sites or articles others have developed. If you have additional examples and sources, please email communications@sesync.org.

Consider various forms of communication.

- The best form of communication for your audience may be restricted by your access. If you are meeting with policy makers, they may limit you to a short phone call or in-person meeting with no presentation. Researching how other groups have reached this audience may also provide insight into effective modes of communication. Below is a list of common communication products and typical audiences you can reach. (The following are guidelines and resources for creating your strategy. Your message strategy will be multi-faceted and will need a diverse portfolio of communication methods to be successful):

Social Media

- Since you are an expert in your field, it is useful to broadly share your research findings on social media. Your home institution may have social media guidelines, for example, here are ours at the [University of Maryland](#).
- Social media is a network of feedbacks and conversations. Building a network and audience takes significant time and effort. While you may see some content may go “viral” on certain platforms, it’s much more likely that it will take time before you can effectively use it for wide distribution.
- Before thinking about your social media audiences, consider your communication goals and your capacity. Would your research merit from having a broad audience converse and share your research? Or would a specific audience active on social media find your research important and informative? Use hashtags and tag other accounts to include certain entities in the conversation around your work or to make it more searchable.
- Resources:
 - [Communicating Science with Social Media](#) – Medium
 - [Scientists, Do You Want to Succeed on Twitter?](#) – Science Magazine
 - [Thousands of scientists are cutting back on Twitter, seeding angst and uncertainty](#) – Nature
 - [Communicating Science Online](#) – AAAS Center for Public Engagement with Science & Technology
 - [Rethinking Social Media for Scientists](#) – C&EN Media Group

Multimedia (videos, photos, mixed media, charts, graphs, visualizations, etc.)

- If you are presenting material or posting to the web, multimedia can increase engagement and understanding of your research.
- Visual images have advantages. They can create an empathetic or tangible connection to your communication—connecting the audience with your research efforts.
- Resources:
 - [Communicating Science through Digital Media](#) – The Fisheries Blog
 - [Science, New Media, and the Public](#) – Science Magazine
 - [Using Multimedia & Visuals](#) – AAAS Center for Public Engagement with Science & Technology

Websites

- Many research teams create websites. Your audience may be difficult to define for a website that is pub-

licly available; however, you can share a lot of information.

- Effectively designed websites can become a tool in your communication strategy while cluttered websites can become a barrier.
- Below are a few examples from research teams who have created effective websites:
 - [PollardBase](#) – An online system for managing butterfly (and other taxa) monitoring programs that follow a Pollard monitoring protocol.
 - [Alliance for Global Water Adaptation \(AGWA\)](#) – This site is intended to showcase a new way for identifying future water risks and then addressing them.
 - [Survive the Century](#) – An online branching narrative game—informed by real science—about the political, environmental and social choices humans will face between 2021 and 2100 as we adapt to the ravages of climate change.

Press Releases

- Consider publications that have audiences that align with your work. A press release can be a simple way to generate attention for a recent publication or book release; however, consider your key points. In a well-written press release you will have about a page to communicate the “so what” to your audience.
- Resources:
 - [Writing Your Own Press Release](#) – American Geophysical Union Blogosphere
- Examples of press releases from SESYNC research:
 - [Letting lawns go brown can preserve water for others during droughts](#)
 - [New decision-making tool helps align investment with objectives in biodiversity conservation](#)

Memos to Policy Makers

- A memo to local, regional or national legislators provides analysis and recommendations to make decisions on your topic.
- When writing your memo, be concise with your message:
 - State the problem.
 - Link your knowledge to their concerns and consider what your audience may already know or believe about the topic.
 - Include a clear recommendation for how policy makers should act and why they would benefit.
- Resources:
 - [How to Write a Policy Memo](#) – Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government

- [Guide to Writing an Effective Policy Memo](#) – Leadership for Educational Equity

Blog Posts

- Science blogging builds an audience and community for commentary on a range of topics.
- Blogs can break smaller news stories, impart personal insight or experience on a topic, or provide criticism on a larger scale topic or published research.
- Consider why you are blogging and how it meets communication goals. (It can take a long time to build an audience and develop a niche perspective and brand, so make sure it is worth the time investment and is something you enjoy).
- Blogs can also be an effective way to impart a personal story and engage an audience through your first-hand account.
- Resources:
 - [Blogging Tips for Science Bloggers, From Science Bloggers](#) – From the Lab Bench
 - [The World of Science Blogging](#) – American Scientist
 - [Why Science Blogging Still Matters](#) – Nature

Pitching to Journalists

- Similarly, when reaching out to journalists you need to consider the audience that they reach through their writing. Are they typically writing about your type of research and are they effectively engaging the audience you wish to engage? Tailor your pitch specifically to the journalist and publication they represent and communicate how your story is important, unique and timely. Establish your credibility and why you are a strong voice for this story. It can be helpful to keep a running list of media contacts that you regularly reach out to. See the worksheet at the end of this document for a sample template.
- Resources:
 - [Tips for Communicating Your Science with the Press: Approaching Journalists](#) – Ecological Society of America

Commentary or Opinion Pieces

- Commentary or opinion pieces are an opportunity to get information and ideas to leaders and the public so they can make the best decisions. The articles are intended to be agenda-setting, authoritative and informed, and they can be provocative articles calling for action on timely issues. Successfully published commentaries roadmap a proposed solution in detail and do not simply snapshot a problem.
- Where should you submit? Match your commentary or opinion to the publication's audience. It is important to understand that audience when approaching the editor or the publication. Below is a list of several publications, descriptions of how they define commentary or opinion pieces, and guidelines for submitting.

Journal

- Science Perspectives or Policy Forum – Here are [guidelines](#) for submission. Perspectives are 1,000 words; Policy Forum articles are 1,000-2,000 words and have a political implication.
- A [Comment](#) in Nature
- A [Comment](#) in Nature Sustainability – Comment articles are opinionated pieces that focus on a topical issue in sustainability research, or in relevant policy and societal debates.

Reputable Independent News and Commentary Platform: The Conversation

- The Conversation can help raise the profile of you and your team’s work. It also provides readers with a better understanding of current affairs and the complex issues the world faces.
- The Conversation is an independent, non-profit media organization that works exclusively with academia to publish news analysis and commentary written by academics, edited by journalists, and aimed at the general public. It is reputable, academic and influential. Pitch guidelines here.
- Time, Newsweek, Quartz, The Washington Post and Fortune are among their regular publishers.

General Audience/Region Specific Newspapers and Magazines:

- The Op-Ed Project offers resources on writing op-ed articles [here](#).
- The Guardian U.S. Opinion [guidelines](#)
- Los Angeles Times’ submission [guidelines](#)
- Washington Post Opinion [guidelines](#)
- Washington Post Health & Science: health-science@washpost.com
- New York Times’ submission [guidelines](#)
- Scientific American’s submission [guidelines](#)
- [Submission information](#) for the top 100 online and print publications in the U.S.

Meeting with Decision Makers

- As you prepare for a meeting with a decision maker or stakeholder, consider the key messages from your research. Keep your key points short, focused, and on-topic for your main communication goal. Determine whether your strategy needs to be informative/educational, persuasive/influential, or an introduction for future collaboration, and craft your message. A meeting with a decision-maker can be a mutually beneficial experience. You may walk away with a better understanding of the policy landscape that can inform your own research or the political context. Below are key areas:
 - **Introductions:** Thank the decision maker or staff for their time and acknowledge their connection to the topic, past voting record on the topic, or current stance on the topic. Contextualize yourself

and your credibility with the topic.

- **Context:** It is important to recognize the overall context of the issue you are addressing but may be difficult to relay all the information. Focus on two to three key facts that will help support your main goal. Some context to consider: Is the issue timely, are actions needed now? Is this a controversial issue or is there a high consensus among scientists?
- **Key Point(s):** Limit your key points to two to three critical issues relevant to the decision-makers interests. This may be an effective time to relate a personal connection to the topic or to relay messages from constituents of the decision-maker.
- **Asking Questions:** Be clear on what you are asking the decision maker to do. Know exactly how the decision maker has acted on the issue in the past and where they stand now.
- **Thank You:** Express your gratitude again for their time and consideration of your perspective. You can also restate your hope for them to consider your “Ask,” or reiterate your key point/take-away.
- **Resources:**
 - Communicating with Decision Makers – Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography
Congressional Visit Days:
 - Congressional Visits Day – [American Geophysical Union](#)
 - Congressional Visits Day – [Soil Science Society of America](#)
 - Geoscience Congressional Visits Day – [American Geosciences Institute](#)
 - Congressional Visits – [Ecological Society of America](#)

Fact Sheets or One Pagers

- Fact sheets or a page of explanatory text and graphics directly engage an audience with a tangible representation of your research. For instance, you may present your findings to a stakeholder group and leave fact sheets for further information.
- When crafting a fact sheet or one pager, consider and answer the questions your audience may commonly ask and provide credible, sited information that will help inform and encourage your own communication goal.
- Resources:
 - [Communication Tools: Fact Sheets](#) – University of North Dakota, Center for Rural Health
 - [NotebookLM](#), can help you create “Briefing Docs,” FAQ’s, Summaries, and even AI-Generated Podcast Episodes based on your work.

STEP 4: CRAFTING A CLEAR MESSAGE

Craft a message that will meet your communication goal(s).

Each communication product may require a variation of your message. Below are a few key points to consider when you begin to craft your message:

STEP 1:

Describe the Problem and How It Relates to Your Audience.

Why should anyone care about your research? This is a harsh question but an important one for you to answer in all your communication products.

You may not answer this directly, however, you need to connect the dots for why your audience should care. Knowing what matters to your audience is a great place to start. It might be your goal to persuade your audience to care about your research, therefore appealing to their values might be effective. If your goal is to help your audience understand your work, build their knowledge. Funders may be another audience, and the challenge in reaching them is making your work relevant to their programmatic interests.

STEP 2:

Talk about an overall solution (“We found that...”)

Talk about your successes at every step of the way. You may have successfully pulled together an international team of top researchers who can tackle this complex problem. Or, your team has solved this one aspect of the problem that

will help unlock further research and inform decision-makers. By knowing who your audience is and what is important to them, you can select what successful aspect of your research to focus on.

STEP 3:

Other specific actions that could be taken (“What next?”)

What specific actions should people or organizations take? What do you want your audience to think, feel and do? You may ask for outside funders to invest in your group or you may inform policy-makers about a specific outcome you found in your research that can inform policy they are drafting. Having a concise action for your audience gives them direction to follow. The more specific you can be about the action the more likely the audience will take part.

STEP 4:

Explain the consequences of actions.

What are the consequences of action or inaction? This message comes from your “What’s in It For Them” (WIFT) from Step 2 the Audience Analysis. When a stakeholder audience knows there is something in it for them, providing a clear purpose for the communication will lead

them to understand consequences of actions or inactions, for example.

- If you take the time to learn about who you are communicating with, ideally you will understand what motivates them and their decision-making landscape. If you can align your communication goals with their underlying motivations, they are more likely to see the benefits to themselves as well as society at large.
- Policymakers cannot take advice from academics directly. One effective approach is to describe the consequences of not taking certain actions, particularly if those consequences affect what the policy maker values (this could be concerns about losing voters or funders, public perception, timeliness of the issue and whether there are better options to solve this issue).
- Be aware of federal limitations for lawmakers to meet directly with academics. For instance, The Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) is a Federal law that governs the establishment and operation of advisory committees. We encourage you to learn more about what limitations you may face federally, as well as locally.

WRITING TIPS

Writing Tips for Crafting a Message

- **Avoid jargon.** Scientific research often includes very technical language that is integral to its viability. However, when sharing information with people outside of the discipline, those words can become meaningless and therefore need to be explained instead, with examples.
- **Create metaphors.** When trying to explain complex concepts it may be useful to use metaphors to help people connect with ideas that are more familiar to them (accepting that no metaphor is perfect).
- **Use short sentences.** Often in scientific writing, sentences go far over 20 words. However, past this point, it can become difficult for anyone to grasp the main point of the sentence. Breaking up the sentences will help people digest the concepts quicker and easier.
- **Simplify the language.** Consider using shorter words in place of longer words if they will have the same effect. An example is use and utilize. In instances where both words mean basically the same thing, choose the one that gets to the point faster.
- **Replace passive voice with active voice.** Often scientific works such as lab reports or journal articles are written in passive voice to emphasize the action being taken rather than the “doer” of the action. This is useful to convey scientific objectivity. However, when writing to be persuasive, for instance, it makes the point less clear and takes more time getting there. [Here is a good article](#) on how to spot the difference between voices and how to turn passive voice into active voice.
- **Use action verbs.** Action verbs can help express relationships among these key nouns and describe movement of your work and the activity or action of your involvement. Below is a table of common action verbs for broad concepts typical of synthesis research:

Analysis	Applications	Synthesis	Evaluations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• analyze• define• categorize• classify• compare• contrast• systematize	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• apply• argue• articulate• conclude• defend• demonstrate• differentiate• employ• establish• extend• hypothesize	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• combine• construct• create• design• formulate• frame• integrate• merge• project• solve• synthesize	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• critique• defend• evaluate• interpret• justify• reassess• re-envision

AND, BUT, THEREFORE STATEMENT

And, But, Therefore is narrative storytelling device developed by [Randy Olson](#), a marine scientist turned filmmaker. Whether you plan to publish your results in a scientific journal or reach a non-academic audience, having a concise description for your team's synthesis project can help translate your work to your audiences. Narrative storytelling is a powerful tool to communicate your research.

By using a method like the "And, But, Therefore," or ABT, you draw connections between different parts of your research, making it overall more compelling. This method engages your audience in the story at the heart of your research rather than being off-put by a monotonous listing of data, facts and findings. Thinking about your research in this way also helps you narrow and focus your communication efforts to be short, visual and precise. Below is a template for developing a short statement about your research:

[This is true and observable] **and** [this is true and observable OR this data exists], **but** [problem statement], **therefore** [this is how we are addressing the problem].

- **And** allows you to hit two main points about your research. Focus on relevant facts that build baseline knowledge. Or focus on an aspect of your topic you have researched for years but is new and interesting to your audience.
- **But** introduces conflict! This is the heart of narrative storytelling. We transition away from the world as we knew it into the reason why this research is necessary.
- **Therefore** ties your goals together and promises to deliver a "resolution" to your audience. In this portion, address how your research will solve the problem articulated in the "But" statement. Your work may not be resolved, but by incorporating a resolving statement you can generate a connection between your work and your audience.

The And, But, Therefore format can also be expanded to a longer paragraph by first articulating a setup of a few facts, then state the problem you are tackling and end with your resolution of how you intend to or are addressing the problem with your research. [Click here](#) for additional tips on how to write an abstract.

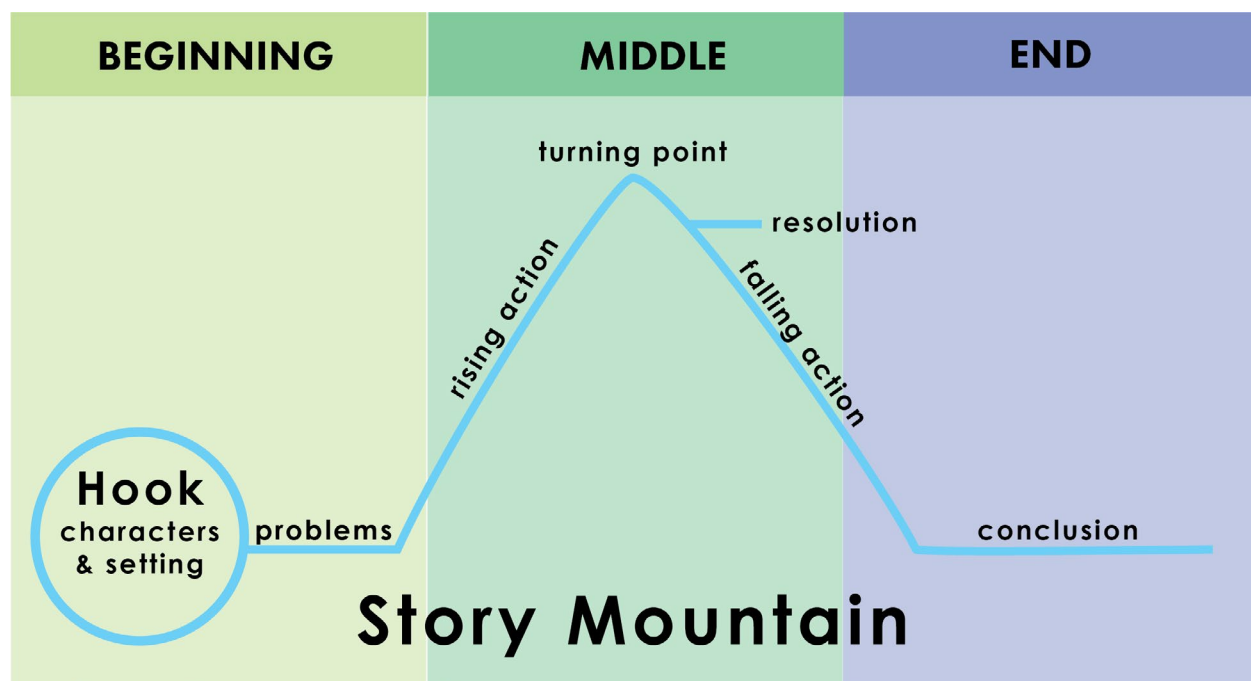
Below is example of an And, But, Therefore Statement, based on a SESYNC research project.

Back and forth changes in winter weather events are known as winter weather whiplash.
AND, scientists say those kind of weather events will become more frequent and intense with climate change.
BUT, the potential social impacts of these weather events are harder to predict.
THEREFORE, SESYNC researchers are seeking to develop metrics for identifying those events.

ELEMENTS OF A STORY

For many audiences, stories are more impactful than a group of facts. They get attention. They stick in people's memories. They change perceptions.

Your goal is to convey accurate scientific information to help people update what they know or change their understanding when necessary. Stories can help people engage with problems and issues on a human level. Understanding the audience and clearly articulating the problem of the story is essential.



A basic story has characters (or a character), conflict, and resolution—and the characters change in some way from beginning to end.

A science story has three deeper level components.

1. The first part is when you confront the audience with an idea that is not familiar or easily understood.
2. The second part tackles the practical implications—how will this research change our lives, or what we know?
3. The third element is the human story. This helps people connect with the problems, issues and developments in your research on a human level. For example, what was the struggle? What were the twists and turns in your thinking that led you to the solution? For example, a natural resource economist at SES-YNC began with the roots of his interest, in addition to his upbringing on a Caribbean island, in order to establish a connection with the audience before explaining his research process and 2 ½ year hunt for answers about the mysteries of Marine Protected Area management.

STEP FIVE: HOW IS YOUR STRATEGY WORKING?

STEP 1:

Launch.

You've done the hard work of identifying your audiences, crafting specific messages for them and preparing your communication approach; now it's time to launch!

Refer to your list of media contacts that you've assembled. (There is a sample template included in the Worksheet that follows.) Are there specific groups, institutions, or individuals that you can reach out to with your work? Next, distribute to your networks—e.g., on social media, on LinkedIn, via email to colleagues, through listservs, in newsletters you are a part of, on your website, to the communications or public relations team of your company or institution (if applicable), etc.

STEP 2:

Track.

Not every communication product is going to work perfectly. It may take several iterations or different approaches to ultimately reach your audience. Be sure to track your progress so you can understand what is working well with and what is missing the mark. Part of this process involves setting

benchmarks for your products. For example:

- We hope to have X amount of followers on our social media platform in 6 months, while aiming to post twice a week.
- We hope to have X number of subscribers to our newsletter in three months, which we will send out biweekly.
- We hope to have X number of views each month on our blog or website, which we will post new content to weekly.

Once you have set these metrics, you can then gather your data to determine whether the frequency with which you're communicating and the content you're sending out are helping you reach these numbers. There are many ways to measure your success. For example you can:

- Set up Google Analytics on your blog or website to determine the number of people visiting your site, the length of their stays, the number of pages they visit, the popularity of individual pages, etc.
- Use a newsletter platform like MailChimp or Constant Contact, which will let you keep track of the number of subscribers, rate at which people open the email and click on its content, bounce rate, etc.
- Use the built-in analytics of social media platforms, like YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc., to gauge number of views, number of followers, engagement levels, etc.

- Conduct surveys to gather feedback on your products and outreach efforts.

This information can all provide valuable insight to help you tailor your message or approach.

STEP 3:

Revise & Update.

What lessons are you learning from the communication attempts that miss the mark? How can you incorporate that feedback into the next communication product? Don't be discouraged if one attempt to communicate your message flops. On average, it takes a person three interactions to be influenced or informed by a product's marketing (is this siteable?), and your communication attempts are no different. Don't be afraid to change things up as needed. Communications is a constantly evolving process!

TOOLKIT WORKSHEET

Communications Toolkit: What Are Your Goals?

Align your communication goals with your research plan.	
What is the problem, issue, or question(s) you are asking and addressing in your research?	
Why is the problem interesting and important? (i.e., So what?)	
How does your work connect with a broader disciplinary conversation about this topic/problem in your field, and what does your work add to that conversation?	
Think BIG! What impact <i>could</i> your research have?	
Is your research more basic (fundamental), applied (practical, like in medicine?), or actionable (incorporating end-users in the process?), or some combination?	
Are you primarily looking to advance an idea (inform), engage other researchers or stakeholders, or change a particular entity's behavior? Or some combination?	

Identify concise & specific goals.	Short-Term Goal 1	Short-Term Goal 2	Long-Term Goal 1	Long-Term Goal 2
Specific: Define a clear goal and who is responsible for its execution.				
Measurable: How will success be measured?				
Achievable: Y/N?				
Relevant: Does it align with the overall objectives and bigger picture? How?				
Time-Bound: What is a realistic deadline?				
Actionability: Does this work necessitate the inclusion of end-users (such as policy makers or community members) in the research process? Y/N; Why/Why not?				

Communications Toolkit: Identifying Your Audiences

Brainstorm potential audiences and their unique characteristics.	
Start by writing down categories or groups of people, e.g., other researchers, policymakers, community members, etc., with whom your research may be relevant.	
Next, be more specific—are there certain institutions or faculty who would benefit from your research? Particular policymakers? Communities?	
Then, list what you believe to be some of the values, motivational forces, and/or needs of each group and how your research intersects with some of these entities.	

Communications Toolkit: Audience-Centered Analysis

Conduct an audience-centered analysis.			
List your audiences.	Audience 1	Audience 2	Audience 3
Write your top three audiences in descending order of relevance.			
Consider your relationship with the audiences.	Audience 1	Audience 2	Audience 3
What is your relationship to the audience?			
How much credibility do you have with the audience?			
"What are the sources of that credibility? E.g., Your position within an organization? Your technical expertise? Your track record? Your relationship with key people? Your personal characteristics? Your shared values with the audience?"			
How can you increase or reinforce your credibility with the audience?			
Who are other relevant influencers of the audience(s)? How do they connect to your audience and what do they know? How do they portray different issues? How might these outside groups react to your messages?			

Conduct an audience-centered analysis (cont'd).

Consider your relationship with the audiences.	Audience 1	Audience 2	Audience 3
Does the audience have any biases about the subject?			
Are there any political factors that need to be taken into account?			
Determine audience-centered goals.	Audience 1	Audience 2	Audience 3
What does the audience already know about the subject? How are they involved in the matter?			
What's in it for the audience? Are you solving a problem? Are you raising awareness?			
What's the objective of the communication? Inform? Engage? Influence? Some combination?			
What is the desired response from this audience? Are they simply taking in information? Do you wish to collaborate? Are you looking to change their behavior? What would you like them to do as a response to your communication?			
If your goal is to inform, what key points do you wish to share?			
If you wish to collaborate, why might that be useful to them?			
If you wish to change or influence their behavior, what information revealed in your research may sway them to do that?			
What questions or objections might the audience have?			

Communications Toolkit: How to Reach Your Audiences (Pt. 1)

List what products you will use to reach your audiences.

Use this section to draft content, or, simply check applicable boxes to let your team know which products you will be making. For example, if your secondary audience is a particular policymaker you would like to meet with, you could draft your script in the box or check that box and work in a separate location.

Medium	Audience 1	Audience 2	Audience 3
Social Media			
Multimedia			
Website			
Press Release			
Policy Memo			
Blog Post			
Pitch to Journal			
Commentary or Opinion Piece			
Script for Meeting with Policy Maker			
Fact Sheet or One Pager			

Communications Toolkit: How to Reach Your Audiences (Pt. 2)

Develop a media and contacts list.							
Throughout the process, compile a list of contacts for use when sharing your work. Use this template to keep track of your network of communication professionals and their contact information.							
Organization	Contact Name	Title	Email	Social Media	List Serv	Date Last Contacted	Product

Communications Toolkit: Crafting a Clear Message

Craft a message that will meet your communication goal(s).			
	Audience 1	Audience 2	Audience 3
Describe the problem and how it relates to your audience.			
Talk about an overall solution (e.g., "We found that...") OR focus on Your team's successes (e.g., "Our team did x, y, and z.")			
Identify other specific actions to take ("What next?")			
Explain the consequences of both action and inaction.			

Communications Toolkit: Writing Tips

Use the following writing tips to craft a clear message.

Use this space to identify some of the complex language and terminology in your messaging and draft alternatives.

Use the following writing tips to craft a clear message.			
Use this space to identify some of the complex language and terminology in your messaging and draft alternatives.			
Writing Tip			
Avoid jargon.	Jargon Term	Definition or Explanation	Example(s)
Create metaphors.	Difficult concept	Metaphor	
Use shorter sentences.	Long sentence(s)	Distilled sentence(s)	
Simplify the language.	Complex word(s)	Synonym(s)	
Change passive voice to active voice: Identify the subject (doer) and make it the focus of the sentence, followed by the verb and object.	Passive voice	Active voice	

Communications Toolkit: And, But, Therefore Statement

Write an And, But, Therefore (ABT) statement.						
Use the template below to make a quick, catchy, and simplified abstract, for non-technical audiences, using the ABT format. The ABT format can also be expanded to a longer paragraph by setting up a few facts, then stating the problem you are tackling, and ending with your resolution of how you intend to or are addressing the problem with your research. Use the space below to craft an ABT paragraph.						
[This is true & observable]	AND	[This is true and observable OR this data exists],	BUT	[Problem statement],	THEREFORE	[This is how we are addressing the problem].

Communications Toolkit: Elements of a Story

Translate your research into a story.	
Hook: Introduce characters and setting. Confront the audience with an idea that's not familiar or easily understood.	
Introduce conflict—what's the problem that your research seeks to address?	
How will this research change people's lives or what we know?	
Build tension—what were some twists and turns in your research? What were some of the struggles?	
What was the 'climax' or turning point in your process where discoveries were made or things started to come together?	
What conclusions did you come to?	

Communications Toolkit: Follow-Up: How Is Your Strategy Working?

Track your progress and reflect on your successes.			
Use the space below to record your products' numbers, comments, etc.			
Audience 1	Product 1	Product 2	Product 3
Qualitative Feedback: Comments, etc.			
Quantitative Feedback: Numbers related to engagement with content.			
Audience 2	Product 1	Product 2	Product 3
Qualitative Feedback: Comments, etc.			
Quantitative Feedback: Numbers related to engagement with content			
Audience 3	Product 1	Product 2	Product 3
Qualitative Feedback: Comments, etc.			
Quantitative Feedback: Numbers related to engagement with content			
Themes/Patterns Noted Overall:			
Areas for Improvement:			
Wins:			
Ideas for the Future:			