

Communication Handbook

Don't panic



Co-funded by
the European Union

Document information

Grant Agreement number	101052342
Project acronym	Biodiversa+
Project full name	The European Biodiversity Partnership
Biodiversa+ duration	7 years
Biodiversa+ start date	Start date: 1 st October 2021
For more information about Biodiversa+	Website: http://www.biodiversa.eu/ Email: contact@biodiversa.eu LinkedIn: Biodiversa+

Deliverable title	Biodiversa+ science communication handbook
Dissemination level	Public
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Work package title	WP6 Communication, outreach and open science
Task or subtask title	T6.4 Capacity building related to communication
Lead partner	Belspo
Date of publication	April 2026
Disclaimer	Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. This deliverable may not have been approved yet by the European Commission and may be subject to change.

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What is Biodiversa+

The European Biodiversity Partnership, Biodiversa+, supports excellent research on biodiversity with an impact for policy and society. Connecting science, policy and practice for transformative change, Biodiversa+ is part of the European Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 that aims to put Europe's biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030. Co-funded by the European Commission, Biodiversa+ gathers partners from research funding, programming and environmental policy actors in European and associated countries to work on 5 main objectives:

1. Plan and support research and innovation on biodiversity through a shared strategy, annual joint calls for research projects and capacity building activities
2. Set up a network of harmonised schemes to improve monitoring of biodiversity and ecosystem services across Europe
3. Contribute to high-end knowledge for deploying Nature-based Solutions and valuation of biodiversity in the private sector
4. Ensure efficient science-based support for policy-making and implementation in Europe
5. Strengthen the relevance and impact of pan-European research on biodiversity in a global context.

More information at: <https://www.biodiversa.eu/>

Table of contents

Working meanings in this handbook.....	5
Your quickstart for when time is short.....	7
Why this matters.....	10
What are we even trying to do?.....	14
Building your support system.....	20
Who exactly are you talking to?.....	25
What are you saying?.....	31
How to help people act.....	36
Where do I go?.....	43
How to.....	52
Building your communication plan.....	61
Is it working?.....	66
Selected references.....	74

Working meanings in this handbook (aka Glossary)

Definitions

These are not formal definitions. They explain how key terms are used in this handbook.

- **Audience:** A specific group of people you want to reach, defined by context, needs, and decisions, not by vague labels like “the public”.
- **Change:** Any shift in awareness, understanding, behaviour, practice, or decision-making that your communication helps enable.
- **Communication:** Purposeful exchange, not broadcasting. It includes listening, adapting, and responding, not just producing outputs.
- **Dissemination:** Making results available. Necessary, but not sufficient, for impact.
- **Engagement:** Two-way interaction that allows others to question, contribute, or act, not just receive information.
- **Impact:** Observable effects beyond academia, such as informing policy, shaping practice, or enabling action. Not the same as reach or visibility.
- **Key message:** The one idea you want your audience to remember or repeat, even if they forget everything else.
- **Policy relevance:** Research that speaks to decisions, timing, and trade-offs faced by policymakers, not just to scientific completeness.
- **Reach:** How many people see or hear something. Useful, but meaningless without relevance or response.
- **Support system:** The people, tools, and routines that help you communicate without doing everything alone.

Acronyms and tools used in this handbook

Term	Meaning
ABT	And-But-Therefore, a simple storytelling structure used to connect context, tension, and resolution, making messages easier to follow and remember.
AI	Artificial Intelligence; refers here to generative tools that can support drafting, brainstorming, or visuals, but do not replace human judgement.
CMS	Content Management System, a platform used to manage website content; mentioned as a practical way to reuse institutional templates.
COM-B	A behaviour change model stating that Behaviour depends on Capability, Opportunity, and Motivation. Used to diagnose barriers to action.
CORDIS	The European Commission platform for EU-funded research results and project information.
Five Whys	A questioning technique used to move from an activity to its underlying purpose by repeatedly asking “why”.
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation, EU regulation governing personal data; mentioned in relation to mailing lists and communication practices.

Goal Pyramid	A framework linking long-term impact goals to outcomes, communication objectives, tactics, and evaluation.
IAP2 Spectrum	A framework describing levels of stakeholder participation, from informing to empowering.
MVP	Minimum Viable Plan, a light, realistic communication plan focused on essential actions rather than completeness.
Message Box	A tool for structuring communication around issue, problem, relevance, solution, and benefit.
ORCID	Open Researcher and Contributor ID, a persistent identifier that helps make researchers easier to find and distinguish online.
Open Research Europe	An open-access publishing platform for research linked to Horizon Europe.
Quadruple Helix	A stakeholder framework grouping actors into policy, business, civil society, and academia.
ResearchGate	A researcher networking platform used to improve visibility and findability.
SMART	A framework for setting objectives: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.
SUCCESS	A message-design framework: Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Credible, Emotional, Story, Solution-oriented.
Yale “Six Americas”	A psychographic segmentation framework showing different levels of engagement and belief within an audience.
WIIFM	“What’s In It For Me?”, a reminder to frame communication from the audience’s perspective and priorities.

Your quickstart for when time is short

Welcome! This handbook is here to help you communicate about your Biodiversa+ project. We know you're busy, so think of it as a flexible toolkit, not a rigid rulebook, designed to help you navigate Horizon Europe expectations in a way that fits your project, your time, and your goals.

This chapter is a quick-use version of the handbook for busy moments. You don't need a full strategy to start communicating well, just clarity, a bit of support, and one sensible next step. If you only read one chapter, make it this one, then follow the signposts to go further if and when you need to.

If you do only five things

1. Start with the change, not the output

Before you make a video, write a post, plan a webinar, or agree to an interview, stop and ask:

- What do I want to be different because this research exists?
- Who can actually influence that change?
- What is realistic at this stage of the project?

A communication activity is not an objective. "We should post more on LinkedIn" is not an objective. "We want municipal staff to notice and consider using this tool" is much closer.

If this still feels fuzzy, use the Five Whys to move from activity to purpose. If you need a fuller structure, go to [Chapter 2](#).

2. Pick one audience, not "everyone"

"The public" is not an audience. Neither is "stakeholders" in general. Your communication becomes much easier when you choose one primary audience for a given output. Ask:

- Who most needs this now?
- What do they already know or assume?
- What matters to them in practice?
- What would count as a useful response from them?

Think in concrete terms. Not "policymakers", but perhaps "a policy adviser working on restoration implementation". Not "farmers", but perhaps "land managers looking for low-risk practical measures".

If you are unsure how to narrow this down, go to [Chapter 4](#).

3. Get the message clear

Most communication problems are message problems disguised as format problems. Before drafting anything, write down:

- Why should this matter to this audience?

- What is the one thing I want them to remember?
- What, if anything, do I want them to do next?

A useful test is this sentence: I'm helping [who] to [do/understand what] by [how]. If you cannot finish that sentence easily, your message is probably still too researcher-centred or too vague.

Use the Message Box to build the message and the Half-Life Exercise to shorten it until it survives outside your head. For more, go to [Chapter 5](#).

4. Choose the channel that fits their reality

Visibility is not the goal. Relevance is. Do not ask, "What channel should we use?" Ask:

- Where does this audience already pay attention?
- What format fits their actual role, habits, and time?
- What can I realistically maintain?

A short brief sent to the right person can matter more than ten posts scattered across platforms you do not have time to use properly. Likewise, a field visit, a targeted email, or a practical factsheet may do more work than a polished public-facing asset.

For channel decisions and distribution logic, go to [Chapter 7](#).

5. Don't do it alone

You are not expected to become a one-person communications department. Before launching into production, ask:

- Have I involved my institution's communication or press team early enough?
- Is there one colleague who can give honest, quick feedback?
- Is there a Biodiversa+ contact or partner who could help amplify this?
- Do we know who is drafting, reviewing, approving, and sharing?

Communication gets lighter, better, and more strategic when it is shared. If support feels patchy, go to [Chapter 3](#). If you need a lightweight structure for action over time, go to [Chapter 9](#).

A conservation biologist once held a town hall on protecting local wetlands. She presented compelling data on biodiversity loss, flooding risks, and carbon sequestration. The audience listened politely, nodded, applauded, and went home. A year later, she took a different approach: partnering with the local school to create a wetland monitoring programme. Students could name monitoring sites after their pets. And soon, families were visiting “Mr Whiskers’ Marsh”.

Why this matters (even if you think it doesn't)



Takeaway: Outreach is a core part of your project, not only because funders expect it, but also because it builds meaning, connection, and trust. That's what drives impact. Effective communication can also enhance your research and boost your career.

1 Why it matters

Communication connects research to impact and creates value beyond the project.



Accountability

Show the public value of public funding.



Trust

Build credibility through clear communication.



Understanding & use

Make knowledge clear and usable.



Societal impact

Inform decisions and action.

2 What Horizon Europe expects

Communication is one of three pillars helping turn research into value and use.



Communication

Engage audiences with the project and its relevance.



Dissemination

Share results with audiences who can use them



Exploitation

Support concrete use of results.

3 What's in it for you?

The aim is smarter communication, not more work.



Better research

Surface ideas, priorities and use cases.



Fulfil your mission

Connect research with decisions and practice.



Career & collaboration

Build visibility, networks and opportunities.

Communication is part of **research impact**, not an optional extra.



Testimonial:

“Only if we understand, will we care. Only if we care, will we help. Only if we help shall all be saved.”

Jane Goodall

What's at stake

Communication can be one of the smartest research moves you make. It is now considered a core dimension of research excellence. Under [Horizon Europe](#), projects are expected to demonstrate:

- **Communication:** Proactively engaging audiences about your project and its relevance.
- **Dissemination:** Sharing results with targeted audiences who can use or build upon them.
- **Exploitation:** Making concrete use of results for societal, policy, or commercial benefit.

This isn't about box-ticking, but about:

- **Accountability:** Public funds deserve public value.
- **Trust:** Transparent, clear communication helps keep science credible.
- **Change:** Sharing findings in a way that lets others act on them.

Just as you design sound methods to produce knowledge, you also need sound strategies to share it. Biodiversa+ goes beyond funding research to catalyse transformation in the governance, valuation, restoration, and monitoring of biodiversity across Europe. In this context, communication is not add-on, but a core strategic tool to generate societal impact.

What's in it for you?

Think of communication not as an “add-on”, but as a lever that can:

- **Enhance your research:** Stakeholder feedback can surface new ideas, priorities, or use cases.
- **Fulfil your mission:** Whether you aim to inform decisions or change behaviours, communication is the bridge to outcomes.
- **Boost your career:** Compelling communication builds your visibility and potential to attract funding and collaborators.

The aim is not to turn researchers into full-time communicators, but to support the integration of smart, realistic practices into project workflows, ones that match your project's goals and your available time.

Reality check

While communication is increasingly expected, it can still feel like a stretch alongside existing commitments. Researchers often highlight the following obstacles:

- **Time:** “I know it matters, but I'm already swamped.”
- **Skills:** “I wasn't trained for this, where do I even start?”

- **Resources:** “I don’t have the tools or budget to do this properly.”
- **Apprehension:** “What if I’m misunderstood, or seen as less serious once I communicate?”

These concerns are valid, and there are no quick fixes on offer. Rather than pushing you to do more, this handbook aims to help you work more effectively and sustainably, with guidance rooted in the day-to-day realities of biodiversity research and practical tools for doing more with less. It is a baseline support resource, not a comprehensive manual. Take what works for you and leave the rest.

Next up: Defining your objectives. The single best time-saver is simply knowing what you really want to do!

A visiting professor saw a PhD student running up and down a 20-metre stretch of riverbank with a dripping bucket. “What are you doing?” the professor asked. “I’m demonstrating rapid water loss!” the student panted. “And where are you taking the water?” asked the professor. The student stopped, bewildered. “Nowhere. I’m just showing how fast it disappears.”

What are we even trying to do? (objectives!)



Takeaway: You need clarity about what you want to change, who you need to reach, and how you will judge success. It will save you time and frustration, helping you choose the right activities and stop you from doing busy work that does not move the needle.



Good communication starts with the **change** you want to support. The **format comes last**.



Testimonial:

“When a man does not know what harbour he is making for, no wind is the right wind.”

Seneca the Younger

Clear objectives matter (and save you time)

“We need storytelling...” “We should make a video...” Hold on. Most disappointing communication happens because the purpose and the method don’t match. In research, you wouldn’t start a project without a clear question. Communication deserves the same **discipline**.

Clear objectives help you:

- Save time by ruling out activities that won’t help;
- Reduce frustration by setting realistic expectations;
- Choose the right format for the right purpose;
- Prioritise when you don’t have time for everything (which is always).

So, instead of asking “What should we make?”, **start with:**

1. What change do we want to support?
2. Who needs to receive or engage with this?
3. What is the key takeaway for them?

Everything else flows from there.

What “change” actually means

We talk about “change”, but to be clear: an objective doesn’t have to be about persuading someone, and it almost never means pushing an agenda. All objectives involve change, sometimes small and knowledge-based, sometimes big and practice-based. In research communication, your goal sits somewhere on a spectrum:

Level	What it means	Example
Awareness	Your audience knows something exists.	Let policymakers know a new biodiversity database is online.
Understanding	They grasp the meaning, context, or relevance.	Help local farmers understand how wetland restoration benefits soil.
Consideration	They think about acting differently.	Encourage ecologists to test our new sampling method.
Action	They take a specific step based on your work.	Get planners to integrate connectivity maps in the next plan.

Long-term change	A sustained shift in policy, practice, or culture.	Support adoption of a monitoring framework as a national standard.
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Your communication objective should match **where your audience is, not where you wish they were**. If policymakers are not yet aware of your tool, aiming for adoption is premature. If practitioners already understand the issue but hesitate to act, more explanation will not help.

At each level of change, ask yourself a simple question: What needs to shift here?

- Is it what they **think**? (awareness, clarity, understanding)
- Is it what they **feel**? (confidence, urgency, trust)
- Or is it what they **do**? (a realistic next step)

Being explicit about this sharpens your objective. But not every communication objective needs to change behaviour directly. Often, the realistic first step is to increase awareness, sharpen understanding, build trust, or make action feel more possible.

The “Five Whys” (your quickest clarity maker)

Tap into your inner child with this very simple technique. It moves you from activity to purpose, clarifying objectives along the way and opening up better-suited formats.

Example:

“We want to post a video on social media.”

- Why? → To share our new report.
- Why? → So local conservation groups know about the findings.
- Why? → So they can use them in their restoration plans.
- Why? → To improve habitat connectivity in the region.
- Why? → To support species migration under climate change.

By the fifth “why”, you are no longer talking about a video. You are talking about an impact goal.

You do not always need all five levels written down. The point is to move from activity to intention, and from intention to contribution.

Before moving on, pause for one strategic check: why does this impact matter? Clarifying why you pursue impact ensures your communication aligns with your values and your stakeholders’ needs, not just funder requirements.

Structuring your objectives

Once you know what change you want to support, you need a simple way to turn that into a plan. Here is a single structure made of three parts:

1. **Pathway:** how communication contributes to change
2. **Timeline:** When to focus on what
3. **Filters:** How to choose what’s realistic

Together, they help you design communication that is purposeful, feasible, and connected to your research.

Pathway: Linking communication to impact

Communication rarely creates long-term impact on its own. What it can do is help move people along a pathway: from awareness, to understanding, to interest, to action, to longer-term change. A simple way to think about this is:

impact goal → intermediate change → communication objective → tactics → check

Example:

- **Impact goal** (the real-world change you ultimately contribute to): support species migration under climate change by improving habitat connectivity
- **Intermediate change** (the shifts in how people think, feel, or act that lead to the impact): local conservation groups understand how the findings apply to restoration planning and feel confident using them
- **Communication objectives** (what communication can realistically achieve): make the research usable for practitioners by clearly explaining what the findings mean for real restoration decisions
- **Tactics** (the activities or formats): short, practical videos featuring examples of restoration choices, shared via practitioner networks and conservation mailing lists, supported by a concise guidance note
- **Check whether it worked**: did relevant groups access the content, refer to it in planning discussions, or request follow-up clarification?

This is your strategic backbone. It helps you separate the bigger change you hope to contribute to from the more modest but still meaningful shift communication can realistically support. It also helps avoid a common mistake: jumping straight to “let’s make a video”. The format comes last, not first.

Timeline: Communicating across the project life-cycle

Communication is not a one-off task at the end of a project. Different stages call for different objectives. Early on, the job may be visibility or trust. Later, it may be engagement, testing messages, or supporting uptake. Think of communication as a companion to the project life cycle. At each stage, ask: what kind of change is realistic now?

Research phase	Example objectives	Example formats/tactics
Foundation (pre-launch)	Establish “findability”: Ensure stakeholders can verify who you are and how to reach you.	Updated institutional/personal profiles (ORCID, LinkedIn, University bio).
Project kick-off	Build awareness: Announce the project’s aims and connect with key partners early.	A short “About the project” video or blog post; a launch announcement on social media.
Fieldwork	Engage & invite: Share the “process” of science to build transparency and invite data/input.	“Field notes” stories; social media updates from the site; co-design workshops with locals.
Preliminary results	Stimulate curiosity: Test the waters with your findings and invite peer/partner feedback.	Visual data snapshots (infographics); internal webinars or “preview” sessions for stakeholders.

Final outputs	Promote uptake: Shift perceptions and turn results into actionable change.	Policy briefs; practical “how-to” guides; final conference or interactive StoryMap.
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This is not busy work, it ensures you’re focusing on the right objective at the right time.

Filters: Choosing what is realistic

Even with a clear objective, you will usually have more ideas than time. These quick filters help you decide what is worth doing before you commit time, effort, or budget.

- **SMART** objectives (you’ve heard it a 1000+ times, but actually quite effective)
 - Specific: What exactly should the audience know, feel, or do?
 - Measurable: How will you know if it happened?
 - Achievable: Is it realistic with your resources and time?
 - Relevant: Does it align with your project’s mission?
 - Time-bound: When should it be achieved by?

Example:

- Within 3 months, have 50 local landowners sign up to receive our wetland management tips”: SMART.
- “Tell people about our wetland project”: Not so much.

- The quick **stress-test** check:
 - Write down the activity you’re considering. (“Make a video about pollinator decline”)
 - Ask: What do I want this to achieve? (“Encourage gardeners to plant native species”)
 - Check: Is it aligned with my pathway, timeline, and audience needs?

Drop, adjust, or proceed as needed

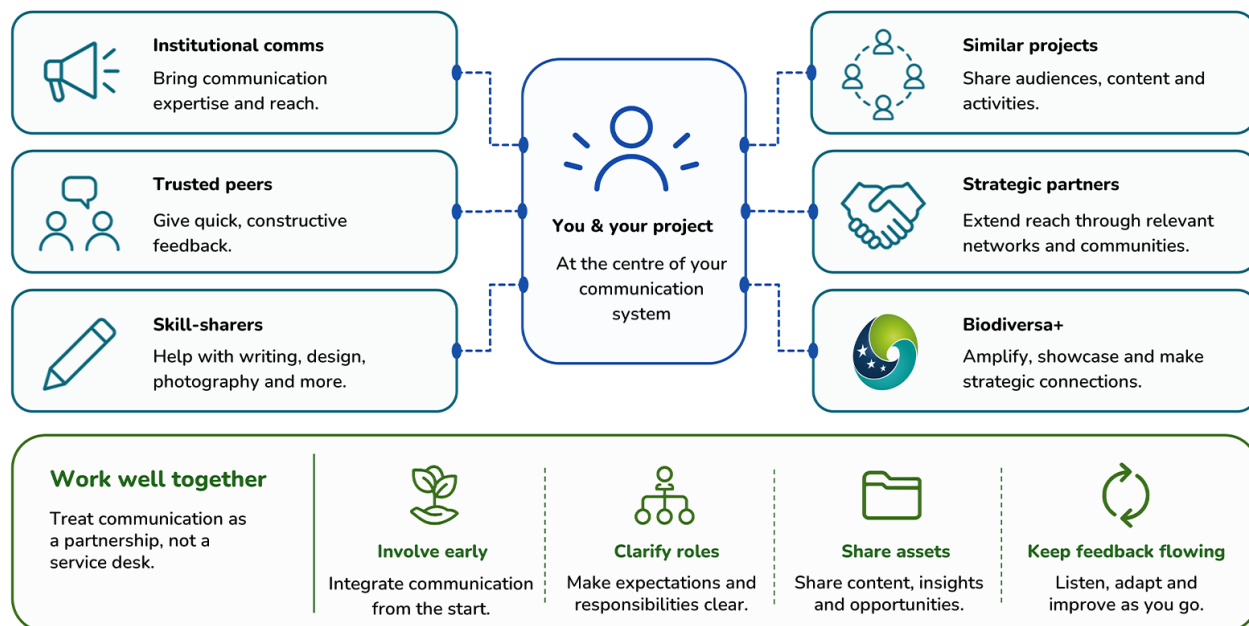
Next up: Building your support system. We have some more clarity on what we are trying to do, but hold on. Let’s not do it alone.

A researcher studying endangered species tried to manage all communication duties alongside her fieldwork. Her to-do list read: "Write blog post. Update social media. Prepare presentation. Design infographic..." She envied her colleague who seemed naturally gifted for this. One day, she caught a glimpse of that colleague's to-do list. It had just one line: "Coffee with Sarah from the Comms Office."

Building your support system (because you shouldn't do this alone)



Takeaway: You don't have to be a one-person communications department. Effective communication is a team sport. By building a support system, you can multiply your impact while protecting your time and energy for research.



You do not need more communication tasks. You need the **right support** around you.



Testimonial:

“This stunt is usually performed by trained professionals. Don't do this alone.”

Your therapist, probably

Why you need a system

“I don't need training; I need support.” Many researchers feel this way, and rightly so. Another workshop (or handbook) rarely solves the problem. What often makes the difference is having the right people, tools, and structures around you. A good support system helps you:

- Share the load and deadlines;
- Tap into different skills and perspectives;
- Get constructive feedback before things go public;
- Access tools and audiences you wouldn't reach alone;
- Stay motivated through peer encouragement.

This is not about offloading responsibility. It is about multiplying impact.

Start where you are

You don't need perfect conditions or a formal team. Start with the people already in your orbit:

- **Your institution:** Most universities and research institutes have a communications or press office. These professionals are there to help you. They know how to craft a press release, talk to journalists, and promote your work to a wider audience. The earlier you involve them, the more useful they are.
- **Similar projects:** Collaborate with other R&I projects to co-organise events, share content, or develop resources. This is a low-cost, high-impact way to amplify your reach.
- **Skill-sharers:** Look for colleagues and students with a “side talent” (for writing, photography, public speaking...). These informal strengths are highly valuable, but too often underused.
- **Trusted peers:** A small “buddy system” of two or three colleagues can make communication lighter and better. Swap drafts, test messages, or sanity-check ideas. Fast, honest feedback is often more useful than perfection.
- **Strategic partners:** NGOs, community groups, professional societies, and networks often already reach the audiences you care about. Co-hosting an event, contributing a guest article, or sharing content can open doors that would be hard to open alone.
- **Leverage AI:** Generative AI tools can be useful for brainstorming, drafting, or generating initial visual concepts. But it cannot replace your judgement. Always check for accuracy, bias, and ethical implications.

Support systems rarely assemble themselves. Beyond formal partners and institutional support, they also grow from **visibility**: introduce yourself at seminars, mention your project in cross-department meetings, reach out to colleagues whose work intersects with yours... You do not need to push your

way in, but you may need to knock on the door. With consistency, small actions often turn acquaintances into allies.

Support systems are neither built once, nor all at once. They change, that's normal. You don't need many people, you need the right few, and you don't need them all at once.

Working well together

Communication offices and project **communicators are often treated as service desks**: you send them a PDF, and a “tweet” comes out. This “vending machine” model is common, and it **rarely leads to impact**. Communication works better as a partnership. Involved early, communicators help decide whether to communicate, to whom, and how. Value people who won't just do what you say, but who push back with challenging questions.

This light collaboration charter helps establish clear, realistic expectations between researchers and communication partners. This is not a contract. It's a **shared reference point** you can return to when coordination starts to feel heavy:

Principle	Your part (Research team)	Their part (Comms support)	Why it helps
Early integration	Involve comms early. Share objectives, audiences, and timelines before results are final.	Identify potential hooks, risks, and formats early on.	Communication is planned, not rushed at the end.
Scientific integrity & clarity	Define what is non-negotiable for accuracy and ethics.	Translate complexity into accessible language without distortion.	Trust is protected on both sides.
Shared assets	Keep core materials (summaries, visuals, photos) organised and accessible.	Provide templates, branding guidance, and reuse-ready formats.	Less friction, fewer last-minute requests.
Clear feedback loops	Share qualitative signals (interest, invitations, reactions).	Share basic metrics and observations.	Learning replaces guesswork.
Adaptation over perfection	Accept iteration and small adjustments.	Help simplify, test, and refine formats over time.	Effort focuses on what works.

A note on internal coordination

External communication depends on internal clarity. In larger projects, consider designating one informal **communication contact per work package**. Their role is simple: relay updates, collect material, and reduce fragmentation, not to “do all the communication”.

You usually need only three coordination basics:

- one place to track **tasks** (decisions and deadlines live in one place, not across emails);
- one space for **conversation**;
- one shared location for **documents**, with clear naming and version control.

Anything beyond that should earn its place.

And, of course, other classical principles still apply:

- Clear roles beat good intentions: Decide who usually drafts, who reviews, and who shares.
- Rhythm beats urgency: Short, regular check-ins prevent last-minute scrambles.
- Respect protects energy: Agree on response times and quiet hours.
- ...

What can Biodiversa+ do for you?

When you are part of a Biodiversa+ funded project, your support system extends to the Biodiversa+ Communication Team. Think of them as amplifiers who can help your results reach a pan-European audience that you might struggle to access alone.

How they can help:

- **Amplification:** Tagging Biodiversa+ on social media or sharing news with the team allows them to repost your work to their established networks.
- **Showcasing:** Key results can be featured on the Biodiversa+ website and in the newsletter, giving them a permanent home.
- **Strategic connection:** They can help position your results in a European policy context and connect you with other projects working on similar themes.
- **“Sanity check”:** Need a second pair of eyes? They offer a safe space to test key outputs or press releases before they go live.

Do not wait until the end of your project to say hello. Get in touch when you have a significant milestone, a compelling fieldwork story, or a new policy brief: communication@biodiversa.eu.

✓ Checklist: Your minimum viable support system

This is not a to-do list. It's a quick reality check: Do I have enough around me to not do this alone? You don't need everything in place. Two or three “yes” answers is already progress.

- ☐ Have I introduced myself to the communications or press team in my institution?
- ☐ Have I identified two or three peers I trust for quick, honest feedback?
- ☐ Is there one person who could make communication feel lighter rather than heavier?
- ☐ Are roles clear in our project or working group? Who usually does what, even informally?
- ☐ Do we have a central place for files and tasks? Are the tools simple enough that people actually use them?
- ☐ Do we share small wins as well as challenges, not only final outputs?
- ☐ When things get stuck, do I ask for help rather than carrying it alone?

If this mostly holds true, you have a support system.

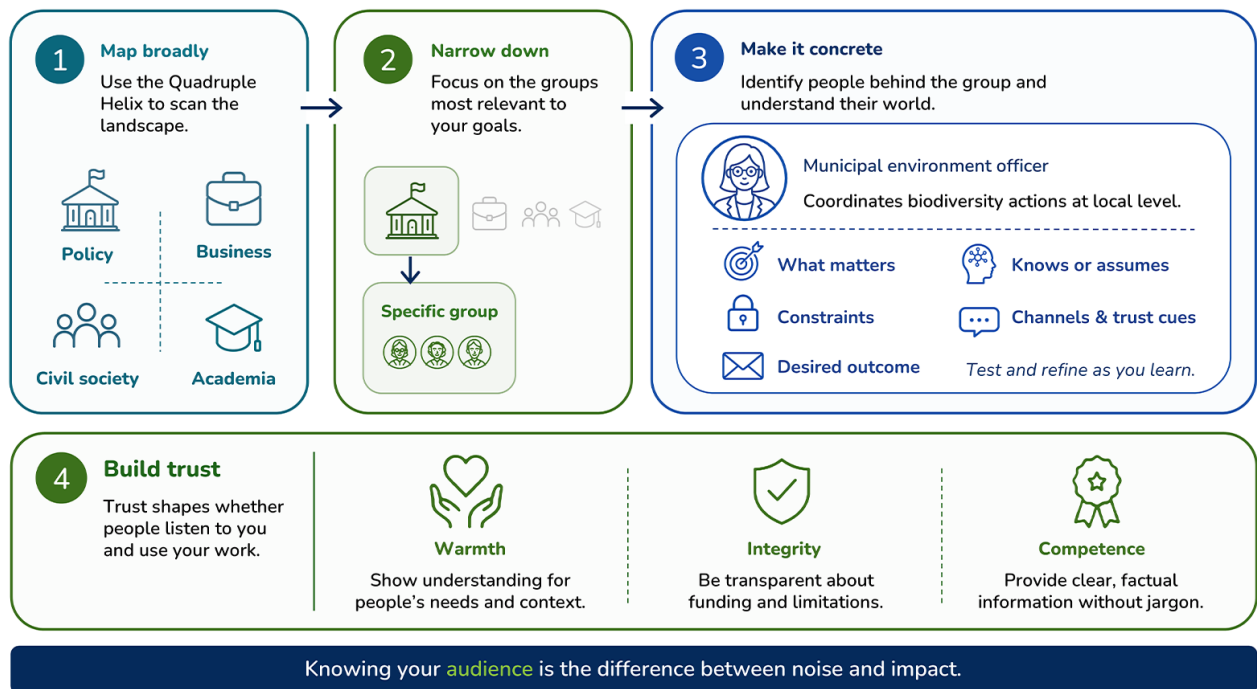
Next up: Knowing your audience and building trust. Because even the clearest objective falls flat if it doesn't land with the people you actually want to reach.

Two researchers stood on a cliff overlooking a town. One, a climatologist, cupped his hands and shouted into the wind, “WE MUST REDUCE OUR EMISSIONS BY 50% WITHIN THE DECADE!” His companion asked, “Who are you talking to?” The climatologist replied, “Everyone!” The echo returned, and they felt a great sense of accomplishment.

Who exactly are you talking to? (it's not “the public”)



Takeaway: Knowing your audience is the difference between noise and impact. Effective communication requires identifying who you want to reach, what matters to them, and how you'll earn their trust. Your messages, formats, and tactics all depend on this.





Testimonial:

“Everything is vague to a degree you do not realise till you have tried to make it precise.”

Bertrand Russell

No such thing as “the public”

You can’t speak to “the public”. Audiences differ in what they care about, how they interpret information, and which channels they pay attention to. Treating them as one group leads to content that feels vague or irrelevant. So, once you’ve clarified your objective (Chapter 2), you need to clarify with whom you need to communicate for that objective to succeed? (note: with whom, not to whom).

Narrowing your audience may feel limiting, but it’s a force multiplier. You gain clarity, relevance, and higher uptake.

Start with the Quadruple Helix

Most research projects interact with four broad sectors. Use this to sort and map your stakeholders before you go deeper.

Sector	Examples	Examples of how they help deliver impact
Policy	Ministries, local authorities, EU bodies	Translate evidence into policy, incentives, programmes.
Business	Farmers, landowners, SMEs, consultancies	Change practices and invest in solutions.
Civil society	NGOs, community groups, citizen scientists	Mobilise support, co-create solutions, sustain local action.
Academia	Researchers, students, professional networks	Advance knowledge, strengthen collaborations.

From here, you identify specific groups and then specific people who matter for your objective. Rather than producing an endless list of everyone who might be relevant, ask a simpler question: **who needs to be involved at each stage?** Start with one or two key people in relevant organisations and build from there. Check who in your network is already connected. Strengthening an existing initiative is often more effective than creating a new one.

Start with what matters to them (not to you)

People don’t absorb information passively. They filter it through values, experiences, constraints, identity, social networks, trust cues, etc. In other words, your audience is always asking: **“Does this make sense to me?”** Communication must start with what matters to them, not to you.

While demographics tell you who someone is on paper (age, job, location, etc), psychographics tell you why they care and how they make sense of things.

Example:

- “Farmers in southern Spain”: demographic.
- “Farmers who rely on peer advice, worry about productivity, and prefer WhatsApp to email”: psychographic, much more actionable.

One of the best-known examples of psychographic segmentation is the Yale “Six Americas” framework. Based on large-scale surveys, it shows that people differ not only in their beliefs about climate change, but also in their level of engagement and readiness to act: some are already convinced and looking for solutions; some are interested but unsure; some are sceptical or disengaged... Audiences are not evenly distributed along a single line of agreement.

But attitudes are only part of the picture. People also interpret evidence through the rules and constraints of the worlds in which they work. A policymaker may consider legal mandates, budgets, political legitimacy and decision timelines. A journalist may look for novelty, public relevance and a clear news angle. A practitioner may prioritise feasibility, local experience and operational risk. These differences are structural, not necessarily signs that communication has failed.

Different starting points and operating contexts require different forms of communication and engagement. Progress is often incremental: you cannot move someone from scepticism to strong advocacy with a single brochure, and clearer messaging cannot remove every practical or institutional constraint.

A few questions to ask yourself:

- Who is my specific audience?
- What do they already know (or assume) about my topic?
- What are their core interests, frustrations, and goals?
- What's in it for them (WIIFM)? How does my work directly impact them?
- Which communication channels do they actually use and trust?

Build personas

Personas keep you from writing for “everyone” and help you design communication that feels relevant and respectful. Keep them simple but realistic with elements like:

- Name
- Role / function
- Goals & motivations
- Challenges / pain points
- Existing beliefs or assumptions
- Information preferences & trust cues
- Channels & habits
- Tone / style considerations
- Evidence (How do you know?)
- Desired outcome (What should they think, feel, or do?)

Examples:

- Marta, municipal green infrastructure officer (Romania): Mia coordinates urban greening with limited time and budget. She wants quick, low-risk solutions backed by examples from other cities (“peer proof”). She prefers short visual briefs and sector newsletters. Desired outcome: She tries one biodiversity-friendly maintenance change and references your work in a strategy update.

If you sent Marta 40-page technical report, it would probably gather dust. But a two-page visual brief with case studies and cost estimates? That might land on her desk.
- Carlos, agricultural land manager (Spain): Javier runs a mixed-use farm in southern Spain and is curious about sustainability schemes. He’s open to biodiversity-friendly practices, but only if they’re practical, low-cost, and proven locally. He trusts other farmers far more than official documents. He uses WhatsApp and Facebook to exchange tips, and prefers hands-on demos over theory. Desired outcome: He tries a small biodiversity measure and shares it with peers.

Tip: It helps if you can “picture” it. So, don’t hesitate to print or pin your personas near your workspace. They help you write to someone real.

How to learn about your audience (even with no budget)

Of course, you can’t build your personas out of thin air. But most researchers don’t have the means for rigorous audience studies. Fortunately, there are other quick, practical methods:

- Talk to colleagues who’ve worked with the same audience.
- Benchmark against similar projects: What are they doing that works?
- Run 3 to 5 short calls with people like your persona.
- Run a short feedback poll after an event or email campaign
- Use existing platforms (e.g., citizen science forums, professional networks) to observe conversations
- Test your draft content before investing too much time and energy
- Check analytics on your website or social media: What topics or formats get traction?

Update your persona as you learn. Treat it as a living hypothesis.

Trust is the currency

People don’t just assess the accuracy of your data, they assess you. In a crowded, polarised information environment, trust determines whether your message resonates or gets rejected.

You can build this trust by consistently demonstrating:

- **Warmth:** Show you care about your audience needs and context. Treat them with respect.
- **Integrity:** Be honest and transparent about your research, its funding, and its limitations.
- **Competence:** Provide clear, factual information that demonstrates your expertise without being condescending or overly technical.

Warmth and integrity open the door; competence keeps it open. Neglecting these principles can erode confidence in both your work **and** the broader scientific community.

Key ethics principles

Building trust also means avoiding harm, especially when working with communities, sensitive topics, or personal data. Good communication protects dignity and scientific integrity, while ethical missteps destroy trust faster than success can restore it.

Principle	What it means	Practical tips
Informed consent	Participants understand and voluntarily agree to data use.	Use opt-in forms and plain-language info sheets.
Anonymity & confidentiality	Protect individuals' identities and sensitive data.	Remove identifiers, store data securely, limit access.
Transparency	Be open about methods, goals, and limitations.	Clearly explain how data will be used or shared.
Respect for communities	Avoid exploitation, honour cultural norms.	Engage communities in design, use respectful language.
Data minimisation	Collect and retain only what's necessary.	Limit scope, avoid oversharing, delete after project ends.
Informed visual use	Use images/videos responsibly.	Get explicit consent, avoid misrepresentation or tokenism.
Secure communication	Protect data during storage and sharing.	Use encrypted platforms, anonymise public datasets.
Intellectual property	Respect copyright and licensing.	Attribute sources, avoid unauthorised use of third-party content.

Cultural sensitivity

Your message is never context-free. Biodiversity research often spans regions, languages, and cultural norms. A message that works in one place may fall flat, or cause harm, in another. To communicate respectfully and effectively:

- **Do your homework:** Learn local values, concerns, preferred communication styles, and sensitivities.
- **Collaborate with locals:** Work with partners or translators who can adapt messages meaningfully.
- **Test before launch:** Share drafts with a small sample of local stakeholders.
- **Mind your visuals:** Colours, symbols, animals, and landscapes carry cultural meaning. Ensure visual equitable representation.
- **Consider timing:** Avoid clashing with holidays, elections, or culturally sensitive periods.

Cultural sensitivity isn't about politeness, it's about relevance and accuracy.

Next up: Crafting your key messages. Now that you know who you're talking to, it's time to decide what to say and how to say it clearly and compellingly.

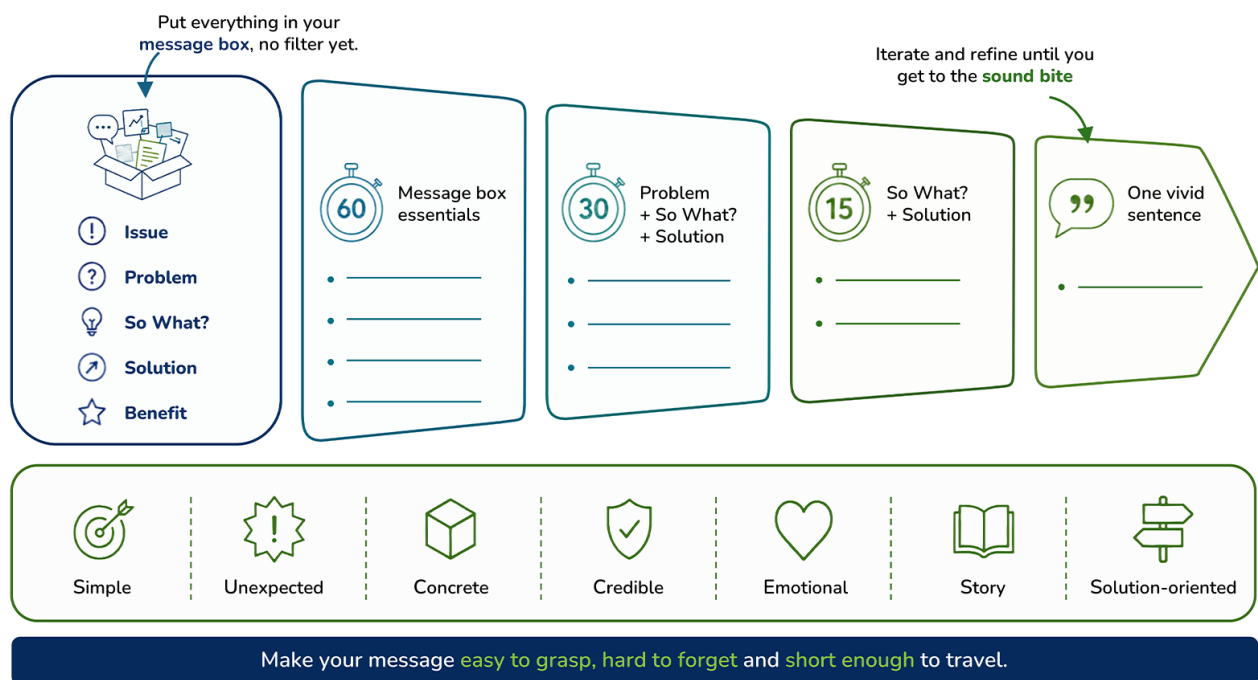
A biologist was preparing for a one-day outreach event at a school. Her colleague saw her trying to load a van with soil core samples, a gas chromatograph, and a stack of 200 academic papers. "They're twelve years old," the colleague remarked, "what is it you want them to leave with?" The biologist paused, looked at the mountain of equipment, and replied, "That dirt is more alive than they think." Her colleague nodded, then asked: "So, are you bringing your evidence, or your conclusion?"

What are you saying?

(basic message craft)



Takeaway: A good message is like a seed: it's small, but it holds the potential for growth. Good engagement starts with a clear, sticky message and grows into meaningful dialogue. When your message is easy to grasp and hard to forget, it becomes the bridge between your science and the people who can use it.





Testimonial:

“I would have written a shorter letter, but I did not have the time.”

Blaise Pascal

Designing your message

“Do I really have to simplify everything?” You know your research inside out, but you need to move from the complexity of your data to a core message that is accurate enough to respect the science, clear enough to reach people, and meaningful enough to matter.

Structure your ideas

The **Message Box** is a practical tool to help scientists move from raw research to an audience-ready message. It guides the user through five key questions:

- **The Issue:** The broad context your work sits in.
- **The Problem:** The specific part of the issue your research addresses.
- **So What?:** Why should your audience care?
- **The Solution:** Outline possible actions based on your findings
- **The Benefit:** What positive outcomes result if the solution is applied?

It's an iterative process, refine your message over time.

Example:

- Issue: Farmland biodiversity is declining across Europe.
- Problem: The loss of hedgerows in intensive farming areas is removing crucial habitats for pollinators.
- So What?: Pollinator loss threatens crop yields/food security (farmers/policymakers).
- Solution: Restoring hedgerows, designed to suit local conditions.
- Benefit: A win-win: more biodiversity and more stable crop yields (bonus: greater climate resilience)

Try filling up this sentence: “I’m helping... (whom) do... (what change) by... (how). If the sentence is hard to finish, your message is likely still too researcher-focused.

Distill your message

You have the core, you now need to make it portable. The **Half-Life** Exercise trims it until it survives any time slot.

- **Start long:** the equivalent of 2-3 paragraphs (your full Message Box)

- **Cut to 60 seconds:** Reduce it to the essentials of the box (your stairs pitch)
- **Cut to 30 seconds:** Focus on the Problem, So What, and Solution (your elevator pitch)
- **Cut to 15 seconds:** One sentence about the So What and one about the Solution (your headline)
- **Cut to a sound bite:** A single, vivid sentence that captures the core idea (your foot in the door)

Tip: This exercise forces you to choose what truly matters. Don't overthink: stand up, speak once, cut, speak again... Don't give yourself too much time to pause.

Make it stick

People remember what they can picture, feel, or repeat. The **SUCCESS** framework is a quick way to test whether your message will travel.

- **Simple:** This isn't about dumbing down your science, but about finding its unbreakable core. If they remember only one thing, what should it be?
- **Unexpected:** Our brains are wired to notice what's new. Grab attention by challenging a common assumption or sharing a moment of discovery.
- **Concrete:** Science often lives in the abstract. Make your message something people can picture, with examples, numbers, metaphors...
- **Credible:** Credibility is your foundation, but the human brain can only take so much at a time. Use your single most compelling data point rather than an overwhelming wall of evidence.
- **Emotional:** People remember what matters to them. Connect your research to your audience's values: a desire for a healthy planet, security for their families, a sense of wonder...
- **Story:** Narrative is how humans store most information. Build set-up (issue, before), leading to tension (action, change) then resolution (result, after). The ABT model (And-But-Therefore) is well established for science communication.
- **Solution-oriented:** Offer agency, however small. Especially in biodiversity: don't leave people in despair and highlight a path forward.

Test it

Accuracy checks come from colleagues. Clarity checks do not. Test your message on someone outside your field:

- What did they think the main point was?
- What stuck with them?
- What felt confusing?

If they get it, you're ready. If they don't, you haven't failed, you've just learned where the signal drops. Let's try again.

... Ok, but my research isn't sexy enough

Some may feel their work is too niche, too process-heavy, or simply not "headline material". But good communication doesn't require a breakthrough, only meaning, connection, and clarity. Here are some ways to frame less "flashy" research:

- The journey: When results are inconclusive or highly specialised, focus on why and how. What problem were you trying to solve? What challenges did you face?

- The bigger picture: When your findings are a small but essential step, show how they fit the larger puzzle. What part of a system or policy does your work inform? Who benefits down the line?
- The question: When it's dense, sometimes the most engaging thing is the puzzle itself. Why is this hard? What counterintuitive assumptions did you explore?

Managing uncertainty

In biodiversity research, certainty is rare. Evidence is often partial, context-dependent, or evolving. Communicating this uncertainty is not a weakness, but it does require care. Being too precise can look misleading. Being too vague can look evasive. The goal is not to eliminate uncertainty, but to design around it.

When communicating uncertain results, check four things:

- **Lead with what is stable:** Start with what the evidence clearly shows before discussing limits or unknowns. Instead of “we are not sure whether the population will collapse,” try “current data show a consistent downward trend. If this continues, the risk of collapse increases significantly.”
- **Bound the uncertainty:** Avoid single-point estimates when outcomes vary. Use ranges, scenarios, or conditions to show precision without over-claiming. For example: “Estimates suggest a decline of between 20% and 40%, depending on land-use change.”
- **Distinguish between unknown and unknowable:** Explain whether uncertainty reflects limits of current data (and ongoing research), or inherent variability in complex systems. This builds credibility and helps justify further research.
- **Link uncertainty to action:** Uncertainty does not mean inaction. Use analogies that illustrate how we routinely make everyday decisions based on probabilities: “We carry an umbrella when there’s a 70% chance of rain. Conservation decisions work the same way.”

Handled well, uncertainty signals rigour and honesty.

Next up: How to help people act. A clear, memorable message is a great start, but what about action and actual change?

A botanist visited an old walled garden with two gates: one wide, polished, and locked; the other narrow, worn, and standing open. “Why is the small one open?” she asked the caretaker. He shrugged. “It’s the one people use.” “But the large one is much easier to walk through.” “Only if you have the key,” he said, and kept sweeping.

CHAPTER 6

How to help people act (and not just nod along)



Takeaway: Communication alone rarely shifts practice. Change happens when people help shape it. Diagnose barriers, involve them early, and pair clear messages with real engagement so your communication becomes impact.

1 Why isn't change happening?

Different barriers need different responses. Test assumptions with the people concerned.



Capability

Knowledge · skills · ability



Opportunity

Time · resources · incentives · norms



Motivation

Beliefs · values · emotions · habits

2 Engagement is not a ladder

Choose the engagement that fits



Inform

Provide information



Consult

Gather feedback



Involve

Work together



Collaborate

Co-design



Empower

Share decisions

3 Citizen science as a pathway

A distinctive biodiversity engagement pathway:



More observations



Local knowledge



Public ownership

Don't just communicate harder. **Diagnose** what is stopping action, then **match the response**.



Testimonial:

“To create the ship is not to weave the canvas, to forge the nails, to read the stars, but rather to convey the taste of the sea.”

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

From message to movement

A clear and memorable message is a solid first step. But many projects need more than awareness: they need use, uptake, participation, and sometimes behaviour change (Chapter 2). Whether you want farmers to try a new practice, policymakers to consider your evidence, or communities to shape local solutions, the question becomes: what is actually getting in the way?

First check: what kind of problem is this?

Projects are often expected to inform people, build trust, involve stakeholders and support action, sometimes all at once. But these objectives are not interchangeable, and the same activity will not necessarily serve all of them. Before designing your strategy, pause and ask:

- Are people missing information or understanding?
- Is trust weak?
- Have relevant voices been excluded?
- Do people understand the issue but lack the authority, resources, incentives or willingness to act?

Treat your diagnosis as a hypothesis. Test it with the people concerned. Some barriers can be reduced through clearer information, dialogue or engagement. Others are practical, institutional, economic or political, and cannot be resolved through better communication alone.

Diagnose the barrier

If your objective involves a specific behaviour, the **COM-B** model can help you look more closely at what may be preventing it. It proposes that three conditions must be in place for any **Behaviour** to occur:

- **Capability:** Do people have the knowledge or skills to act? This includes both understanding (psychological capability) and practical ability (physical capability). Communication can help by providing clear instructions, practical training, or visual guides.
- **Opportunity:** Does their environment make the behaviour possible or socially supported? This includes time, resources, incentives, norms, tools, and peer acceptance. Communication can help by pointing to resources, sharing peer stories, or helping build supportive policies or networks.
- **Motivation:** Do they want to act, and does it feel important enough amid competing priorities? This includes beliefs, values, emotions, habits, and perceived benefits. Communication can help by connecting to values, showing benefits, and building trust.

Example:

You share evidence that wildflower strips benefit pollinators and yields. Still, farmer adoption remains low.

- **Capability issue?** Maybe they aren't sure which seeds to use or how to maintain the strips. Consider providing simple, visual guides or short demos.
- **Opportunity issue?** Maybe seeds are costly, machinery is lacking, or neighbours see strips as "messy". Consider sharing subsidy information, peer testimonials, or reframing strips as progressive land stewardship.
- **Motivation issue?** Maybe they doubt the benefits or worry it won't pay off. Consider using local success data and highlight pride in contributing to healthy farmland.

Your diagnosis shapes your strategy. There's no point designing a motivational campaign if the real barrier is equipment cost.

Mind the framing

Once you know which factor is limiting change, you can design communication that reduces that barrier. Below are common psychological principles that strengthen motivation, understanding, and uptake. Use them sparingly and ethically.

- **Reciprocity:** We feel inclined to give back after receiving something. Example: Share a free local biodiversity map before inviting people to join a monitoring initiative.
- **Consistency:** People want to act in line with previous commitments. Example: Start with a small pledge before asking for larger participation.
- **Social proof:** We look to others to decide what's normal. Example: Highlight how many farmers, citizens, or cities already use your approach.
- **Unity:** We're more influenced by those we see as "us". Example: Frame around shared identity or place (e.g., "Let's protect our coastline" vs. "Help our project").
- **Curiosity:** A knowledge gap sparks interest. Example: Pose a question or mystery (e.g., "One insect species underpins most garden birds. Do you know which one?").
- **Loss aversion:** Avoiding loss motivates more than gaining. Example: Say "We risk losing half our native bees" instead of "We can save half."
- **Anchoring:** First information shapes judgments. Example: Start with a big, impressive number to make your solution seem reasonable.
- **Endowment:** We value what we feel we own. Example: "Protect our clean drinking water" rather than "Help protect water quality."

Other principles include authority (credible sources), liking (people we like), scarcity (things seem more desirable when rare), etc.

Keep it ethical

Behaviour change frameworks can enhance clarity and respect when used well, but can easily slip into manipulation when used poorly. Before using them, ask:

- Is this fully transparent? Am I presenting evidence honestly and openly?
- Does this empower my audience? Does it help them make better decisions for themselves or does it pressure them for my goals?
- Is this serving a shared, positive goal? Is the desired change genuinely beneficial for all parties involved?

- Would I feel respected if this technique were used on me? Would I feel misled?

At their best, these tools are about empathy: stepping out of your expert mindset and meeting people where they are.

Engagement makes change stick

Sometimes people simply need clear, timely information. In other cases, you need feedback, local knowledge, shared understanding, legitimacy or joint decisions. That is where dialogue and participation matter.

But more participation is not automatically better. The right level depends on your purpose, what is genuinely open to influence, and the time and capacity available on all sides. The [IAP2 Spectrum](#) helps you make that choice explicit:

Level	Goal	Promise	Examples
Inform	Provide clear information	"We will keep you informed."	Websites, briefs, summaries
Consult	Gather feedback	"We'll listen and report back."	Surveys, feedback rounds
Involve	Work with stakeholders	"Your concerns will be considered."	Workshops, listening sessions
Collaborate	Co-design solutions	"We will seek your advice."	Scenario planning, co-creation
Empower	Share decision-making	"We will implement what you decide."	Community-led programmes

Choose fit, not depth. Select the level that serves your purpose. Be honest about who sets the agenda, who participates, what influence they will have, and which decisions are genuinely open to change.

Keys to effective engagement

Engagement isn't a data-extraction exercise; it's a relationship.

- **Enter as a learner:** Curiosity builds trust. When entering a community space, show up as an interested participant and listen first.
- **Start early:** Involve stakeholders during design and implementation, not just after results.
- **Match level to goals:** Choose an engagement depth that fits your objectives and capacity.
- **Be realistic:** Don't overpromise, better one meaningful activity than several tokenistic ones.
- **Clarify roles:** Define if participants advise, decide, or co-develop, and align with project goals.
- **Value diverse knowledge:** Treat local and experiential knowledge with respect.
- **Be transparent:** Explain how input will be used and follow up to close the loop.
- **Adapt to your audience:** Use language, formats, and timing they understand and trust.
- **Ensure safe, inclusive spaces:** Address power dynamics, accessibility, and cultural needs.
- **Document outcomes:** Record decisions and actions for accountability and continuity.
- **Allow the relationship to evolve:** The appropriate level of involvement may change over time. Revisit it as objectives, relationships and decision opportunities develop.

Good engagement relies on good communication, but communication alone is not engagement. Biodiversa+ has produced a [guide about stakeholder engagement](#) that will help you decide who to engage, why, and at what level. Use it!

✓ Designing engagement moments

Before your event:

- ☐ Have we defined clearly why we are bringing people together and what they should leave thinking, feeling, or doing?
- ☐ Have we been explicit about participants' level of engagement?
- ☐ Have we considered accessibility needs (e.g., language, timing, format, hybrid access)?
- ☐ Does the agenda leave real space for dialogue, not just presentations?
- ☐ Does the speaking order and time allocation reflect whose voices we want to prioritise?
- ☐ Have we considered how power dynamics might shape participation?
- ☐ Have we planned more than one way for people to contribute (e.g., small groups, written input, anonymous questions)?

During:

- ☐ Are we sticking to the purpose, rather than drifting into presentation mode?
- ☐ Who is speaking and who is not? Do we need to actively invite quieter voices?
- ☐ Does the flow alternate between listening, reflecting, and interacting?
- ☐ Are we creating an atmosphere where disagreement or uncertainty can be expressed safely?
- ☐ Are we capturing key ideas visibly (e.g., shared document, flipchart, live notes)?

After:

- ☐ What participation patterns did we observe, both in the room and in informal moments?
- ☐ Have we explained how input will be used and when participants will hear back?
- ☐ What should we adjust next time?

Citizen science as an engagement pathway

Citizen science is one of the most distinctive engagement routes available to biodiversity researchers. We use it because:

- We need large-scale or long-term observations we cannot collect alone;
- Local ecological knowledge will improve interpretation;
- Building public ownership of a site or issue strengthens impact pathway;
- The topic naturally motivates people (species monitoring, pollinators, local rivers, etc.)...

It doesn't require you to become a communicator in the traditional sense: it simply asks you to open the door to shared inquiry. It doesn't need to be complicated, but it does need to be intentional.

Biodiversa+ has produced a [citizen science toolkit](#). Use it!

✓ Citizen science checklist

Design & onboarding: Ensures the task is clear, manageable, and accessible to non-specialists.

Protocol: Focus on the minimum viable task.

- ☐ Can a non-specialist follow this without supervision?
- ☐ Are instructions visual and short?

- ☐ Is the task simple enough to repeat often?

Learning: People rarely read long guides.

- ☐ Provide one visual sheet or an engaging short video.
- ☐ Offer a live demonstration or virtual walk-through if the task is field-heavy.
- ☐ Offer one example dataset so participants know what "good" looks like.

Use: Make joining (and leaving) simple and transparent. Participants should know:

- ☐ How to sign up and what is expected.
- ☐ How long participation lasts.
- ☐ How their data will be used.
- ☐ How to pause or step back at any time.

Data & quality: Ensure the collected data is usable for your scientific objectives.

Standardisation: Not everything needs perfect accuracy.

- ☐ What variables truly need precision?
- ☐ What can be semi-structured without harming analysis?

Data-Quality: Citizen science data is usable only if validated sensibly.

- ☐ Establish clear rules for uncertain data.
- ☐ Implement spot checks and quick expert verification of edge cases.
- ☐ Use simple flags or categories for data that "needs review".

Retention & sustainability: Maintain enthusiasm and ensure the project lives on

Feedback: Without feedback, projects lose volunteers fast.

- ☐ How will you show participants what their data revealed?
- ☐ How often (e.g., quarterly, at project milestones)?
- ☐ In what format (e.g., personalised emails, public maps, webinars)?

Acknowledgement: People are motivated by recognition.

- ☐ Ensure formal credits in reports or publications.
- ☐ Offer certificates or "Top Contributor" highlights.
- ☐ Invite participants to share their own stories or observations.

Community: Citizen science works best when people feel part of something.

- ☐ Provide a shared platform or chat group for peer-to-peer connection.
- ☐ Share occasional group updates and project news.
- ☐ Create a shared photo gallery or map of local impact.

Sustainability: Citizen science collapses when maintenance is underestimated.

- ☐ Who answers participant questions day-to-day?
- ☐ Who manages data validation and site updates?
- ☐ What is the plan for hosting the platform and data after the project ends?

Next up: The channel guide. How do you get it to the right people, in the right way, at the right time?

A wildlife biologist studying urban bird populations decided to share her work everywhere: Bluesky, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, local newspapers, radio shows, and community bulletin boards. She spent more time posting than researching. Meanwhile, her colleague focused solely on the local birding society newsletter, reaching 200 dedicated enthusiasts who started a citizen science project that doubled her data collection. When asked about her strategy, the second researcher shrugged: “I only talk to people who actually want to hear about birds.”

Where do I go? (channels and formats that work for you)



Takeaway: You do not need to be everywhere. Visibility is not the objective, relevance is. Effective communication means showing up in the right places for the right people with the right format.

1

Make your work findable

Make yourself and your project easy to find.



Research profiles

Keep them up to date and easy to find.



Institutional profile

Connect your research to your institution and project.



Identity & connections

Use a distinctive identity and link outputs to your project.

2

Don't broadcast everywhere

Meet your audience where they already are. Test small if unsure.



Channel fit

Where are they already looking?



Format fit

What works for them?



Feasibility

What can you sustain?



Timing

When will it land?

3

Plan how it travels

Distribution beats production.



Direct sharing

Share personally with key people and lists.



Partners & networks

Use allies and networks to amplify your message.



Strategic moments

Use events, campaigns and key dates.

You do not need to be everywhere. Show up in the **right places**, for the **right people**, with the **right format**.



Testimonial:

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

Bernard Shaw

Findability basics

Before you start worrying about channels or formats, make sure the foundations are sturdy. Your minimum goal is simple: If a journalist or potential partner Googles (Bings/DuckDuckGoes/Ecosias/...) you, they should immediately find who you are, what you are working on, and how to email you. Project findability

The same goes for your project. And in this case, findability begins with distinctiveness. If your project name is too generic, there's some chance you'll be buried under 10 million search results for biology networks, biotech firms, or organic yogurt brands. A clear, unique name (or acronym) ensures that:

- Search results point to you, not a similar project from 2005;
- Journalists can actually find you again after hearing you speak;
- Impact can be tracked over time.

If someone hears about your work once, they should be able to find it again with a single search.

Action	Goal	Why it matters	Practical tips
Update research profiles	Credibility	These are often the first places journalists, policymakers, or partners check	Keep ORCID up to date and linked. Check Google Scholar and ResearchGate for accuracy.
Complete your institutional profile	Context	Connects your research to your institution and project	Use clear, jargon-free descriptions. Mention the project name and Biodiversa+ funding where relevant.
Identify comms contacts	Relay	Ensures fast, coordinated responses	Know who the communications or press officer is in your institution. This links directly to your support system (Chapter 3).

Connect the dots

If a policy officer downloads your PDF, reads it, and likes it, can they easily find their way back to your project website?

A few tips:

- Each output must answer three questions: Who did this? What project is it? Where is the link?
- Use the exact same project name and short description across your institutional page, the project landing page, and your social media bio.

- Never release a PDF, slide deck, or infographic without a URL or QR code pointing back to the main project hub.

As well as connecting the dots, it protects continuity when staff leave or affiliations change, and helps Biodiversa+ and your institution track your impact.

The credibility boost

You might view the requirement to display the Biodiversa+ logo alongside the logos of individual funders and the EU emblem as just another administrative checkbox. It isn't. In a crowded landscape of claims and opinions, it works as a seal of credibility, signalling that your research has passed a rigorous selection process and is part of a coordinated European effort.

Used well, it strengthens trust rather than cluttering your message:

- For policymakers: This work is policy-relevant and part of the European research ecosystem.
- For journalists: This project is funded, vetted, and accountable.
- For the public: Public money is producing public knowledge, transparently.

It also helps connect your local case study or field site to a much larger continental picture.

Get the assets: [Logos & Guidelines](#)

From “broadcasting” to “targeted delivery”

“Do I really have to be on social media?” No. The world does not need another reluctant science TikTok. The key question is not where you should be, but where your audience already is, and what you can realistically maintain. Even the clearest message fails if it shows up in the wrong place or at the wrong moment.

Go where they already are

Building a new audience is hard. Meeting an existing audience where they are is far easier. Your personas (Chapter 4) give you clues about where they look for information, what formats they trust, how much time they have, what constraints they face... Use those insights as your compass. Focus on a small set of channels you can realistically maintain, and where your presence genuinely adds value.

Here are some examples. It is a **starting map** you should adapt using real evidence from your audiences. If you're not sure something belongs here, treat it as a hypothesis and test small.

Audience	Example of what they can value	Potential formats	Example channels
Policy makers / advisers	Clarity, brevity, credibility, alignment with agendas	Policy briefs, maps, recommendations, expert inputs	Targeted emails, briefings, closed events, high-level webinars, LinkedIn, EU platforms
Land managers / farmers	Practicality, peer examples, low-risk solutions	Factsheets, explainer videos, on-farm demos	Field days, farmer networks, advisory services, local newsletters, YouTube, radio
Researchers / project partners	Rigour, reproducibility, collaboration	Preprints, methods blogs, updates, internal webinars	Publications, conferences, Slack/Teams, project newsletters

NGOs / civil society groups	Clear evidence, stories, actionable insights	Workshops, infographics, short videos	Mailing lists, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, NGO networks
Journalists / media	Novelty, clarity, human interest	Short pitches, interviews, concise data visuals	Direct email pitches, press releases, Twitter/X
Teachers / educators	Ready-to-use, curriculum-friendly materials	Lesson packs, slides with notes, how-to videos	School networks, educational newsletters, YouTube
Interested citizens / students	Meaning, connection, local relevance	Stories, short videos, public talks, citizen science calls	Instagram, blogs, podcasts, local events
Local authorities / municipal staff	Feasible actions, cost-benefit, local examples	Short briefs, case studies, site visits	Email updates, local workshops, municipal networks

Plan for distribution, not just creation

Many researchers invest heavily in writing a report or blog, then share it once and consider the job done. But distribution beats production. So, build in time for promotion and plan how your audience will actually encounter your content, not only how you will create it

Not all timing is equal. Maximise impact by aligning your efforts with strategic “moments”:

- Policy cycles (e.g., consultations, elections, programme launches)
- Seasonal events (e.g., World Wetlands Day, planting season, heatwaves)
- Project milestones (e.g., launch, interim results, final deliverables)
- Crisis moments in the news (with caution and care)

Use a simple communication calendar to plan what to release when.

Check and adapt

You do not need a complicated dashboard. Track only what helps you decide: What should I stop? What should I do more of? If a channel performs consistently poorly, pause it (more on this in Chapter 10).

Simple metrics	What they tell you
Page views / downloads	Is your website content being seen?
Email open/click rates	Are people engaging with your newsletters?
Event attendance	Which formats attract interest?
Retweets / shares	Which messages are resonating?
Direct feedback	Are people acting on your communications?

The channel cheat sheet

Don't try to master it all. Understand channel strengths and limitations. Pick the ones that match your resources, your natural strengths, and your audience's habits.

Medium	Best for	Strengths	Limitations & watch-outs	Time & resource investment	Key questions to ask	Time-saver tips
Website / Blog	Hosting core, detailed, evergreen content	You own it; always accessible; easy to update	Needs active promotion; audiences will not visit by default	High initial effort; moderate ongoing	What are the 3 or 4 essential pages? Is navigation clear and user-friendly?	Use your institution's existing CMS templates. Aim for "clear and finished" over "bespoke and perfect".
Policy brief	Policymakers and advisers	Trusted format; concise; actionable	Must be short and visually strong; clarity is essential	Moderate	What are the audience's key concerns? Is my recommendation clear in 1 sentence?	Follow a simple template (Chapter 8) and write the "Recommendations" box first.
Factsheet	Tools, methods, and findings	Easy to reuse	Risk of clutter	Moderate	Can it be skimmed in 30 seconds?	Stick to one topic per sheet. Use a modular template so you only have to swap text and one key visual.
Newsletter / Email List	Stakeholders, partners, project communities	Direct, personal, relationship-building	Needs a schedule; GDPR compliance; risk of fatigue	Low to moderate	Do I have enough to say quarterly? Is my list well targeted?	Reuse blog updates. Keep it short and skimmable.
Social media (LinkedIn, X, Instagram)	Visibility, day-to-day engagement, quick updates	Fast, shareable, useful for networking	Needs consistent posting; visual demands; noisy environment	Low per post but high over time	Does my audience use this platform? What is my purpose here?	Repurpose one idea across platforms and batch-produce (e.g., spend 30 minutes once a week scheduling posts rather than reacting every day).

Media engagement (press releases, pitches, interviews)	Reaching a broad public through news outlets	Large public reach; credibility	Must be genuinely newsworthy; no guarantee of pickup	Low (press release) to moderate (interview prep)	Why would a journalist care now? What is the hook? Is this relevant to their audiences?	Don't cold-call. Let your press office handle the distribution while you focus on your "hook" and message box.
Public talks (online or in person)	General public, students, conferences	High engagement; human connection	Prep and travel time; requires storytelling	Moderate	Do I have a compelling story? Can I rehearse with non-experts?	Keep visuals simple. Use stories and metaphors. Build a slide library that you can drop into any presentation at a moment's notice
Webinars / Workshops	Training, dialogue, stakeholder engagement	Interactive; trust-building; wide reach	Requires promotion; risk of low attendance; Zoom fatigue	Moderate to high	What is the value for attendees? Do I have a clear structure?	Co-host with partners to boost attendance.
Videos / Animations	Explaining complex topics visually	High engagement; good for reuse	Time and resource intensive	High	Does this need to be a video? Do I have a strong visual story?	Start small. A 60-second "unfiltered" phone video from the field can get more engagement than a glossy animation.
Podcasts / Audio	Deep dives, conversations, expert interviews	Accessible while multitasking; intimate	Requires editing and consistency; niche audiences	High	What is the format? Do I have recurring themes or guests?	Record short episodes. Batch recordings.
Field days / Site visits	Land managers, local authorities, practitioners	Builds trust; shows real contexts	Logistically intensive; small groups	High	What should participants experience?	Partner with local networks. Keep the agenda simple.

Beyond the usual suspects

The table above covers the most common communication channels. But sometimes, unusual formats open doors conventional channels cannot, reaching audiences who would not attend a webinar or read a brief. Consider occasionally stepping outside familiar tools. Some examples:

- Science education activities: Partner with schools, museums, or youth groups to raise awareness through hands-on sessions, challenges, or classroom materials.
- Hackathons or competitions: Bring in students, developers, designers, or local communities to co-create solutions or explore data in new ways.
- Serious games: Use interactive digital or physical games to explain complex concepts, explore trade-offs, or make data meaningful.
- Roadshows, mini-exhibitions, or documentaries: Take your project on the road or create a short film to reach wider publics in an immersive, story-led format.

Keep feasibility in mind. These formats work best when co-created with partners who have the right skills.

Spotlight on EC avenues

Since you are working within the EU framework, don't overlook:

- [Cordis](#): The primary repository for EU R&I project results
- [Horizon Magazine](#): You can pitch stories to the editorial team (DG RTD also maintains a [R&I Projects Success Stories](#) website)
- [Horizon Results Platform](#): Key for visibility on exploitable results
- [Open Research Europe](#): A platform to submit and share your research openly
- [Booster](#): Tailored dissemination/exploitation support

✓ The channel & distribution checklist

Audience fit

- ☐ Have I chosen a channel my audience actually uses?
- ☐ Do I have at least one piece of evidence (even small) that this channel works for this audience?
- ☐ Is the format aligned with their time, habits, and trust cues?

Feasibility

- ☐ Can I realistically maintain this channel with the time and skills I have?
- ☐ Am I choosing this channel because it works, not because I feel pressured to “be everywhere”?
- ☐ Have I reused or adapted existing content instead of creating something completely new?

Message-channel match

- ☐ Does the format amplify my message (brief for policymakers, story/video for citizens, etc.)?
- ☐ Would a different format make the main point easier to grasp?
- ☐ Is the call to action clear for this specific audience?

Timing & relevance

- ☐ Is there a live moment that increases impact (policy window, seasonal event, project milestone)?
- ☐ Is the audience already paying attention to this topic right now?
- ☐ Is this the right pace (quick update, in-depth resource, dialogue format)?

Strategic distribution

- ☐ Have I placed the message where people will really see it (not just where it is easy to publish)?
- ☐ Have I shared it directly with the individuals or networks who can make it travel further?
- ☐ Is there one partner, network, or community who could amplify it better than I can?

Repurposing

- ☐ Have I adapted the content into 2-3 formats?
- ☐ Could a single insight be used in multiple channels without feeling repetitive?
- ☐ Have I created one visual element that increases memorability or shareability?

Test & reality check

- ☐ Have I tested the content with one person like my target audience?
- ☐ What did they think the main point was? Is that the point I intended?
- ☐ Does anything need to be cut, simplified, or re-framed before release?

Learning loop

- ☐ What one metric will tell me if this worked?
- ☐ When will I check it (in one week/two weeks)?
- ☐ If it underperforms, what will I stop? If it performs well, what will I double down on?

Next up: Essential production skills. Just a few tips and tricks to make the most of the time you invest in producing communication content.

A soil scientist once dreaded public speaking but had to present her work on carbon sequestration to policymakers. She rehearsed her talk obsessively, memorising every sentence. During the presentation, a policymaker interrupted with a question. She froze. Her script had not prepared her for dialogue. Later, her mentor told her: "You don't need to be a perfect performer. They're not there to judge your presentation skills, they're there because they need your expertise."

How to (good enough production skills)



Takeaway: If your science is solid but your formats block understanding, impact stops there. Production skills are not about becoming a communicator, but about making your expertise easier to access, harder to misunderstand, and more likely to be used.

1 Make the words easy to follow

Remove obstacles between your expertise and your audience.



Brevity

Keep it tight



Action

Prefer active voice



Simplicity

Use familiar words



Intent

Give each piece one job



Context

Explain scale and meaning



Structure

Guide attention

2 Guide the eye, don't decorate

Use visuals to clarify, not compete.



Consistency

Use one visual language



Hierarchy

Show what matters



Accuracy

Keep data honest



Readability

Make it accessible and easy to read



Targeted

Focus on one key message

3 Tailor to format, not completeness

Focus on what the format needs. Get specialist help when needed.



Slides

Guide attention, not a script.



Media

Headline first; three key points.



Briefs & factsheets

Front-load the point. One clear purpose.

Make your expertise **easier to access**, **harder to misunderstand** and **more likely to be used**.



Testimonial:

“The more they overthink the plumbing, the easier it is to stop up the drain.”

Montgomery "Scotty" Scott

The basics

“I’m a scientist, not a writer or a graphic designer.” That’s fine, no one expects you to be. But understanding a few core principles, and knowing when and how to involve others, gives you control over how your work travels and saves time in the long run.

Listening

Communication is not a one-way transfer of information. It is a loop. Listening is what keeps that loop working. Before you write, design, or publish anything, pay attention to what your audience already asks, struggles with, or pushes back on. Those signals tell you where your communication can actually make a difference.

A policymaker who keeps returning to a particular question may be signalling what really matters to their department. A farmer who reacts strongly to one sentence in your presentation may be highlighting practical constraints that should shape your recommendations. A colleague’s throwaway comment at an event can reveal a misunderstanding that you can easily correct in your communication materials.

In practice?

- Informally (the **pulse check**): Engage in conversations during events, pay attention to questions and comments during webinar and after talks, observe comments on social media.
- Formally (the **evidence base**): Use interviews, surveys, feedback forms, and co-creation workshops to gather structured data on audience needs.
- Continuously (the **loop**): Every output should invite a response, and every response should inform the next output. Avoid “parachuting in” with one-off updates.

A simple test: If you can’t explain what your audience cares about without mentioning your research, you haven’t listened enough.

Plain language

Plain language doesn’t mean oversimplifying. It keeps the focus on the idea, not the wording. It helps people grasp the message without extra effort, whether it’s a policy brief or a slide deck. When people can follow along easily, they’re more open, more curious, and more willing to act.

A few **BASICS**:

- **Brevity**: Keep sentences tight. If you stumble when reading aloud, your audience will too.

- **Action:** Prefer active voice: “We found...” is stronger and clearer than “It was found that...”
- **Simplicity:** Avoid jargon and use concrete, familiar words. If you must use a technical term, explain it.
- **Intent:** Give each paragraph or slide one job only. If it drifts, split it.
- **Context:** Explain scale and meaning of numbers, not just values.
- **Structure:** Use headings, spacing, bullets, and visuals to guide attention.

Visuals

Visuals help people grasp ideas quicker and connect emotionally with abstract data. It's especially important for biodiversity, where many processes are hard to see. A well-chosen image, clean map, or simple diagram can make concepts intuitive and memorable. You don't need to be a designer: focus on clarity, not decoration. Think of visual communication as guiding the eye through your message.

Some principles to **CHART** your course:

- **Consistency:** Stick to the same colours, fonts, and styles within a piece.
- **Hierarchy:** Guide attention and show what matters most with size, weight, space, and color.
- **Accuracy:** Avoid misleading visuals by keeping scales, axes, and labels honest and fair.
- **Readability:** Make visuals accessible and easy to interpret for everyone.
 - Sufficient colour contrast
 - Readable labels and font sizes
 - Alternatives to colour-only distinctions
 - Alt text for images and graphics
 - Captions or subtitles for video
 - Plain-language summaries
 - Descriptive links (not “click here”)
- **Targeted:** Stick to one key message per visual. If it tries to say everything, it says nothing.

Presentations

Presentations are one of the most common ways your research meets the world, but also one of the easiest to overload. Unlike reports or papers, a presentation is not meant to contain everything. It is a moment of attention: people listen, look, and only take in part of what they see and hear, so your role is to guide that attention in real time rather than transfer everything at once.

So, before preparing slides, take a moment to ask: is a presentation the right format, or would a short document or discussion be more effective? Then, a simple sequence to keep on track (no acronym, it's about rhythm!):

- **Aim it:** What is this for? What should people understand, feel, or do differently after? A better presentation is not just about better slides, but about being clear on what you want to achieve.
- **Frame it:** Where is your audience starting from? What do they already know, care about, or need?
- **Say it:** Explain your idea out loud before creating your slides. This is where structure emerges: what comes first, what follows, what matters. If you cannot say it clearly, your slides will not fix it.
- **Strip it:** Remove what is not essential. Use one idea per slide where possible. Slides are visual support to guide focus and understanding at a glance, not a script.
- **Stage it:** Do not show everything at once. People are there to listen, not to read ahead. Guide attention step by step and give time to process. In person, you can rely more on presence and

interaction; online, attention is more fragile, so slides need to carry more of the structure and clarity.

- **Accept it:** You cannot say everything. Focus beats completeness. When needed, prepare a second, more detailed version for sharing.

Once your deck is ready, a final check: if someone can fully understand your presentation just by reading the slides, they are probably doing too much.

Working with the media

Media interviews often feel high-risk. You have little time, limited control, and no second draft. Journalists aren't trying to cover your entire research. They're interested in the story, why it matters, and what comes out of it.

Some tips to prepare:

- **Headline first:** In a paper, you put the conclusion at the end. In an interview, you put the conclusion in the first ten seconds. If they stop listening after one sentence, what is the one thing they must know?
- **The rule of three:** Prepare three key points and return to them. If the conversation drifts, use a bridge: "That's an important detail, but the core issue here is..."
- **The 'So what?':** Ask yourself why someone far from you should care and use that answer.
- **Kill your darlings:** Practice explaining your research in everyday language (no technical or scientific terminology allowed!)
- **Always on the record:** Assume every microphone is live and every chat is a quote. If you don't want to see it as a headline, don't say it.

Media work is a skill, not a personality trait. A short preparation goes a long way.

Lighten the load

You don't have to do everything yourself. Sustainable communication starts with deciding what deserves your attention. Your core contribution is not production, but insight, judgement, and scientific responsibility. A common trap is equating communication with content production.

- The trap: Spending days wrestling with tools you don't enjoy or master, producing outputs that don't land.
- The alternative: Spending a short, focused moment clarifying the message and letting specialists handle the execution.

Often, thirty minutes of alignment saves days of unnecessary work. But this **only works if you have a system**. Delegation and collaboration are not individual skills; they depend on having people, roles, and coordination in place. If "lightening the load" currently feels impossible, return to **Chapter 3 (Building your support system)** and start there. Even a minimal system makes everything in this chapter easier.

Tasks that are usually worth sharing or delegating:

- **Design and layout:** Turning dense material into clear visuals or one-page formats.
- **Editing and simplification:** Applying plain-language filters while preserving accuracy.
- **Media handling:** Managing journalists, requests, and interview preparation.
- **Post-production:** Editing videos, adding captions, ensuring accessibility.
- **Distribution:** Choosing channels and timing rather than "posting everywhere".

If you feel stuck or drained by these, it's a signal to lean on your support system:

Production toolbox

There are many tools out there. Here are some examples in case you don't know where to begin:

Category	Examples	Best for
Data visualisation	Datawrapper (Free Tier), Flourish, Tableau Public (Free), Google Looker Studio	Dynamic, interactive charts, dashboards, and quick maps (ideal for non-coders)
Infographics & general design	Canva (Free Tier), Piktochart (Free Tier), Infogram, Visme	Easy drag-and-drop design, general infographics, and social media graphics
Specialist scientific graphics	Mind the Graph (Free Tier), BioRender (Free Tier)	Creating technical diagrams, scientific illustrations, and graphical abstracts (e.g., cell pathways, ecology)
Geospatial & mapping	QGIS (Free/Open-Source), StoryMapJS (Free), ArcGIS	Professional geospatial processing, mapping, and interactive map storytelling
Video production	CapCut (Free), Adobe Express (Free Tier), iMovie (Mac), DaVinci Resolve (Free)	Turning text into short, visual videos; simple field footage editing (DaVinci Resolve Free is a professional-grade option)
Advanced/code-based graphics	Inkscape (Free/Open-Source), Adobe Illustrator, R (ggplot2), Python (Matplotlib/Seaborn)	Advanced vector graphics, custom design work, and reproducible, code-based data graphics
Text editing & readability	Hemingway App (Free Web Version), Grammarly (Free Tier)	Checking readability, improving sentence structure, and eliminating passive voice and jargon

Format-specific tips

In Chapter 7, we looked at where to go. Now that you've picked your battles, here are a few tips to win them. Treat this as a pre-flight check, not a recipe.

Format	Common pitfalls	Tips
Policy briefs	Vague recommendations; hiding the point on page 3; overly technical language	Keep it short (1–2 pages where possible). Front-load the solution. Put 2–3 clear recommendations in a visible box on page 1, with a strong executive summary.
Factsheets	Walls of text; unclear structure; trying to be a mini-report	One page, one purpose. Ideal for tools or methods. Use short text blocks, icons, and a simple Problem → Solution → Evidence flow.
Newsletters	Institutional tone (“We are pleased to announce...”); too many links	Write like a human. Use clear headings, one main story, and one clear call to action. Curate rather than broadcast.
Blog posts	Slow, abstract openings; jargon; no narrative arc	Start with a hook (question, moment from the field, or surprising fact). Use storytelling, quotes, and plain language. Aim for under 1,000 words.
Social media	Trying to say everything; link-only posts; weak visuals	Focus on one idea. Lead with the “so what?”. Use a strong visual (people, places, species). Write for the platform, not your CV.

Press releases	Too technical; no news angle; buried quotes	Lead with what is new or important. Say why it matters now. Include one clear human quote and keep technical detail minimal.
Infographics	Overloaded charts; missing context; poor accessibility	Build around one insight. Provide brief context. Use clear labels and colour contrast. If it needs long explanation, simplify.
Posters	Treating it like a printed paper; too much text; no focal point	Think “visual abstract”. One key message. Apply the 3-metre rule: the core finding should be clear from a distance. Add a QR code for details.
Presentations	Reading slides; rushing; slides overloaded with text; no clear takeaway or ask	Slides are visual support, not a script. Focus on the opening and closing. Prepare two versions: one concise, visual deck for presenting, and one more detailed version for sharing (with references and context). End with a clear next step or question.

Deep dive: The policy brief

A policy brief is often your clearest route to influence decisions. A strong brief does three things:

- **Frame the problem clearly:** What is the issue, and why is it urgent?
- **Present evidence concisely:** What does the research show?
- **Offer actionable recommendations:** What should be done, and what will those actions achieve at a policy level?

Keep evidence and judgement distinct. Evidence can clarify the available options, likely consequences and uncertainties, but it rarely determines one inevitable policy choice. Recommendations also involve priorities, feasibility and trade-offs. Make clear what follows from the research and where interpretation or judgement enters.

So, do not start writing before you can answer:

- **Who exactly is this for?** You cannot write for “policymakers”. They have different responsibilities, constraints and levers.
- **Why now?** Relevance beats completeness. Link your brief to a live policy moment.
- **What is the one action they should take?** If you cannot state your recommendation in a single sentence, you are not ready to write.

Anatomy of a policy brief

Section	What to include	Common mistakes	Tips
Title	A clear, engaging statement of the issue or solution	Jargon-heavy or overly generic titles	Highlight urgency or benefit
Executive summary	3-5 sentences covering the core problem, key finding, and what should happen next.	Too long; filling it with background history; vague recommendations.	Front-load relevance. Assume many will only read this section. Make the recommendation explicit here.
Context (why this matters)	Why the issue is urgent now, who is affected, and policy relevance.	Long history lessons; academic framing; no link to timing.	Link to live debates. Mention specific EU processes or current events. Relevance trumps context.
Evidence & findings	The essential evidence your recommendation relies on, and no more.	Data dumps; too many graphs; unexplained indicators; technical language.	Prioritise actionable knowledge. Use plain language. Explain numbers in context (“a 12% decline , equivalent to…”).
Implications	What the evidence suggests, possible scenarios, and trade-offs.	Overly cautious hedging (“on the one hand…”); uncertainty paralysis.	Focus on what is clear. Show benefits. Mention limitations if necessary, but keep them concise.
Recommendations	3-5 specific, feasible actions the reader can actually take.	Overly broad asks; recommendations that exceed the audience’s mandate.	Make actions concrete. Use verbs like “Amend Article X” or “Fund pilot Y”. Prioritise feasibility.
Further resources	Links to reports, datasets, annexes.	Overloading the main brief with attachments.	Keep it clean. Place technical methodologies or deep data in annexes/links.
Contact	Name, organisation, email.	Hard-to-find details.	Offer availability. Explicitly offer a briefing or follow-up call.

Remember: a brief is not a mini-report, it is a tool for decision-making. A policymaker should understand your argument in no more than 60 seconds by scanning the title, key messages, one graphic, and the recommendations.

Getting your brief read

Producing a high-quality brief is only half the work. It only matters if you're ready to put it to work. Policymakers rarely come knocking on researchers' doors. As a constituent or expert, you have the right to get in touch directly. Beginning at the local level can make it feel more doable and less out of reach.

Stepping forward, however, is not about sending your brief everywhere. The impact of your brief depends on who receives it, how you reach them, and when. The most common way is via email, so a few tips:

Step	What to do	Common mistakes	Practical tips
Targeting	Map actual decision-makers.	Sending to generic addresses (info@); relying only on official channels	Find desk officers, attachés, MEP assistants, key funders, etc. These people draft the policy. Add intermediaries (EEA, NGOs, trusted networks) who can amplify your message.
Pitch	Write a short, clear, engaging email (Chapter 5).	Long emails, technical subject lines, vague relevance	Subject: Keep it short and relevant. Body: 3-4 lines maximum (Issue → Insight → Why now → What you offer) Tone: concise, respectful, actionable
Sending	Deliver the brief in usable formats.	Sending huge files; pasting the full text into the email body	PDF: Label clearly and keep under 2 MB. Include a link to a web/downloadable version (for mobile and tracking).
Follow-up	Send polite, strategic reminders.	Assuming silence = rejection; giving up after one email	Tie follow-up to a live policy moment. 1st follow-up: After 5-7 working days 2nd (optional): Before key policy milestones
Tracking	Record responses and influence.	Relying on memory; losing contacts when collaborators leave	Keep a simple, living spreadsheet with role, email, and history of contact.

For more on policy briefs:

- [More guidance and some examples from Biodiversa+](#)
- [A guide from the European Commission](#)

Next up: Making it happen. All this can be a lot, so you'll need a plan, not to gather dust, but to actually help you see things through.

A research team studying pollinator decline submitted a beautifully detailed communication plan to their funder: timelines, target audiences, metrics, the works. Then they put it in a folder and did not look at it again until the final report was due. In a rush, they built a website, sent a few tweets, and issued a press release nobody picked up. Another team treated their communication plan more like a grocery list. They checked items off, scribbled notes in the margins, crossed things out, and added new ideas as the project evolved. By the year-end conference, the first team's pristine binder sat unopened. The second team's notebook was dog-eared, coffee-stained, and falling apart.

Building your communication plan (without burning out)



Takeaway: Your communication plan does not need to be perfect or impressive. It needs to be alive. A good plan helps you focus, act, and adapt without burning out. Keep it short. Use it often. Revisit it regularly. Let it guide your energy so you can show up where it matters most.

1

Build a Minimum Viable Plan

Keep it short and useful. Enough to guide, coordinate and support.



Objectives



Audiences



Key messages



Activities & formats



Key moments



Responsibilities



Learning

2

Match effort to what matters

Sprint around key moments. Keep lighter routines in between.



Anchor

Provide durable reference points



Sustain

Build trust over time



Pulse

Maintain visibility

3

Keep the plan alive

Revisit and adapt as the project changes.



Stay flexible

Leave room to adapt



Think modular

Reuse, reshape and repurpose



Review regularly

Check, update and adjust

Your plan does not need to be perfect. It needs to be **alive**. Keep it short. Use it often. Revisit it regularly.



Testimonial:

“Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face”

Michael Tyson

The Minimum Viable Plan (MVP)

One of the biggest barriers to communication is feeling overwhelmed, especially when time is short and priorities keep shifting. In those moments, planning can feel like administrative noise. But planning is not paperwork. It is leverage. A useful communication plan works as:

- A compass (not a straitjacket) helping you decide what is worth your time;
- A coordination tool, especially when several people communicate on behalf of the project;
- A safety net, reducing stress when deadlines or controversies arise.

You don't necessarily need a 20-page strategy. Your plan can fit on one or two pages that help you make decisions quickly and stay focused.

Here is a practical structure you can use and revisit throughout your project:

Section	What to fill in	Why it matters
Objectives	What change your communication should support	Anchors the whole plan
Audiences	Who you need to reach (primary and secondary)	Tailors messages and formats
Key messages	What each audience should understand or do	Creates consistency and focus
Activities & formats	What you will actually produce or organise	Turns intent into action
Timeline & key moments	Milestones, policy windows, seasonal hooks, events	Helps you prepare and be timely
Responsibilities	Who does what	Avoids confusion and bottlenecks
Evaluation & learning	What you will monitor (light-touch metrics)	Supports adaptation and improvement

Of sprints and marathons

People often say communication is a marathon. That is only half true. Effective communication combines:

- **Strategic sprints:** short bursts of effort around key moments (publications, policy windows, events) where impact can be disproportionate.

- **Slow-burn marathons:** low-effort, consistent actions that build trust over time.

So, not all communication needs the same effort. A simple tiered structure helps you manage energy and expectations.

Tier	Purpose	Examples
Core / Anchor	Durable, referenceable content	Project summary, key visuals, bios, main report or dataset
Mid / Sustain	Builds awareness and trust over time	Blog posts, newsletters, infographics
Light / Pulse	Keeps visibility and engagement up	Social posts, short clips, quotes

Think modular

Your communication strategy should act like an ecosystem where different channels work together. Instead of creating something new for every channel, think modularly and ask:

- Can this be reused or reshaped for another channel?
- Can we break it into parts?
- Is it worth adapting for another audience or language?

Example: One hedgerow study, many outputs

Tier	Format	Example adaptation	Example channels
Short-form: Fast, light pieces that boost visibility	Visual snippet	Key statistic or before–after photo	Instagram, LinkedIn
	Microblogging	“What can hedgerows do for farmers? Here’s what we found (1/5)”	Bluesky, Mastodon, Twitter/X
	Quote card	“These hedges brought the bees back.” — farmer	Instagram, Facebook
	Short video clip	20-30 seconds: hedge line + pollinators	Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts
Mid-length: Narrative formats that build understanding and trust	Newsletter story	“Field notes from Belgium: hedgerows during the June heatwave”	Project newsletter
	Blog post	“Five things we’ve learned about hedgerows and farm resilience”	Project website/blog
	Factsheet	“How hedgerows benefit farms: practical takeaways”	Websites, advisory networks
	Infographic	Key mechanisms + simple diagram	Social media, PDF download
Long-form / anchor: Durable, referenceable pieces that hold the full story	Policy brief	“How hedgerows can boost biodiversity and resilience on EU farms”	Policymakers, funders
	Report / article	Detailed methods and results	Project website, scientific networks
	Case study	One farm, one change, one outcome	EU platforms, newsletters

Interactive / experiential: High-engagement formats that create dialogue and practical learning	Workshop / roundtable	Field visit + Q&A with farmers and policymakers	Events, advisory boards
	Tutorial / explainer video	"How to assess hedge health on your farm"	YouTube, training sessions
	Citizen science	Hedge mapping or pollinator spotting	Local events, schools
	StoryMap	Spatial narrative of hedgerow impacts	Websites, presentations

Common traps (and quick fixes)

Trap	What Happens	Quick Fix
Rigid calendars	Plans become obsolete fast	Plan themes per quarter, keep 10-20% flexible
Paralysis by polish	Communication stalls while waiting for perfect text or visuals.	Define a publish-ready ("good enough") threshold.
One-and-done outputs	PDFs die on upload and never get reused.	Design for reuse and create content you can update and re-share with fresh context.
Going solo	Bottlenecks and burnout	Set up a support system (chapter 3).
Ignoring metrics	You repeat what doesn't work.	Spend 15 minutes monthly checking simple analytics.
Over-engineering	Time is lost choosing platforms, refining processes, etc.	Start with "good enough" tools and only upgrade when needed.
No 'why now?'	Communication feels generic or mistimed and you lose drive.	Begin each sprint thinking about moments that matter, with a news hook or milestone.

Navigating risk and crisis

Biodiversity communication sometimes touches sensitive ground. Being prepared helps you respond with clarity and confidence.

- **Anticipate:** What could be misunderstood? Who might feel affected? Map potential flashpoints.
- **Prepare:** Draft short holding statements or Q&A in advance. Identify trusted intermediaries (e.g., NGOs, farmer unions) to help mediate discussion.
- **Respond:** Be prompt, factual, and respectful. Say what you know, what you are doing next, and what you will not speculate on. Don't ignore the issue or make promises you cannot keep.

Some additional tips for your wellbeing:

- **Limit exposure:** Set specific times to check messages or social media.
- **Manage the stress:** talk to trusted colleagues or friends, practice grounding techniques.
- **Remember:** negative comments often reflect frustrations unrelated to you personally.
- If overwhelmed, delegate or seek support from your institution (communication, HR, legal...)

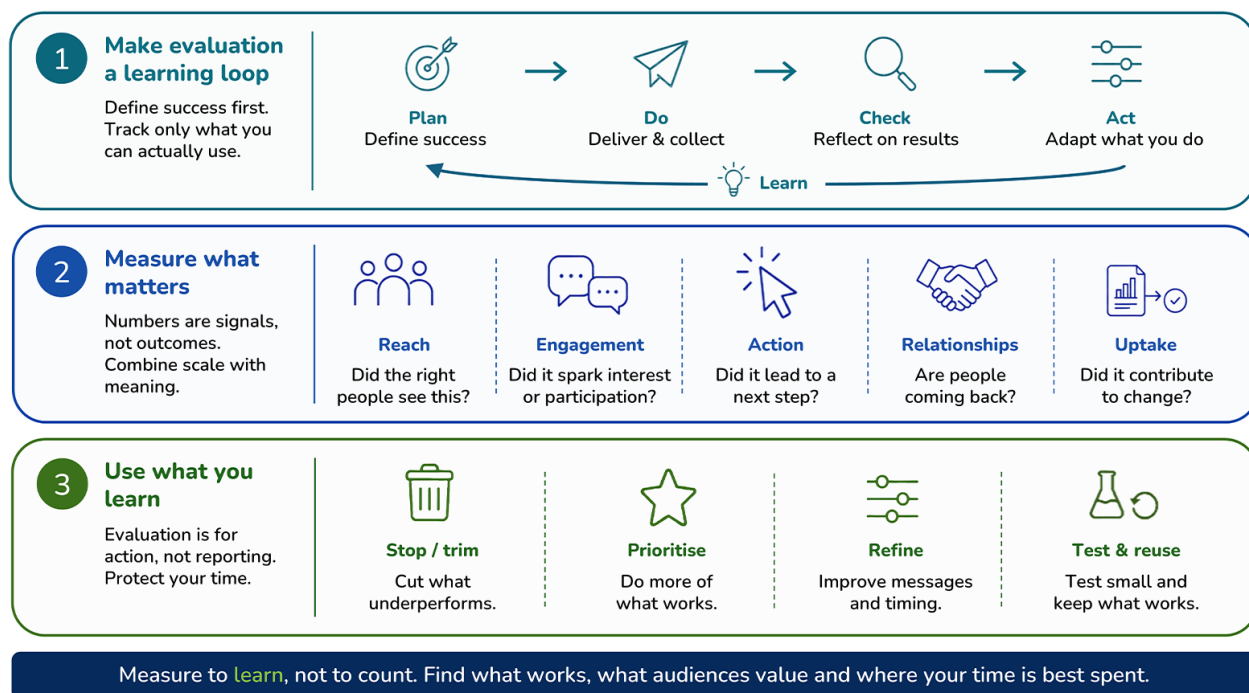
Next up: Measuring and learning as you go. How do you know if your communication is working? How can you improve and adapt over time? The final chapter explores practical ways to track, reflect, and grow.

An institute, keen to engage the public, installed a large red button in the town square with a sign: "Press for a science fact." Every time it was pressed, a loudspeaker boomed, "Mitochondria are the powerhouse of the cell!" After a week, they checked the data. The button had been pressed 10,000 times! The institute had achieved a high level of engagement. Although mostly by a flock of pigeons who enjoyed the vibration of the button.

Is it working? (measuring what matters)



Takeaway: Measuring communication is not about collecting numbers. It is about learning what works, understanding what your audiences value, protecting your time, and showing funders and institutions why your work is worth resourcing.





Testimonial:

“Without data, you’re just another person with an opinion.”

W. Edwards Deming

Learning and improving

“It’s all a bit vain, isn’t it?” That reaction is common. You invest time and energy in communication, but how do you know whether it made any difference? Communication behaves more like ecology than physics: results depend on context, timing, relationships... There is no simple formula that says: “If you do X, you will achieve Y.” But done well, evaluation is a learning tool. To keep it useful and lightweight, think of evaluation as a simple, repeatable cycle with four steps: Plan, Do, Check, Act.

Plan: Define success

The first step is moving from vague intentions to clear success criteria. Not everything you track will be a final outcome, so it helps to distinguish between two things:

- **Measures** (direct evidence): Clear proof that something happened (e.g., a policymaker citing your work, a survey showing a change in behaviour).
- **Indicators** (signals of progress): Signs that you are moving in the right direction (e.g., a policymaker opening your newsletter, attendance at your event).

Because behaviour and policy change are often indirect and unfold over time, communication relies heavily on indicators. Communication rarely causes change on its own; it contributes alongside many other factors. Indicators therefore help you track your contribution to progress, even when final outcomes are beyond your direct control.

These indicators are not just reporting tools: they support learning for researchers, signal relationship-building with stakeholders, and provide accountability to funders. Most importantly, they help surface early evidence of trust, relevance, and usability, long before final impacts appear.

To choose useful indicators, answer four questions:

- **What are your communication objectives?** What are you trying to achieve? Awareness, understanding, behavioural change, collaboration, policy uptake? Be specific. A vague goal (“reach the public”) leads to vague communication.
- **What does success look like in practice?** Describe it plainly, without metrics. What would you see if it worked?
- **What can you measure or track?** These can be quantitative (opens, downloads, sign-ups) and qualitative (feedback, follow-up queries, requests for data). They keep you motivated and informed along the way.
- **Is it SMART enough to be usable?** How can you track this with your tools and time. If you can’t realistically monitor it, it won’t help you.

These four questions create a clear through-line: from objectives to observable evidence to practical KPIs.

Example:

A coastal dune restoration project aiming to engage local policymakers and land managers.

- Objective?
 - To increase local decision makers' awareness of our dune restoration findings, so they can consider them in planning discussions.
- In practice?
 - Policymakers understand the key benefits of the restoration approach.
 - They recognise the evidence behind the recommendations.
 - They are willing to invite the team for further discussion.
- What to measure?
 - Attendance and engagement at a policy-focused webinar
 - Email replies or follow-up questions
 - Downloads of the policy brief
 - Mentions or references in municipal planning documents
- SMART KPIs?
 - At least 25 policymakers attend the webinar, with at least five questions raised
 - At least three follow-up requests for more information or meetings
 - 50 downloads of the policy brief within three months
 - At least one municipal meeting referencing the research within the year

✓ Do: Deliver and collect data

Good communication generates better signals, which makes evaluation easier. The QUEST project proposes [12 guiding principles to judge the quality of your communication](#). Use this as your preflight checklist:

Trustworthiness and scientific rigour

- ☐ **Scientific:** Is the information based on reliable science and clearly sourced?
- ☐ **Factual:** Is it accurate, objective, and consistent with the evidence?
- ☐ **Balanced:** Are diverse expert opinions and stakeholder views included?
- ☐ **Transparent:** Are methods, limitations, funding, and affiliations disclosed?

Presentation and style

- ☐ **Clear:** Is the language simple, accessible, and focused on key messages?
- ☐ **Coherent and contextual:** Does it provide context and follow a logical structure?
- ☐ **Spellbinding:** Does it use narrative or format creatively to captivate?
- ☐ **Interacting with the audience:** Does it invite dialogue and respect audience input?

Connection with the Society

- ☐ **Purposeful and targeted:** Is it tailored to a clear objective, audience, and timing?
- ☐ **Impactful:** Does it aim for real-world change or spark debate?
- ☐ **Relatable:** Does it link science to everyday life and common concerns?
- ☐ **Responsible:** Does it follow ethics and counter misinformation?

Check: Reflect on results

After each key activity, ask:

- What worked well?
- What surprised me?
- Where was there friction or confusion?
- Did this bring us closer to our objective?
- What is the smallest useful change to try next time?

This habit saves time over the long run. Every so often, go one step further:

- Was our original diagnosis of the communication problem accurate?
- How did people interpret, adapt or reframe what we communicated?
- What practical, institutional or political constraints became visible that communication alone could not resolve?

These questions help you distinguish between a communication issue and a wider barrier to change. Complement this reflection with occasional reviews of indicators, but remember: while numbers such as likes, views, impressions or follower counts can feel comforting, they are not outcomes. Treat them as signals that help you ask better questions:

- Did the right people engage?
- Did they respond in the way we hoped?
- Did it open a door or strengthen a relationship?
- What should we stop, adjust or repeat?

Good evaluation combines quantitative scale with qualitative meaning. You need both to understand what happened and improve what you do next.

Here are some examples of indicators:

Category	Guiding question	Example indicators	How to measure	Qual/Quant Mix	Common pitfalls
Reach	Did the right people see this?	% of target policymakers opening your email; unique visitors to a page crafted for land managers; views from regions relevant to the project	Email analytics; segmented audience reports; website analytics; social dashboard exports	Note which specific audiences reached you (e.g., “3 national advisors opened the brief”)	Looking at total views instead of segmented, relevant views
Engagement	Did they interact meaningfully?	Questions asked in webinars; replies to email updates; comments from practitioners; shares inside key networks	Q&A logs; comment analysis; webinar platform analytics; social repost lists	Capture examples of good questions or comments: they often reveal gaps in understanding	Counting likes without checking who engaged
Action / Conversion	Did they do what we hoped?	Downloads of a tool or brief; registrations for a workshop;	Download logs; signup forms; CRM entries;	Ask a short question at signup: “Why did	Assuming downloads = uptake or use

		sign-ups for your newsletter; requests for demos or meetings	event registration data	you register?" (reveals intent)	
Quality of Engagement	Did this open a door or deepen a relationship?	Requests for clarification; invitations to present findings internally; peer-to-peer endorsements	Interaction logs; meeting notes; email records; CRM notes	Keep one-sentence summaries of meaningful exchanges	Recording every micro-interaction (noise)
Relationship Signals	Are people coming back or building trust over time?	Returning visitors to stakeholder pages; repeat attendance; ongoing email exchanges	Repeat-visitor analytics; event history; correspondence logs	Watch for "stickiness": who keeps showing up?	Treating one-off attendance as relationship building
Qualitative Insight	What did people tell us?	Quotes from farmers on usefulness; comments expressing confusion; emails showing policy relevance; feedback from trials	Feedback forms; email archives; interviews; comment threads	Treat select quotes as "micro case studies"	Treating feedback as anecdotal rather than evidence
Impact Signals	Did communication contribute to change?	Policymakers referencing your findings; shifts in guidance; partners adopting practices; improved understanding	Policy document scans; partner interviews; end-of-pilot surveys; citation tracking	Document where your work "showed up" in real decisions	Claiming full attribution rather than contribution

For an overview of common indicators, you can refer to the [Communication Network Indicators](#) used by the European Commission to measure the effectiveness of its outreach.

A note on "the algorithm"

If you are using social media, you may notice that some posts receive far more visibility than others. This is often attributed to "the algorithm" – the systems platforms use to decide what content to show to whom. No need to cover all the technical details here, but it helps to keep a few simple principles in mind. Platforms tend to prioritise content that:

- receives early engagement (likes, comments, shares),
- keeps people's attention (clear, relevant, easy to follow),
- prompts interaction (questions, reactions, discussion),
- is posted consistently over time.

This means that visibility is not only about the quality of your research, but also about how your message is framed and how your audience responds to it.

However, high reach does not necessarily mean high impact. A widely seen post is not the same as a decision changed, a collaboration started, or a method adopted. Use platform feedback as a signal, not a goal. If something resonates, ask why. If it does not, adjust and try again. The aim is not to “beat the algorithm”, but to learn what connects with your audience and build from there.

Act: Adapt based on what you learned.

Evaluation only matters if it leads to adjustment. Use what you learn to:

- Stop or trim formats that consistently underperform;
- Prioritise activities that reach the right people;
- Refine messages that caused confusion;
- Improve timing around moments that matter;
- Run small experiments (two subject lines, two visuals);
- Build a library of what worked for reuse.

A simple log helps you see patterns over time and makes reporting easier later. Fill it in while details are fresh and keep it short.

Date	Activity	Objective	Plan / Target	Quantitative results (with source)	Qualitative insights	Key learning & adaptation	Owner [optional]
21-10-25	Webinar	Engage local farmers	40 min + Q&A Target: 50 attendees	65 registered; 42 attended; 88% stayed full duration (Zoom analytics)	“Useful but too long”; 4 farmers asked for follow-up; strong visuals/story	• Worked: Speaker story, visuals. • Didn’t: Too long, Q&A rushed. • Adaptation: Shorten next webinar to 30 mins; reuse two key slides for a social media infographic.	Maria

✓ Checking in on your support system

Building a support system (Chapter 3) is not a one-off task. This checklist is for moments when collaboration starts to feel heavy, fragile, or invisible. Use this as a check-in, not a requirement list.

Start with people

- ☐ Have I introduced myself to the communications team early enough to involve them meaningfully?
- ☐ Do I have 2-3 trusted peers I can send a draft or idea to without overthinking?
- ☐ Have I identified one person (internally or externally) who makes communication feel lighter?
- ☐ Are interns, students, or junior colleagues supported and supervised, and not used as a last resort?

Make collaboration easy

- ☐ Are roles written down (who leads, who reviews, who approves)?
- ☐ Is ownership of short-form (“pulse”) and long-form (“anchor”) content clear?
- ☐ Do roles still match people’s time, skills, and energy?

Reduce friction, not people

- ☐ Can a new team member find key assets (logos, briefs, contacts) in under three clicks?
- ☐ Do we have one place for files and one place for tasks?
- ☐ Are our tools actually used, or just officially agreed?

Protect time and attention

- ☐ Have we agreed on quiet hours and realistic response times?
- ☐ Are meetings short, purposeful, and followed by clear action points?
- ☐ Have I blocked small, realistic communication slots in my calendar?

Reuse before creating

- ☐ Are reports, briefs, or datasets reused across formats?
- ☐ Are templates saving time instead of constraining us?
- ☐ Are visuals, wording, or explanations reused where possible?

Be ready for friction

- ☐ Do we know which findings could be sensitive or contested?
- ☐ Do we have a short holding statement or Q&A ready?
- ☐ Is it clear who responds if issues arise?

Keep learning (lightly)

- ☐ Are we recording small wins (questions, invitations, feedback)?
- ☐ Do we talk about what didn’t work without blame?
- ☐ Are we using AI tools to support, not replace, judgement — and reviewing outputs carefully?

If this feels heavy, that’s a signal. The system needs adjusting, not you.

Sustain & thrive

Congrats, you’ve made it to the end! Maybe you saw a bit of yourself in these pages: the limited time, the conflicting expectations, the moments where communication feels energising, and the moments where it feels like “one more thing” to carry. That tension doesn’t go away. Communication happens alongside fieldwork, deadlines, teaching, family life, and institutional constraints. It’s rarely neat, hardly ever linear, and almost never finished. What makes it sustainable is not doing more, but doing what fits.

As you step back into your work, a few things are worth holding on to:

- You do not need to communicate everything to communicate well. Choosing less is often choosing better.
- You are allowed to choose formats and audiences that suit your project, your skills, and your energy.
- Learning what does not work is still progress. If a channel or an idea quietly disappears, it does not mean you failed, it means you learned.

Communication handbook

- Communication is part of research, not a performance. It is one of the ways your work becomes part of the world.
- Communication becomes lighter when it is shared. Reuse, repurpose, and collaborate whenever you can.

There will be phases when communication fades into the background, and phases when it takes centre stage. Both are normal. What matters is staying intentional enough to return to it when it matters. Do it in ways that feel honest, manageable, and human. That is enough.

Now, before you close this handbook, it may be worth pausing for a moment and asking yourself: What is one small step that feels doable today?

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