

BRIEF FOR A COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY FOR NERAF



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Summary

This brief suggests actions necessary to develop a communication strategy for NERAF.

The following is a summary of recommended actions:

- Define how communications will help NERAF achieve its core objectives
- Define a set of communications objectives which are aligned with the core objectives, drawing on information from NERAF members and GONE staff
- Establish the target audience of NERAF
- Verbalise the messages which will most effectively and succinctly describe the aims and objectives of NERAF
- Distil these messages into the three key points which can be used to promote NERAF in all communications
- Determine a preferred tool/set of tools to deliver the communication messages
- Determine what can be learned from past activities that should influence the approach
- Cost the development and use of the toolkit
- Carry out an assessment of available resources and an approximate timescale for development of the strategy
- Benchmark existing levels of engagement with NERAF (if possible)
- Determine quantifiable metrics for evaluating the success of the communication strategy
- Obtain feedback during and after the strategy is implemented in order to amend and improve it
- Canvass NERAF members and stakeholders on the suitability of the proposed approach
- Produce a month-by-month plan detailing actions
- Monitor and report activity against the original objectives of the communications strategy

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to present a brief for development of a communication strategy for NERAF, including an analysis of methods of engagement with key stakeholder groups.

Some work has already been carried out on current and prospective communication methods, and this is integrated into the strategy brief.

The proposed development of a communication plan complements ongoing activity to update the [Sustainable Farming and Food website](#).

The document is produced in large part by Norma Foster with additional contributions from David Clubb. The methodology for construction of a communication strategy was taken from guidelines published by the Media Trust¹.

2. Methodology

The communication strategy for NERAF is designed to establish the following:

- Objectives
- Audiences
- Messages
- Tools and activities
- Resources
- Timescales
- Evaluation and amendment

Objectives

The objectives are the key to the success of the communications strategy. They ensure that the communications strategy is organisationally-driven rather than communications-driven.

Actions:

- Define how communications will help NERAF achieve its core objectives
- Define a set of communications objectives which are aligned with the core objectives, drawing on information from NERAF members and GONE staff expertise

Audiences

Identification of the NERAF 'audience' is necessary to understand with whom we are to communicate in order to achieve NERAF organisational objectives. The best audiences to target in order to achieve an objective may not always be the most obvious ones, and targeting audiences such as the media may not always help achieve the objectives.

Actions:

- Establish the target audience of NERAF, with the help of the following questions:
 - What is the single most important customer?
 - What is the rationale for this choice?
 - Describe how they would use the service (what governs the use of NERAF rather than another portal/organisation? Or is the audience currently not engaged with NERAF or other similar organisations?)
 - What other target groups should be considered?
 - What action would we like them to take after using the service?

The audience (existing or prospective) should be contacted in order to establish what they want from NERAF and how it should be communicated.

- Specific questions to the audience would include:
 - What do you read/see/hear?
 - What works/doesn't work?
 - What do you want to see more of?
 - What information do you need that you are not currently supplied with?

¹ Developing a communications strategy — Media Trust, http://www.mediatrust.org/training-events/training-resources/online-guides-1/guide_developing-a-communications-strategy (last visited Jan 6, 2010).

- How often do you want us to communicate with you

Messages

NERAF should consider the key messages it wants to deliver, emphasising the different elements of these messages for any different audiences. These will ideally be summarised in three key points which can be constantly repeated.

For example, the BBC 'informs, educates and entertains'. How can NERAF emulate this in a way that is consistent with its aims?

NERAF should aim to use interesting narrative, human interest stories and arresting imagery in order to spread its messages. For example, how do NERAF activities impact on real people? How can we make activities relevant to the audience?

Actions:

- Verbalise the messages which will most effectively and succinctly describe the aims and objectives of NERAF
- Distil these messages into the three key points which can be used to promote NERAF in all communications

Critical success factors

These are the key elements which will lead to success of the communication strategy if tackled appropriately. Although some are listed below, real thought should be applied to what will produce the best value for the strategy

- Best use of members and their networks to disseminate information and to work to the strategy
- Use of new media in a way which does not disenfranchise members, stakeholders and the wider rural constituency

Actions:

- Define a set of critical success factors which can be used to keep the communication strategy focused

Tools and activities

Identify the tools and activities that are most appropriate to communicating the key messages to the audiences. These will be suggested by the audiences, messages, or a combination of the two.

For example, the 'annual review' was an extremely useful tool in the corporate communications arena; whereas an email newsletter lends itself well to internal communications. The tools and activities should be tailored to the level of time and human and financial resources available.

This is a very important part of the overall consideration, as the right tool could save considerable amounts of time and effort over the coming years.

Actions:

- Determine a preferred tool/set of tools to deliver the communication messages
- Determine what can be learned from past activities that should influence the approach
- Cost the development and use of the toolkit

Resources and timescales

An assessment of resources available, and the timescales in which the communication plan is to be delivered. Expectation levels should be legitimately set within these parameters.

Actions:

- Carry out an assessment of available resources and an approximate timescale for development of the strategy

Evaluation and amendment

Benchmark the current level of engagement with NERAF (quantitatively if possible). Then consider performing a communications audit to assess the effectiveness of the strategy with internal and external audiences. Consider and discuss the results carefully and use them to amend your strategy.

The set of questions which was provided in the 'Audiences' section would be a good start for an evaluation,

particularly if also used as an initial benchmark exercise.

Actions:

- Benchmark existing levels of engagement with NERAF (if possible)
 - Determine current marketing activities around NERAF activities
- Determine quantifiable metrics for evaluating the success of the communication strategy
 - What are the short and long-term goals?
- Obtain feedback during and after the strategy is implemented in order to amend and improve it

a. Production of the strategy

NERAF and its stakeholders should have some level of involvement with the development of the communication strategy, though the level of involvement should be left to individuals to decide (some may not want a large part to play). This engagement will allow the communications strategy to feed into an organisational strategy to ensure maximum alignment with aims and objectives.

A detailed month-by-month communications plan should be derived from the strategy. Activity should be monitored and reported against the original objectives contained within the strategy.

Actions:

- Canvass NERAF members and stakeholders on the suitability of the proposed approach
- Produce a month-by-month plan detailing actions
- Monitor and report activity against the original objectives of the communications strategy

3. Suggested budget

The following is an indicative budget to carry out the work described in the sections above.

	Project Director	Project Officer	Totals
Direct costs			
Day rate	350	275	
Define link between communications and objectives	0.50		£ 175.00
Define communication objectives	0.50		£ 175.00
Establish target audience	0.25	0.25	£ 156.25
Verbalise messages to describe aims and objectives	0.25		£ 87.50
Produce three key points to promote NERAF	0.50		£ 175.00
Determine toolset to deliver communication messages	1.00		£ 350.00
Review past approach to learn lessons		0.50	£ 137.50
Cost development and use of toolkit		0.50	£ 137.50
Assess resources and timescale for development of strategy	0.50	0.50	£ 312.50
Benchmark existing levels of engagement		2.00	£ 550.00
Determine metrics for evaluating strategy success	1.00	0.50	£ 487.50
Canvass members and stakeholders on the suitability of the approach		1.00	£ 275.00
Produce action plan detailing actions		0.50	£ 137.50
Monitor and report against objectives		1.00	£ 275.00
Obtain feedback to amend and improve the strategy	0.50	0.50	£ 312.50
Subtotal staffing	5.00	7.25	£ 3,743.75
Total costs			£ 3,743.75

4. Bibliography

1. Developing a communications strategy — Media Trust, , http://www.mediatrust.org/training-events/training-resources/online-guides-1/guide_developing-a-communications-strategy (last visited Jan 6, 2010).