TEMPLATE

Develop a communication plan in nine steps

A communication plan defines the approach that a program will use to communicate with communities. It helps ensure systematic information sharing and two-way communication. The nine steps in this template address the key aspects that programs should consider:

1. Identify your objectives.
2. Choose your target audiences.
3. Design your key messages.
4. Select your communication methods.
5. Plan for two-way communication.
6. Establish your time frame.
7. Draft a budget.
8. Implement the plan.
9. Monitor the results and look for ways to improve.

Each step includes a series of questions to help staff identify the best approach for the program.

Program managers may choose to take the lead in developing a communication plan, or they may work through each of the nine steps with their staff. For an example of how to develop the plan as a team, see FACILITATOR'S NOTES: "How to work with staff to develop a communication plan."

When implementing projects with partners, CRS staff may support partners to develop a communication plan—for example, by providing the template as a resource or cofacilitating a session to develop a plan.

Step 1: Identify your objectives

Stating your objectives will keep the communication plan focused. Written objectives can be shared with other staff so they understand why the communication plan is important to the program's success. The questions below will help you identify your objectives:

1. **What is your purpose for communicating key program messages? What do you want to accomplish?**

2. **Which geographic areas do you want to receive your messages? (Are there any areas that should not receive the messages?)**

Common objectives for communicating with program participants and communities

By communicating about who you are and what you are doing, you show respect for the dignity of the people you serve and you make it more likely that the program will succeed. Sharing information helps do the following things:

- **Establish trust** between CRS, partners and the community.
- **Manage expectations** so that people know what CRS and partners can and cannot do. This can improve staff security and reduce the risk that rumors will arise.
- **Encourage participation and collaboration**. Informed communities are better able to participate in programs, provide feedback and engage in meaningful dialogue about the programs.
- **Ensure that the appropriate people know about the program's services and entitlements.** They also need to understand how people can access the program's benefits.

Depending on your program, you may have additional, more specific objectives.

Step 2: Choose your target audiences

In international relief and development, we often refer to the “community.” In reality, no community is homogenous. Communities are made up of women, men, girls, boys; different social-economic groups; youths and the elderly; people with disabilities; local leaders, community-based organizations and government members; as well as program participants and nonparticipants.

You may need to use different communication methods to reach different groups. The groups may need different levels of program information.

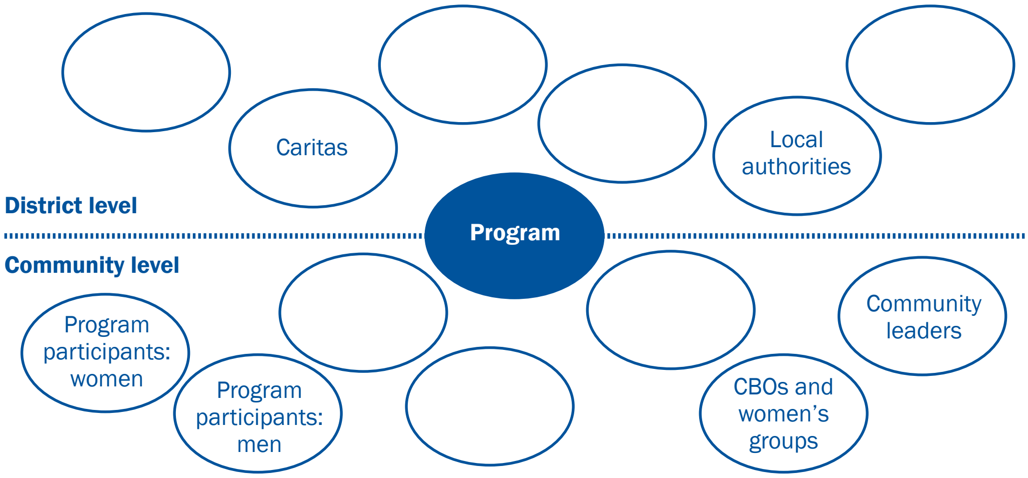
Who needs to know details about your program? (Be as specific as possible—will these audiences help to achieve your objectives?)

Quick method for conducting a stakeholder analysis

Think about your program. Which groups of people may (1) have an effect on the activities or (2) be affected by the activities. Identify which groups exist at the community level and which exist outside of the community.

You can then decide who you want to target with this communication plan. Think about which stakeholders have similar information needs and which groups you can reach using similar methods.

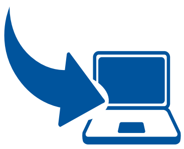
Identifying the different stakeholders at community level can help you decide which ones have similar information needs.



In emergency distributions, it is normal to target three broad groups: leaders, participants (beneficiaries), and nonparticipants (nonbeneficiaries). As programs move into the reconstruction phase, you will need to divide these groups into categories that are more specific.

A related resource

For another example of how to do a stakeholder analysis, see *ProPack: Project Design and Proposal Guidance for CRS Project and Program Managers*, available at http://www.crsprogramquality.org/publications/2011/1/14/propack-i-english.html.



Step 3: Design your key messages

Identifying your key messages will help you distill the information that is critical for achieving your objectives.

1. **What are the key messages you want to communicate to each audience?**

2. **It may help to ask yourself:**
   - **What questions do people ask staff during field visits?**
   - **What do people need to understand in order for the program to succeed?**
   - **What would you want to know about the program if you lived in the community?**

Audiences	Key messages

3. **Is there any information that should *not* be shared, given the context?**

What information should be shared?

The below table is adapted from the *CRS Haiti Accountability Framework,*[1] which outlines the types of information that should be shared as part of emergency and development programs. The Bronze level is the minimum for emergency programs. The Silver level is the minimum for development programs.

Bronze level (minimum for emergency programs)

Communities are informed about:

- Program goals and objectives
- Planned activities and deliverables, including start and end dates
- Criteria and process for program participant selection, and number of people who will be selected
- Details about partners who are involved in project implementation
- CRS mission and core values
- Contact details, including how people can identify a CRS employee
- Community members' right to provide feedback and make complaints

Silver level (minimum for development programs)

Communities are informed about:

- All Bronze-level information
- CRS code of conduct and other relevant commitments
- Relevant budget information (subject to security considerations)
- How people can participate in the program
- How the impact will be sustained after the end of the program
- How complaints will be handled

Gold level

Communities are informed about:

- All Bronze- and Silver-level information
- Progress of actual performance in relation to goals and activities
- How input from participation has contributed to decisions
- Key staff roles and responsibilities

1 The framework is available in English, French and Spanish at http://www.crsprogramquality.org/publications/tag/Haiti-Accountability-Framework.

Is there any information that should not be shared?

As every context is different, the potential risks associated with sharing certain information will also differ. To gauge the amount of risk in your situation, consider the following questions:

- Could sharing certain information compromise the safety and security of program staff or program participants?

  For example, in very insecure areas, publishing the date and time of a distribution point might put people at risk if it allows criminals to plan an attack.

- Is this confidential information linked to supporters, donors, partners or staff?

  For example, sharing budget information is considered good practice, but individual staff salaries are normally considered confidential.

- Could sharing this information have potentially negative effects on the program?

  For example, in certain contexts publishing the list of selected program participants may result in these individuals being approached for loans, which would reduce the impact of the program. In this example, people living in the community would be best placed to advise if this practice is common and therefore a risk.

Examples from the field

Sometimes sharing budget information improves the program

As part of evaluating a transitional shelter (T-shelter) program, CRS asked community members and program participants to (1) give their definition of a good T-shelter and (2) compare this definition with CRS' T-Shelters.

However, these community members did not know the cost per T-shelter or the link between the cost per shelter and the number of families targeted. Participants had no way of assessing whether the T-shelters offered good value for the money.

Some participants replied that CRS' program should have provided larger shelters, with tiled floors, glass windows and indoor toilets. Their feedback was based on the unrealistic expectation that CRS had unlimited funds to spend. Participants did not have the information to factor in resource limitations or key resource allocation choices.

Sometimes information needs to be adapted before sharing it

In the past, CRS found in certain areas of Pakistan that sharing program-level financial information resulted in partners and staff being harassed by government entities, landlords and nonparticipants who wanted to influence the targeting process. Even top-line budget information such as "100,000 USD is available for the program to complete 10,000 infrastructure schemes" had potential to make staff targets.

To overcome this, CRS now shares financial information relevant to the items or package that its program participants receive—for example, the value of the livelihoods package, the budgeted value of a cash-for-work or infrastructure scheme and the actual amount spent in the community. This level of detail helps the committees better prioritize their needs and develop "bills of quantities" without endangering the program staff.

And sometimes it's responsible to withhold some information

Following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, 1.5 million people were forced to live in camps in and around Port-au-Prince. The high population density and ease with which people could move from one area to another to find aid made conducting distributions challenging. To serve families living in smaller camps in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, food distributions were conducted at night.

During late afternoon, teams would go into a small camp of 100 to 200 families to distribute tokens by tent. The teams did not say what the tokens were for or when the distribution would take place. At 10 p.m. or 11 p.m., teams returned with food, woke up people and conducted a distribution. This method, while counter to general good practice, was necessary in this context to prevent the influx of people that would have occurred if information had been readily shared or if the distributions had occurred during the day.

Step 4: Select your communication methods

Your context, objectives and target audience will determine what communication methods will be most suitable. Ideally, you should aim to prioritize two to four key methods, with a combination of oral and written methods.

1. **What methods will you use to communicate the messages to the target audience?**

2. **How will each method work?**

3. **Do the selected methods pose any risks to staff or community members?**

Written options and oral options

Written options

- Leaflets and flyers
- Notice boards and posters
- Distribution (or program participant) cards
- Agreements between the program and each program participant
- Short message service (SMS) messaging
- Newspapers
- Social media methods using the internet

Oral options:

- Megaphones
- Community meetings
- Community committees
- Radio
- Theater
- Hotlines or help desks
- Models and demonstrations
- Door-to-door community mobilizers

Select communication options to match the context

Reflect on the factors that will affect different communication methods

- **Local situation.** What existing communication channels are present in the community? What planned program activities could be used? How accessible is the community?
- **Target audience.** What methods do community members prefer? Is certain information for the whole community or only for program participants? What are the levels of literacy among men and women? How can more-vulnerable groups be reached?
- **Risk management.** Is there a risk that certain information will be misunderstood? Could certain communication methods put staff or community members at risk?
- **Available resources.** What staff and budget are available for communication?
- **Two-way communication.** Does the program want to gather feedback while sharing information? Are people likely to have questions?

Consult with community members as soon as the situation allows

- How do people currently find out what is happening?
- What methods would communities prefer staff to use?
- How should staff reach more groups that are vulnerable?

It's common to use several communication methods before and during emergency distributions:

- distribution cards, coupons or vouchers
- posters and banners
- leaflets in the distribution package
- megaphones
- face-to-face conversations with community volunteers and staff who go door to door or up and down the waiting lines

For more information see WORKSHEET: "Choose which communication methods to use."

Examples from the field

Take advantage of communication methods that already exist

After the Haiti earthquake, CRS conducted distributions in Port-au-Prince's Petionville Camp, where 40,000 people had taken shelter. Shortly after people started moving into the camp, a local pastor set up a stage and a sound system to preach every evening. CRS used the evening sermons and the sound system to relay information regarding services and safety to the camp population.

Use trusted channels

By speaking to people who were living in Kenya's camps, Internews found that although people heard some updates and news through the camp leaders, they didn't trust them as sources of information. Several sources estimated that information shared via existing networks took two to three weeks to reach its target audience, if it reached the audience at all. Instead, people trusted and preferred getting their information from radios, mobile phones and friends or family.[2]

Add to already-planned activities and materials—especially during emergencies

During emergency distributions in India, families received coupons that they could trade in for goods. CRS put its name, logo, mission and vision on the back of the coupons to promote transparency. Posters gave details about what was being distributed (with pictures, descriptions and quantities of each item).

In Haiti, CRS used the back of participant ID cards to convey information about a resettlement program:

> CRS and the mayor are implementing the *Ann Ale Lakay* program to help families find housing and move back to the neighborhoods where they lived before the earthquake. This service is free.
>
> If you want more information about the program, see one of the CRS notice boards. If you are unhappy with the program or you are struggling to get service, we want to know right away. You can call 277 or speak to one of our field staff to file a complaint.

2 Matt Abud, with Jacobo Quintanilla and Deborah Ensor, *Dadaab, Kenya: Humanitarian Communications and Information Needs Assessment Among Refugees in the Camps; Findings, Analysis & Recommendations* (n.p.: Internews, 2011), http://www.internews.org/research-publications/dadaab-kenya-humanitarian-communications-and-information-needs-assessment-amon/.

Step 5: Plan for two-way communication

Two-way communication promotes dialogue and allows organizations to gather ideas, suggestions and feedback from target communities. This can help you adjust your programs to better fit people's needs. You can gather feedback formally (for example, during community meetings or via a help desk or hotline) or informally as part of other activities.

Field staff are the most likely to receive feedback. This feedback needs to reach the program manager, who can then make a decision about whether to adjust the program and how to respond to the communities. Responding to feedback shows the communities that their feedback has been considered and used, even if the answer to the community's request is "no."

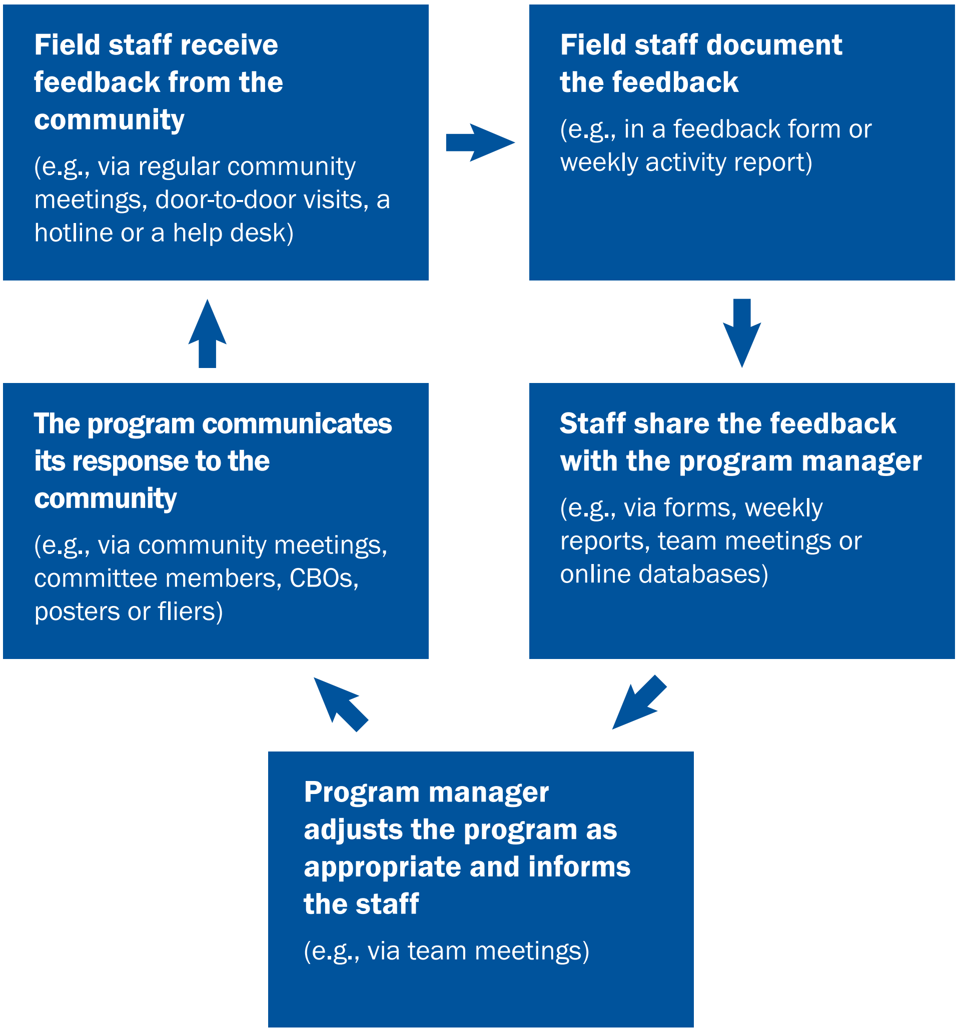
1. **Which of your communication methods allow dialogue with the community and opportunities for feedback?**

2. **How will field staff collect and document feedback?**

3. **How will program managers receive the feedback? How often?**

4. **How will the program communicate its response to the community?**

A basic feedback cycle



Each step in this basic feedback cycle is important for capturing and using feedback. Teams should agree about how each step will happen during the program and ensure that field staff understand that the program managers value the community's feedback. Otherwise, the process might get stuck in the middle of the cycle.

See "Additional resources" for guidance on how to set up a formal feedback mechanism (including complaint and response mechanisms).

Examples from the field

Provide multiple channels for feedback

Desmiati Pondok belongs to a T-shelter committee in Sumatra, Indonesia. She has noticed that it's important for people to have multiple ways of asking questions and reporting problems:

> "I and people in my community are aware of the 24-hour help-line service. The number is clear and it is visible on the road to our village. Many people in the community come to talk to me or others on the committee whenever they have problems, issues or questions about the project. Most of their questions were about the cash grant distribution date. Because CRS staff often visited us, we could also contact them."

Build feedback collection into monitoring activities

During emergency distributions in 2011–2012 in India, the program collected feedback on the distribution process through exit interviews at each site. Focus groups in selected locations provided additional feedback about how people used the relief items.

The team also used postcards to collect feedback. The program gave prestamped and preaddressed postcards to a random selection of participants, asking them to write down their comments and put the postcards in the mail to CRS.

Emergency distributions commonly use help desks and postdistribution staff meetings to share feedback from community members.

Step 6: Establish your time frame

Communication at all stages of the program is important. People need to be informed about key developments so they will be able to make the most of the program. You should communicate with community members throughout the program, especially before starting key activities, before making changes to the program and upon encountering delays.

1. **What are the key activities in your program? Which ones need to be preceded by information sharing?**

2. **When will you share updates with the different audiences?**

Activities that require information sharing before or during implementation

- Selecting program participants
- Distributing items
- Forming committees or groups
- Conducting satisfaction reviews and evaluations
- Facilitating participatory processes (e.g., designing a latrine or mapping a community)
- Starting new activities at the community level

You might also consider the following activities:

- Hold a community meeting every month to provide a forum for ongoing dialogue.
- Provide an update on progress and planned activities of the last six months, after each planning meeting.
- Share findings after the midterm evaluation and satisfaction surveys.

Step 7: Draft a budget

Depending on your budget, you may need to be more strategic about when to invest in expensive communication methods such as mass media. Many methods are inexpensive, such as sharing information at community meetings, creating simple posters and working with community committees.

Sometimes program budgets and country budgets have a budget line for media or external relations expenses. It would be worth checking whether this is available.

1. **What is your budget? Can costs be integrated into program budgets as the program budgets are developed?**

2. **How much do you expect your plan will cost?**

Item	Cost per unit	Number of units	Total cost	Notes

Example of a communications budget

The below table is an example of a communications budget. You should include the communications budget in the program budget.

Please note that the items and costs are only intended as examples. The list of items is not exhaustive. Costs need to be determined locally.

Item	Cost per unit	Number of units	Total cost	Notes
Artist to develop pictures to accompany written information	30.00	4	120.00	4 pictures for the program poster
Printing of leaflets, posters and participant agreements	0.20	1,000	200.00	One leaflet for each program participant
T-shirt printing so that staff are easily identifiable	10.00	20	200.00	Two T-shirts per staff member
Staff ID cards, so staff are identifiable	5.00	10	50.00	
Refreshments as part of trainings on better communication with community committees	7.00	70	490.00	Assume 10 members for 7 committees—snacks only
Cost of physical items—such as notice boards, megaphones	120.00	2	240.00	Notice boards for the 2 sites
Cost of sound truck—to go around neighborhoods with messages	50.00	24	1,200.00	Sound truck to visit both sites each month for 12 months
TOTAL			**2,500.00**	

Step 8: Implement the plan

You may need to use a variety of activities in order to roll out your communication plan. The activities might be one-time, periodic or ongoing.

Consider the order in which different people will need to know information. For example, staff may need to be informed before they can explain the program to others. Often, programs need to inform community leaders and other community groups before informing the wider community.

1. **What key activities will you need to complete in order to roll out this communication plan?**

2. **Do certain target groups need to be informed before others?**

3. **Who will take the lead for each? Think about who is responsible for**

   - managing the communication plan and sustaining the approach,
   - developing communication materials,
   - sharing messages with communities and gathering feedback,
   - communicating with other stakeholders (e.g., government departments, local NGOs and international NGOs) and
   - reviewing whether the communication approach is effective.

Activity	Lead	Time frame											
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

Example of activities in an implementation plan

The below table is an example of how to schedule activities in an implementation plan. The list of items is not exhaustive.

Activity	Lead	Time frame											
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Develop a communication plan, with community's input about preferred communication methods.	Program manager	✓											
Develop a poster to summarize the program.	Program officer	✓											
Develop a program participant agreement (PPA).	Program manager	✓											
Brief staff on the program and how to explain it to others.	Program manager		✓										
Distribute the posters and explain PPA to those selected.	Field staff		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Work with the partner to identify location for community meetings.	Program officer		✓										
Hold bimonthly community meetings.	M&E staff		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓
Develop an updated poster to communicate progress to date.	Program officer								✓				
Review the communication plan. Are current communication methods effective? If people feel well informed about the program, what additional information would they like to receive?	M&E staff						✓						

Step 9: Monitor the results and look for ways to improve

Review your communication plan during and after its implementation. Look for ways to improve. Did people receive your message? How did they respond?

The review can be either a stand-alone activity or one part of an overall program review. Before you implement the plan, you should decide with your team how and when to review the plan. This reminds staff that it's important to learn and improve over time.

1. **What methods will you use to decide whether each communication approach is effective?**

2. **Who will be responsible for developing the review criteria and making the review happen?**

Methods for reviewing whether a communication approach is effective

Review your approach by making observations, by speaking to staff and by speaking to community members.

Observe

You can observe whether communication approaches are effective by making field visits and suboffice visit; by looking at reports, databases and communication materials; by observing community meetings; or by taking advantage of other opportunities to observe programs in action.

What to look for

- ☐ Target groups understand the language and words that staff and communication materials use.
- ☐ The communication method conveys enough information.
- ☐ The information is accessible. (It reaches all vulnerable groups, and there are few barriers that might prevent people from understanding it.)
- ☐ The program documents and analyzes feedback.

Talk to staff

You can find out whether managers and field-level staff understand the communication plan by talking to them during meetings, informal interviews, field visit or focus-group discussions.

What to look for

- ☐ Staff understand the overall program.
- ☐ Staff can explain what communication methods the program uses and what information the program is sharing.
- ☐ Staff can provide an example of how the program used feedback to make improvements.

Sample questions

- Can you explain the program? *(Ask for details: How are people selected for the program? What are the program's main goals, activities and deliverables? What is the time frame?)*
- What do you tell community members and program participants about the program?
- How do you communicate this information?
- When do you communicate with community members and participants?
- What is your role in informing communities about the program?
- How can community members provide feedback?

- How do you share feedback with decision makers? *(Can you give an example of when the program used community feedback to improve the program?)*
- How do you think we could improve the way we communicate with communities?

Talk to community members

You can find out whether community members are receiving the information that they need by asking them for feedback during community meetings, informal interviews, staff visits, focus-group discussions and surveys. Be sure to talk with people who are more vulnerable.

What to look for

- ☐ There is evidence that all target groups are receiving information in a timely manner and that they understand the information.
- ☐ The program uses communication methods that community members prefer.
- ☐ All vulnerable groups have equal access to information.
- ☐ Community members feel satisfied with the amount of communication.
- ☐ Community members have the opportunity to give feedback, and they feel that their comments will be taken into consideration.

Sample questions

- What do you know about this project and the organizations that are running it? *(Ask for details: How are people selected for the program? What are the program's main goals, activities and deliverables? When will the program end?)*
- How did you find out this information?
- How would you like us to share information about this project with you?
- Which people or groups in this community know the most about the project? Which people or groups know the least? *(Why do some people know more than others? What are some of the challenges that prevent people from accessing information?)*
- What else would you like to know about the project? *(Do you have any questions for us now?)*
- Has the program given you ways to share your feedback and opinions with us? Have we responded to feedback?

Example from the field

Reviewing your approach reduces time wasted on ineffective methods

Following the Haiti 2010 earthquake, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent used a number of methods to share information about their programs and practical information about health, weather and cholera. They used radio shows, SMS mass messaging, phone lines (via call centers and recorded messages), field visits by staff and posters.

An evaluation of their communication efforts in 2011 found 74 percent of people had received information from the Red Cross. But women and people who were more than 50 years old had less information, highlighting a need to put extra effort into reaching these groups.

People preferred receiving information via word of mouth and radio. Only 5.5 percent of people who were surveyed reported that they received information through posters, even though staff commonly used posters, which took a considerable amount of time to develop. As a result of this feedback, staff adjusted their approach. They stopped using posters and instead introduced a Red Cross sound truck to visit camps and communities with messages and music.[3]

3 Catherine Chazaly, *Beneficiary Communications Evaluation: Haiti Earthquake Operation 2011* (Geneva: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2011), http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/disasters/reports/IFRC-Haiti-Beneficiary-Communications-Evaluation-EN.pdf.