

Communication Strategies

In support of the constitutional guiding principle of transparency, it is important for the [constitution-making body](#) (CMB) to proactively and systematically impart and exchange information and news about the constitution-making process with stakeholders, the public and the media. To this end, a CMB [secretariat](#) will usually have a Communication Department, and that department will first need to develop a communication strategy to guide all communications by and from the CMB. A communication strategy is a tool utilized by the CMB and [secretariat](#) describing how these bodies will utilize the media and other means to impart and exchange information and news about the constitution making process with the general public.

This paper discusses the following topics:

1. Objectives of a Communication Strategy
2. What a Communication Strategy should Address
3. Who Develops the Strategy?
4. Key Considerations when Developing a Strategy
5. Role of the Media

1. OBJECTIVES OF A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Communicating about the work of the CMB is a key mechanism for building confidence in what is often a new and untested institution. If the public and other key stakeholders understand the process and know what is going on, they are more likely to buy-in to the final outcome. Furthermore, if they know what is going on and when, then they will more easily be able to participate in the process and may be less inclined to critique the process and/or to believe negative rumors about the CMB and its work.

Particularly in countries emerging from conflict or authoritarian rule, where there may be significant mistrust between citizens and leaders, and suspicion of any decision-making process, a communication strategy can assist constitution-makers to:

- Increase transparency and build credibility and trust with citizens and key stakeholders
- Manage expectations and increase confidence that progress is being achieved
- Popularize the constitution making process

2. WHAT A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY SHOULD ADDRESS

It is essential that the Communications Strategy is developed to respond to the particular circumstances and challenges present in the country and the constitution making process, for instance: existing political/social fractions; linguistic diversity; the role and independence of the media; and utilizing the most popular media, such as television, newspapers and the internet.

While context will dictate the key aspects of a communication strategy, they frequently address many of the following areas of the constitution making process:

- ❖ **Outreach on the constitution making process** - a first objective of the communication strategy should be to raise awareness about the constitution making process and body/bodies. The [civic education](#) program might be closely connected to the communication strategy in this regard. Questions that should be answered include:
 - What are the steps in the constitution making process?
 - What is the role of the constitution making body and how does it fit in the overall process?
 - What are the responsibilities and powers of the constitution making body?
 - Who are the members of the constitution making body? How were they selected?
 - How might the constitution making body be branded?
 - What is their expertise or whom do they represent?
 - What are the limits/constraints on the constitution makers?
 - What outcomes can be expected?

- ❖ **Constitution making plans** – the communications strategy should clearly articulate how the constitution making body will fulfill its mandate and carry out its work:
 - What are the internal structures (committees, [secretariat](#))?
 - What are the different phases and aspects of the process?
 - How will the body make decisions?
 - What is the timeframe for its work?

- ❖ **Public participation** – the constitution making body should clearly articulate its plans to engage citizens, civil society groups and other stakeholders. This can help to increase legitimacy and support, manage expectations, allow the public to prepare to participate in a meaningful way and focus efforts and energy to a common set of interactions. In particular, the communications strategy should address:
 - **Who:** who can make a submission, participate or give input to the constitution making process? Ideally, this dimension of outreach can help to popularize the process and create a value that all citizens and groups have a right and responsibility to take part.
 - **When:** at what phases will public participation take place? What are the timelines for particular public participation exercises or events?
 - **How:** what mechanism will be used to engage with citizens and other groups? (eg, submissions, face-to-face meetings, discussion forums on a website? input through social media? surveys or other mechanisms?) how the constitution making body intends to utilize the public inputs/submissions.

- **Where:** what is the location for public participation events? Or submission of input?
- ❖ **Achievements** – the constitution making body should also communicate what milestones are reached, agreements are made, how public participation has been incorporated (or, if not incorporated, how input was given due consideration) and how the draft constitution progresses toward further [deliberation, adoption or ratification](#).

3. WHO DEVELOPS THE STRATEGY?

The Communication Strategy is primarily a document intended to guide the communications of the CMB itself, and as such, the CMB [secretariat](#) is usually tasked with developing a draft or supporting the leadership of the CMB to prepare the strategy. In reality, advice from a communications expert is often useful to consider, as is input from civil society organizations, journalists and other media actors. The CMB may also want to call on the Ministry of Information if one exists, as they will likely have considerable in-house government expertise which can be drawn on and will also be aware of existing government communication channels which could perhaps be utilized by the CMB to get its message out.

Communication strategies require agreement on the part of the constitution making body officials on (a) the need for and purpose of the communications strategy; and (b) the message to be delivered. Without agreement on these issues there will likely be no coherent strategy at all.

4. KEY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN DEVELOPING A STRATEGY

When developing the strategy, the CMB should consider:

- ❖ **Audience** – while outreach should reach the population broadly, specific components of the communications strategy may need to be tailored to particular groups or individuals, such as minorities, women, and youth. Specific messages might also be delivered to specific constituencies, such as the business community, lawyers and judges, human rights groups, and diaspora. In order to ensure that marginalized or minority groups are reached, the communication strategy should take into account:
 - Language
 - Literacy levels
 - Age, sex, disability
 - Tradition and culture
- ❖ **Spokespeople** – determining who should deliver CMB messaging is as important as the message itself. The development process for the communication strategy should explore the role for members of the CMB themselves. The CMB will need to consider:
 - Can CMB Members speak to the press individually? If not, why not? There are compelling reasons for and against. Uniformity and consistency might counsel against letting CMB Members speak in their individual capacity. However, it may be useful for citizens to hear directly from “their” representatives on the CMB. And in any event, it may create unnecessary problems trying to keep members quiet.
 - Should there be official communications of the CMB (which are only made by the designated spokesperson) and unofficial communications, which can be made by any member?

- Can CMB Members issue their own press releases and have their own websites or Facebook pages in their capacity as CMB members?
- Should some parts of the CMB work be kept confidential and if so, are CMB members allowed to discuss such issues if they happen to disagree?

More commonly, CMBs will identify a suitable spokesperson or spokespersons (possibly within a unit of the CMB or [secretariat](#)) to provide a clear point of contact for the media in particular. In Kenya, this activity was charged to the Civic Education, Publicity, Information and Communication Committee (see pages 60-72 of the [CKRC's Report on Working Methods](#)).

There are inherent dangers in having too many spokespersons who might deliver divergent messages. By having an official spokesperson/persons, it might also clarify which messages directly reflect the views of the CMB as a whole, as opposed to individual members. The CMB might establish speaking rules for its member to ensure that mixed messages are not delivered. Investing in training for media relations personnel may also contribute to the overall perception of the constitution making body.

The communications strategy could also contemplate a role for other credible, trusted and prominent opinion leaders. This could include faith-based leaders, popular figures (artists, actors or sports celebrities), traditional authorities and/or civic leaders. In Tunisia, for example, an NGO, al Bassala, was given an important role in the communication strategy. The CMB delivered the information of the proceedings to the NGO and it in turn used social media such as Twitter to inform the public about speeches, votes and other proceedings in real time.

❖ **Methods, tools and tactics** – there are an increasing number of methods, tools and tactics for the CMB to communicate with the public and specific groups. Different methods will be more effective for reaching particular groups and in particular contexts as certain forms of media will be more popular in certain countries/regions. Some options include:

- Radio – for example, research in Nepal showed that 90% of people listened to the radio for up to 2 hours a day and that it was the most trusted source of information. In some countries, the deliberations of the CMB have been broadcast by radio.
- Television – call-in shows and interviews provide a way for effective outreach by CMB members and to engage with the public. In Colombia (1991) and Venezuela (1999) the plenary sessions of the constituent assemblies were televised through the public TV channels.
- Written media, such as newspapers, news releases, brochures/pamphlets, expert opinions. In Timor-Leste a short daily bulletin was put out in several languages by the CMB. In Colombia (1991) and Venezuela (1999) the Assemblies published an official gazette with a complete transcription of the day's proceedings.
- Websites – experiences in Bolivia, Ecuador, Georgia, Ghana, Iceland, Kenya Malawi, Nepal, Somalia, Zambia, Tunisia, Egypt, Fiji and Yemen demonstrate that websites are an increasingly standard tool for CMB communications, as well as [civic education](#) and [public consultation](#). The effectiveness of a website will depend on the degree of internet penetration and the literacy rate, although even simply by putting information out into the community, the CMB can be more effective because CSOs and the media can then simply it and share it with communities. For countries with

significant diaspora populations, it can be a good way to engage people who might otherwise have limited information.

- Social media – depending on the level of internet access, Facebook, twitter, blogs and other social media sites may provide another mechanism for the constitution making body to reach citizens. In Iceland, the Constitutional Council not only provided information about their mandate and the commission; they encouraged input, debate and interaction, which added to their credibility and legitimacy.
- Mobile phones – depending on the rate of mobile phone use, regular text messages can be sent to update people on the progress in the constitution making process. In Kenya, the Committee of Experts was able to target messages to correct rumors or misinformation about the constitution making process.
- Townhall meetings – face-to-face meetings in public or targeted to particular groups can be a valuable way for the members of the constitution making body to foster relationships and credibility. Interactive forums will model a participatory approach and build confidence in the transparency and accessibility of the constitution makers.
- Billboards and visual materials – in order to popularize the constitution making process, billboards, visuals materials, symbols and logos are useful tools.

Tunisia's Constituent Assembly, Internet and Social Media

The Tunisian Constituent Assembly established a website as one means of communication. The website was available in English, French and Arabic. During the most intensive periods of drafting and debate, the website was updated almost daily. Given the legacy of state-controlled television, newspapers and radio, social media and websites provided a new source for Tunisians. Individual members also established Facebook pages to provide updates to their constituents and other citizens. These media also served as a platform for citizens and organized groups to give their input, review drafts and participate.

- ❖ **Evaluation** – throughout the constitution making process, it is important that there is ongoing evaluation about the impact of the communication strategy and outreach. This will assist the CMB and/or [secretariat](#) members to revise and reshape messages if necessary. It will also allow the CMB to 'measure the pulse' of the public on how the constitution-making process is tracking.

Communications and Outreach in Brazil

Constitution making in Brazil was entrusted to the legislature, which was elected for that specific mandate. To support outreach and communications, the congressional staff set up a media center, which was coordinated: 716 television programs; 700 radio programs; 3,000 hours of video; 4,871 interviews with members of the assembly; 5-minute segments on the assembly's work aired twice each day; and, a weekly journal of the assembly distributed to more than 70,000 government officials, universities and research institutions.

5. ROLE OF THE MEDIA

A specific media component within the broader communication strategy, which identifies how the CMB and its [secretariat](#) will engage with journalists, can help to reduce potential tensions between media (eg, newspapers, TV, radio, websites/blogs) and the CMB. It can also help to leverage existing channels for dissemination of news and information for the benefit of the CMB's own outreach.

In addition to delivering official messages from the CMB itself, the media may also serve an important “watchdog” function, whereby they investigate and assess whether the process is being properly conducted. The ability of the media to serve these functions, however, is dependent on several factors, including their own capacity and neutrality. In many post-conflict and transitional states the media is weak and/or partisan. Where this is the case, the CMB may wish to address this directly, by providing training for the media on constitutional issues and by proactively engaging with journalists to try to help ensure their articles are accurate.

An important element of the media strategy may be to organize regular press conferences/briefings for the media and/or to facilitate the CMB leadership and/or members being regularly available to the media for interviews/questions. Journalists should also be given access to public deliberations and major proceedings of the CMB and might also be given access to certain internal meetings. There should be a presumption of inclusiveness of the media, unless there is a good reason to exclude them from a particular proceeding.

See pages 173-175 of the [Interpeace handbook](#) for more on media strategies.

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