For emergency programs and
development programs

COMMUNICATION TOOLBOX

Practical guidance for program managers to improve communication with participants and community members

CRS
CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

Since 1943, Catholic Relief Services has held the privilege of serving the poor and disadvantaged overseas. Without regard to race, creed or nationality, CRS provides emergency relief in the wake of disasters. CRS works to uphold human dignity and promote better standards of living through development projects in fields such as agriculture, education, health, microfinance, peacebuilding, and water and sanitation.

CRS also works throughout the United States to expand the knowledge and action of Catholics and others interested in issues of international peace and justice. Our programs and resources respond to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' call to live in solidarity as one human family.

ISBN-13: 978-1-61492-115-8
ISBN-10: 1-61492-115-6

All photos by CRS staff.

Catholic Relief Services
228 West Lexington Street
Baltimore, MD 21201-3413 USA

Download this and other CRS publications at www.crsprogramquality.org.

Acknowledgments: Emily Rogers led the development of this toolbox. She was the accountability coordinator for CRS in Haiti from December 2010 to June 2012. The toolbox would not have been possible without valuable input from Guy Sharrock, Carla Fajardo, Lisa Beyl, Amber West and the Sindh protection team, Susan Romanski, Donal Reilly, Valerie Destin, Taina Camy, Nathalie Francisque, Mariane Mathia, Deb Ingersoll, Hilary DuBose, Pauline Acayo, Josh Tong and Rebeka Martensen.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Have you experienced programs that . . .

- start activities in communities without formally introducing the staff to the people they are trying to assist?
- expect people to understand activities as they happen, with no opportunities for them to ask questions or provide feedback in advance?
- expect people to actively influence programs they do not really understand?
- expect people to provide feedback and evaluate activities without communicating what the program is trying to achieve?
- cause conflict at the community level because people don't know why some are benefiting from the program while others are not?

If yes, then this toolbox is for you!

What is the toolbox?

The *Communication Toolbox* offers practical guidance for program managers who want to communicate more effectively with program participants and community members. The tools are designed for emergency programs and development programs.

The toolbox focuses on communicating about programs as a way to improve accountability to those communities.

This toolbox was inspired by programs in Haiti, where Catholic Relief Services observed that relatively simple, low-cost activities that promoted transparent communication substantially improved programs. Programs that did not emphasize the importance of sharing information with communities often faced challenges in implementation.

How should I use the toolbox?

If you need to design a communication plan in an emergency situation, begin with the following tools:

- TEMPLATE: "Develop a communication plan in nine steps" (page 3)
- FACILITATOR'S NOTES: "How to work with staff to develop a communication plan" (page 26)
- CHECKLIST: "Standards for communication in emergency situations" (page 51)

If you need to design a communication plan for a development program, begin with the template and the facilitator's notes, and consider the following tools:

- WORKSHEET: "Choose which communication methods to use" (page 28)
- TIPS: "Implement your communication methods" (page 35)
- TIPS: "Include communication responsibilities in job descriptions" (page 46)
- CHECKLIST: "Standards for communication in development programs" (page 54)

If you want to improve a certain aspect of your current communication approach, you can skip the other tools and go directly to the one that you need.

For information about why you should develop a communication plan, see the following tools:

- HANDOUT: “Why develop a communication plan” (page 47)
- CASE STUDY: “How a resettlement program in Haiti used a communication plan to improve results” (page 49)

In order to get the most out of the toolbox, readers should already have an understanding of the program that they will be implementing and the context in which the program will take place.

This toolbox draws on recognized good practice and on examples from CRS’ programs. The content and guidance are not specific to one context. They can be used worldwide.

A note on terminology

Community: For brevity, the toolbox often refers to the “community.” In reality, every community is made up of individual women, men, girls and boys who fall into different social-economic groups. Individuals may be young or elderly, abled or disabled, program participants or nonparticipants. Communities include local leaders, members of community-based organizations and members of local government.

Program participants: This term refers to the people whom the program aims to assist. Other commonly used terms include *beneficiaries*, *clients* and *people affected by disaster*.

Staff: Throughout the toolbox, *staff* may be read as CRS staff, partner staff or a combination of both, depending on your program.

A note on partnerships

The toolbox is applicable to programs implemented by CRS or partners and can be used by either to ensure good communication between the implementing organization and communities. Teams of CRS staff may support partners to develop a communication plan as part of capacity strengthening.

Programs are more likely to succeed when CRS and its partners communicate with each other. CRS and partners could use this toolbox—especially the template for a communication plan—when jointly deciding on a communication approach.

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.

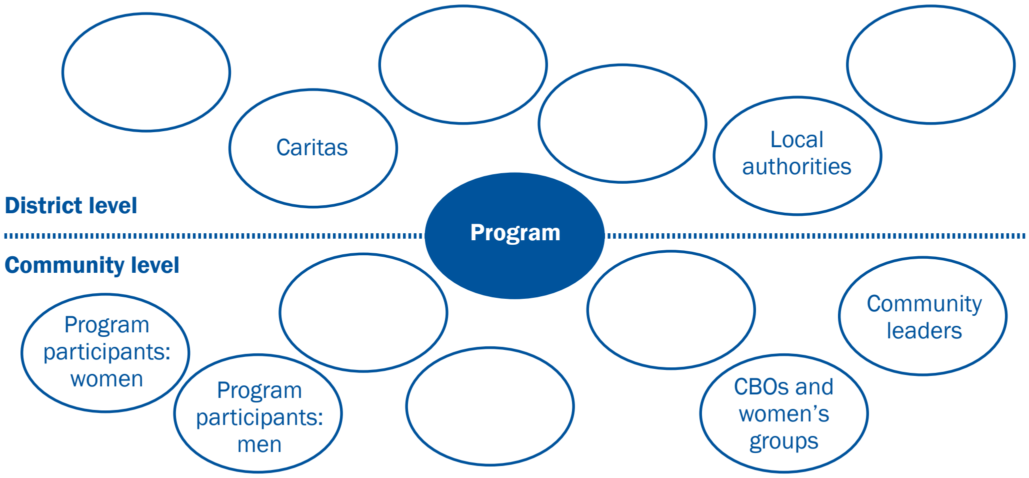
Who needs to know details about your program? (Be as specific as possible—will these audiences help to achieve your objectives?)

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.

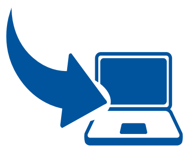
Identifying the different stakeholders at community level can help you decide which ones have similar information needs.



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.

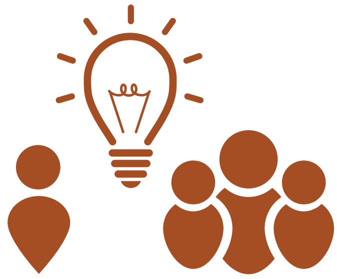
An evaluation of their communication efforts in 2011 found 74 percent of people had received information from the Red Cross. But women and people who were more than 50 years old had less information, highlighting a need to put extra effort into reaching these groups.

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.

FACILITATOR'S NOTES

How to work with staff to develop a communication plan



Program managers can use these notes to develop or improve a communication plan with field teams, including partner staff. The notes have been adapted from a session that CRS held in Pakistan.

Purpose

By the end of the session, participants will

- understand why communication is important;
- develop a communication plan for their program, building on their experience and knowledge of the program context;
- understand the communication approach that will be used; and
- understand their role in the communication plan.

Duration

You will need 2–3 hours to conduct the session.

Timing

It would be ideal to conduct the session at the beginning of the program. Program managers can also adapt these notes to use after the program has started, allowing teams to review and build on current practice. Other necessary activities

The facilitator should reserve time to

- consult with appropriate communities (for example questions, see WORKSHEET: "Choose which communication methods to use"),
- document the communication plan and
- share the communication plan with appropriate staff.

Preparing for the session

- Read this document and the template, "Develop a communication plan in nine steps." Identify the parts that are the most relevant to your program.
- Review the program's information (for example, its budget details and key activities).
- Identify ways that teams currently communicate with program participants and community members. This will enable you to recognize and build on existing good practice and reflect on lessons learned.
- Understand your staff's attitudes about two-way communication. This will help you to guide the team toward the right mind-set, if necessary.

Conducting the session

1. Set the scene *(optional)*

To help staff understand the importance of information sharing, you may choose to start the session with 20–30 minutes of discussion about one of the two scenarios below.

Scenario 1: After Cyclone Sidr in southern Bangladesh, one man who was selected as a beneficiary said, *If I know about the items that will be distributed tomorrow then I can decide if I should go to the distribution point or stay and fix my house.*[4]

- What does he mean? How does the lack of information affect him and the program?
- Think about [*insert recent emergency that staff are aware of*]. If you were living in the affected area, what information would you want to know about an emergency relief program?
- What would happen if you and others in the community did not have access to this information? How would you feel? What would you do?

Scenario 2: Can you think of an example in which there was misunderstanding between an NGO and a community? [*Or give a concrete example from your area to start the discussion.*]

- What happened?
- How did the misunderstanding affect the community, the program and the program staff?
- How could the misunderstanding have been prevented?

2. Introduce the purpose of the session and plan

Explain to participants the purpose of the communication plan and describe the nine steps in the template.

3. Create the communication plan for your program

Go through each of the nine steps and answer the questions in the template. You may find it helpful to use a projector to display the questions, and print out relevant parts of the template for discussion.

For each of the template's steps that are relevant to your program, reflect on current practices and the participants' experiences. What works well? What could be improved?

4. Record conclusions and decisions as you go

It is important to put the plan in writing so the team can refer to it throughout the program. Every plan will look different. You can organize your plan by using a combination of tables, text and diagrams.

4 Paraphrased from "HAP International," Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, http://www.hapinternational.org.

WORKSHEET

Choose which communication methods to use

This worksheet will help you choose two to four communication methods that are appropriate for your program. Look at the chart below, which lists some common communication methods. Then answer the questions to decide which methods are right for your plan.

Common communication methods

The chart on the next page lists some common written and oral communication methods. Some methods are better for reaching a broad audience. Other methods are better for reaching a targeted audience.

Be sure to think about local options, too. In Haiti, for example, programs could ask traditional Rara bands to go through a community in order to draw people out of their houses. Then the community could enjoy the music and hear the program's messages.

Factors to consider when choosing communication methods

Local situation

1. **What methods do community members and program participants say they would prefer you to use?**

   Speak to different community members. Use methods they say would work for them.

2. **What methods are already common that you could build on?**

   For example, if most people have access to a radio or mobile phone, can you communicate this way? If people regularly go to meetings, can you share information at the meetings, too?

3. **What planned program activities can be used for greater information sharing?**

   For example, if the program is gathering people to launch activities, take the opportunity to explain more about the program. If program participants will be given a distribution card, what extra information can you share on the card itself?

Written methods | Oral methods

Broad audience | Targeted audience

Written methods

Newspapers
E.g., to share information about who the agency is and what the agency has achieved in the last year.

Notice boards
E.g., to display key project information in central locations.

Social media via internet
E.g., to communicate with program participants via a targetted website, Facebook page or Twitter account. Applicable for countries with high levels of internet access or smart phone ownership.

Leaflets and flyers
E.g., to convey key messages about projects, share design details (e.g., shelter design) or address rumors.

Distribution cards, program participant folders or agreements
E.g., to show a commitment to someone who is selected for a program and to share relevant information.

Mobile phones via voice and SMS
E.g., to send mass SMS messages about activities to participants or leaders, or to call targeted individuals and share information—asking them to spread the message.

Oral methods

Megaphones
E.g., to announce the beginning of an activity or to inform people at distribution points about the items or process.

Theater
E.g., to share programmatic messages (e.g., on hygiene promotion) and key information about the agency, the program and the accountability people can expect.

Radio
E.g., to broadcast programmatic messages and general information about the agency and programs. Listeners can participate in call-in sessions.

Community meetings
E.g., to introduce new activities, provide program updates and respond to questions.

Community committees or groups that share information on behalf of the programs
E.g., to share information via groups that have access to different sections of the community (women, youths, committees, CBOs, etc.).

Hotlines or help desks
E.g., to give information, answer questions and collect feedback by phone or in person.

Models and demonstrations
E.g., to show building designs, a water-purification process or how distributed items can be used.

Community mobilizers
E.g., to reach out to more vulnerable groups or individuals within a community, or to make door-to-door visits.

One-way communication method

Two-way communication is possible with this method

Two-way communication is likely with this method

4. **How accessible is the community?**

   For example, mountains and rivers might restrict how often and what times of the year you can physically visit a community. Security might affect whether you can visit certain areas. If it's hard to visit a community, consider using radio or SMS messaging, which can be good ways to share information with key community members and committees.

Target audience

5. **Who needs to know this information? The wider community or only program participants?**

   Certain methods, such as radio, megaphones and notice boards, target the whole community. Sometimes a program may want to give additional information to participants (for example, information about their roles and responsibilities as part of the program). You could use program participant agreements, distribution cards or targeted meetings to communicate this information.

6. **What are the levels of literacy among men and women?**

   Use oral and visual communication methods if less than 100 percent of the target audience is literate. Do not rely on written methods alone. Oral and visual methods include speaking at community meetings, giving demonstrations and creating illustrated posters. Test the visual methods to ensure that people understand the pictures.

7. **How can we communicate with groups that are more vulnerable?**

   Traditional methods (such as communicating via community leaders) and methods that cost money (such as buying a newspaper) may exclude vulnerable groups. It often takes extra effort to reach these groups. For example, you might need to go door to door or work with community groups, such as a women's group, who can pass information on to people who are hard to reach.

8. **Does the program need to communicate with men and women equally?**

   Certain channels, such as by communicating via church groups or women's groups, may not reach men. Other channels may not reach women.

Risk management

9. **If information is misunderstood, will it put the program at risk? Is there a risk of rumors or distortions if people pass the information from person to person?**

   For sensitive information that is more likely to be misunderstood or distorted, use written methods (such as leaflets and posters) to complement oral methods. A good example of sensitive information is a program's selection criteria and selection process.

10. **Will certain communication methods put staff or community members at risk?**

    For example, will inviting mothers and children to a central meeting point put them at risk when they travel home? Work with groups to identify how to minimize risk.

Available resources

11. **How much money, staff time and other resources are available for the program?**

    Some methods need more initial financial investment (such as developing a radio message). Other methods may need sustained staff time (for example, keeping a notice board up to date). Door-to-door mobilization often requires the most staff time.

Two-way versus one-way communication

12. **Does the program want to gather feedback while sharing information?**

    Community meetings and door-to-door visits create an opportunity for dialogue when staff are present. Hotlines provide an opportunity for community members to contact the agency even when staff are not in their community. Programs should only seek feedback if they believe they can use it. If the program has already made a decision or if it is not possible to change certain aspects of the program, then collecting feedback can raise false expectations.

13. **Are people likely to have questions about the information that the program shares?**

    Two-way methods enable people to ask questions and feel heard. They also allow field staff to respond to people's questions, comments and concerns.

Advantages and disadvantages of written and oral methods

Reflecting on the advantages and disadvantages of written and oral methods will help you identify what combination of methods might be most appropriate for your program.

Written methods

Advantages

- Presents a formalized, consistent message to communities. This can reduce the risk of misunderstandings and rumors. (E.g., publishing distribution times helps assure people that the distribution will happen.)
- Helps make formal agreements (e.g., between an agency and a committee).
- Lasts for a long time.
- Makes it easier to follow up because there is a paper trail. (E.g., you can more easily identify program participants if they receive a receipt after registering.)
- Makes it easier to display information (e.g., designs, pictures or other visual data).

Disadvantages

- Needs higher levels of literacy or relies on some people to read to others.
- Takes time to develop the materials.
- Makes plans more concrete, which may present a challenge in quickly changing contexts.
- Tends to result in one-way communication.

Oral methods

Advantages

- Allows communication with target populations that have high levels of illiteracy.
- Allows staff to tailor their message to the audience.
- Prompts dialogue between field staff and the community.
- Provides the opportunity for people to ask questions and for staff to hear suggestions from the community.

Disadvantages

- Sometimes leads to misunderstandings, distortions and rumors as messages pass from person to person.
- Requires staff to be briefed to ensure consistency of the message.
- Often relies on key contact people at the community level, who may not deliver the message to the intended audience.
- Requires the audience to be present at a given time. If people are out during the day, they may miss staff visits or community meetings.

Consulting with communities to identify their preferred methods

Staff can ask community members the following questions to identify which methods of communication they would prefer and which methods might be more effective. If the program has already started, staff can revise these questions to review the effectiveness of existing communication methods.

1. How do you currently find out about what is happening in your community?

2. Which groups of people in the community are generally more informed about what is happening? Which groups are normally less informed? Why?

3. What communication methods would you prefer that we use to keep you informed about this program?
   - You may give some examples of different communication methods to help start the discussion.
   - You may wish to discuss written and oral options, and then ask people which ones they prefer.
   - You may also need to discuss the resource limitations or constraints your program is operating under. For example, if people say they would like you to come door to door every week and the program site is 5 hours away, you may need to discuss whether this is feasible.
   - You should explore details about preferred communication methods. For example, if certain groups prefer community meetings, how often should they occur? Is there a day or time that is more convenient? If people prefer to receive information via a notice board, where should it be placed?

4. Who might be excluded if we use the communication methods that you have selected?

   Explore issues that might affect people's access to information (including time, resources, mobility and culture). It is important to consult different vulnerable groups as part of this process.

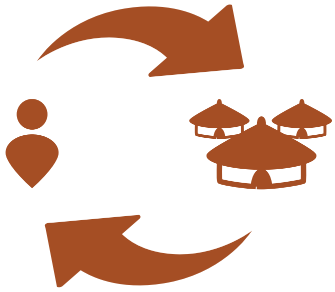
5. What would you like to know about the program right now? What would you like us to keep you updated about?

   Another way of asking this is, "What questions do you have about the program?"

6. How would you like to provide feedback to us about the program?

TIPS

Implement your communication methods



You've selected the program's communication methods, but how should you implement them? Here are some tips on communicating via community meetings, notice boards, written materials, community-based organizations, SMS messaging, radio and megaphones.

Community meetings

Community meetings give programs an opportunity to invite a wider population and to hear feedback. Programs can hold community meetings at regular intervals, such as every two months, to create opportunities for dialogue. These meetings should not be about individual sectors but instead should be cross-sectoral, so community members need only attend one meeting to understand the program's holistic approach.

How to hold community meetings

1. Agree to a plan

Work with local leaders and others to organize and run meetings. Consider what role they can play (in order to empower them as part of this activity) and what role the agency or partners should fill.

Agree to a location, time of day and duration. The meeting should last no more than 1.5 hours. Keep in mind times when most people will be free.

Identify key topics to discuss during the meeting, assign responsibilities to staff and fill out the form titled "Planning tool for community meetings."

2. Invite stakeholders

Invite people to the meeting in advance. Think about how you will invite people, especially how to invite harder-to-reach individuals.

Invite other groups that are working in the same area if you think they may want to give an update or make an announcement.

3. Conduct the meeting

Use different techniques and methods during the meeting to convey different messages and keep it interesting. For example, meetings can include

- question-and-answer sessions,
- role playing and drama,
- visual materials and
- several speakers.

Keep to the time limit, and ensure that a staff member is recording participants' questions and feedback.

Set a date for the next meeting.

4. **Follow up on feedback**

   Share the participants' feedback with the appropriate manager. At the next meeting, tell the participants how the program used their feedback.

Planning tool for community meetings

Field teams can fill out this form to plan successful and productive community meetings.

Meeting's date: ______________________________

Meeting's time: ______________________________

Meeting's location: ______________________________

Who will be invited? Which zones are they from?

What is the meeting's objective?

What is the meeting's agenda?
List key topics for discussion.

Who is the meeting's facilitator?

Who is the meeting's note taker?

What other staff will attend?
List their names and their roles in the meeting.

How will the organizers inform people about the meeting and invite them to it?
Who will take the lead?

What needs to be done to ensure the venue is suitable and ready for the meeting?
Who will take the lead?

What messages or materials need to be prepared for the meeting?
Who will take the lead?

Feedback tool for community meetings

During each meeting, the note taker should fill out this form to record the information that people share. Afterward, the meeting's facilitator should check the form and sign it if the notes are accurate. Then the supervisor should read the notes, write comments and sign the form.

Meeting's date: ____________________

Meeting's location: ____________________

Number of men: _____ Number of women: _____

Type of participants *(e.g., beneficiaries, leaders, masons, carpenters, community members, community-based organization)*: ____________________

____

Facilitators' names: ____________________

Main points discussed in the meeting:

Suggestions/feedback from participants:

Action needed, and person responsible:

Comments from the facilitator:

Next meeting set for *(date)*: ____________________

Name and title of facilitator *(print)*: ____________________

Facilitator's signature: ____________________

Supervisor's comments and signature:

Written materials and notice boards

How to develop written materials

1. Make a plan

- Develop key messages and submit them for approval.
- Decide what visual material you need.

2. Create the materials

- Translate key messages into the local language.
- Work with an artist, if needed, to develop visual materials.
- Combine the materials to create posters, flyers or leaflets.

3. Test the materials

- Show the materials to a few community members.
- Ask questions to find out whether they understand the text and images.
- Look for potential misunderstandings, and revise the materials to make the message clear.

4. Print and distribute the materials

Print the materials, taking into account how they will be used. (For example, materials for notice boards need to be waterproof to withstand rain.)

How to set up effective notice boards

1. Follow the above process

Read the steps in the above list, “How to develop written materials.”

2. Remember your audience

All materials should be written in the community’s language. Avoid using acronyms, initialisms and NGO jargon.

3. Create an eye-catching design

Think about how you can display information using both words and pictures. Here are some examples:

- Use “before” and “after” photos or a timeline of photos to show a project’s progress.
- Include diagrams to show the design of transitional shelters.
- Illustrate key messages with drawings.

4. Agree to a location

Decide on the location the notice boards with the community. Notice boards should be in central locations where lots of people can easily read them.

5. **Ensure community ownership**

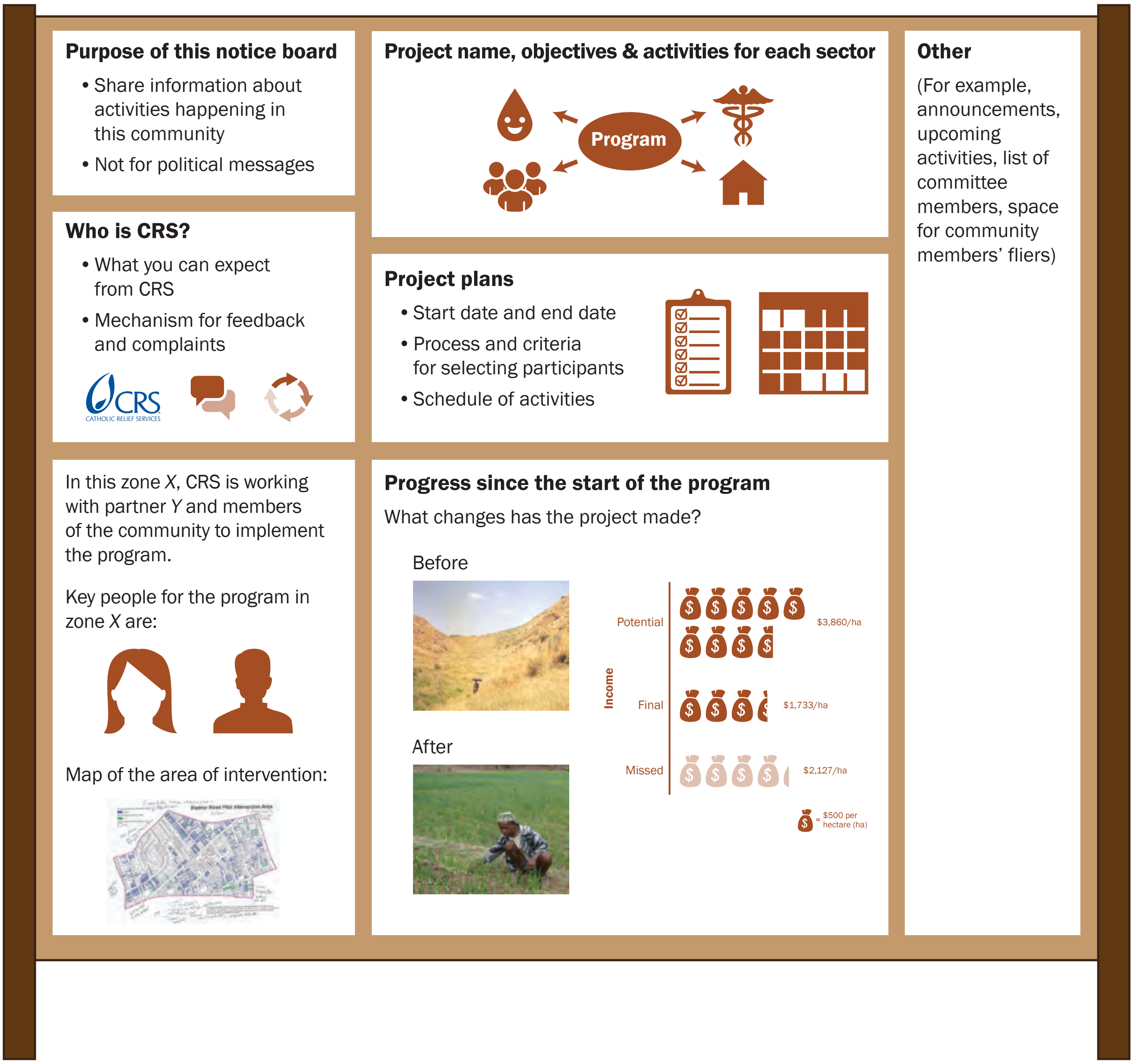
   The community needs to take ownership of the notice board. Here are some ways to accomplish this:

   - Identify someone in the community who can help maintain the board.
   - Encourage others in the community to use the board for community announcements.
   - Ask local children or groups to decorate the board.

6. **Update the notice board**

   Nominate a staff member to regularly update the notice board.

Example of a notice board



Committees, CBOs and other groups

These groups can not only assist with program activities but also share information with the community members and gather feedback. It is essential for the agency and partners to work closely with community groups in order for this relationship to succeed.

How to use groups to spread your message

1. Identify community leaders

Before visiting the community, try to get the contact information of a community leader.

During your first visit to the community, identify known community leaders (e.g., teachers, activists, barbers, shopkeepers). Keep in mind that these are not necessarily the most vocal people in the community. Make observations: Which people seem to be respected by other community members? Who do people listen to during meetings?

2. Establish a committee if one doesn't exist

Explain that there should be a representative from each group so that everyone's voice can be heard. If it is necessary to do so for cultural reasons, create two committees—one for men and one for women.

Ask the community members to either select committee members or give feedback about them to ensure that these people are respected by the community.

3. Discuss mutual expectations

- Explain the project to the committee members.
- Discuss roles and responsibilities with the committee.
- Ask committee members to sign an agreement with CRS or the partner.
- Exchange contact information so you can reach each other more easily.

4. Share information

- When you need to ensure that a message reaches the community, share the message with two or three of the committee members, in person or by phone.
- Share the committee's feedback with the rest of the program's staff. (For example, "Community members are harvesting rice. Now is not a good time to conduct trainings.")

SMS messaging

SMS messaging can be an effective way to quickly share many types of key information with a large number of people. For example, you can use it to

- announce the time and location of a distribution, or other key activities;
- inform people that they have or have not been selected as program participants;
- reassure community members (e.g., if an office closes for security reasons, SMS can explain why and state that CRS hopes to reopen the office when the situation is calmer);
- communicate key CRS values (e.g., that all aid is free).

Messages may be sent via the local phone network or the internet, and both methods are quick to set up.

Method 1: To use the local phone network to send messages, you will need a computer and either a mobile phone or a modem with a local SIM card. The software commonly used for this type of messaging is FrontlineSMS (http://www.frontlinesms.com/). Charges per SMS are based on the mobile phone's local network rates.

Method 2: To use internet to send messages, you will need a computer with internet access. Two services are Clickatell (https://www.clickatell.com/) and BulkSMS (http://www.bulksms.com/). Charges per SMS are based on fixed rates, regardless of country.

Test your SMS system to ensure that you can easily and quickly send a large number of messages. This will enable you to fix glitches *before* you need to send time-sensitive messages. In Haiti, CRS found that internet-based messaging was more effective at sending SMS to thousands of people.

How to send SMS messages

1. **Create a database of mobile-phone numbers**

   Collect mobile numbers as part of program activities.

   Set up or expand an existing database to store the numbers. Linking each mobile number to other details about a person (such as whether the person is a program participant, nonparticipant, leader, man or woman) will allow you to send specific messages to certain groups as well as to send certain messages to everyone.

2. **Compose the message**

   Use simple language. Your message might need to be no more than 160 characters long. It will depend on your phone network's requirements.

   Make sure that the message is clear. Show it to field staff or community members, and ask questions to see whether they understand.

3. **Send the message**

   Test the message by sending it to one mobile phone. Make sure that there aren't any strange symbols. Then send the final message to the group.

4. **Check for responses**

   People may respond to the SMS. Check for incoming messages. You might receive feedback that should be responded to.

Radio

Radio shows are normally 30–60 minutes long with content that changes regularly. You can use radio in several ways. Here are some examples:

- Talk shows normally have a presenter with guests, phone-in segments, music, competitions and other features to make them engaging and interesting. Each talk show may focus on a different topic and theme.
- Dramas or radio plays can be used to communicate messages through storytelling. The program can develop characters and explore different topics in each show. Normally, programs should create a series of episodes and broadcast each episode once or twice.
- Short radio spots or jingles (3–4 minutes long) can be broadcast during and between shows, at prearranged times.

How to develop material for radio

1. **Assess the situation**

   Assess whether target communities have radios. If they do, how many do they have, and do they use them? Is radio one of the main sources of communication? At what time of day do people listen? Look for differences between men, women and other groups.

   Gather data on available radio stations, their current number of listeners and the cost of running shows, spots and jingles.

2. **Train a team to develop the material**

   Work with the radio staff, partners and community leaders to select who should be trained to develop the shows, spots or jingles. Consider what role the community can play and what role CRS needs to take.

   Plan and conduct the training with facilitators who have experience in developing material for radio. It usually takes 4–5 days to teach a team how to produce radio material.

   During the training, participants should develop the radio show, spot or jingle. Consider how you will encourage people to listen to your broadcasts. For example, you could play popular music, broadcast drama and sketches or hold competitions (and offer prizes).

3. **Test the material and the messages**

   Test the material a few times with community members in different locations. Allow the listeners to ask questions and make recommendations. Make corrections before using the material.

4. **Sign contracts with radio stations**

   Make agreements with different radio stations, specifying

   - the days and times when they will run the show, spots or jingle, and
   - how long the material will be.

   Inform the target communities of the dates and times to listen (for example, by putting up banners in strategic places or by sharing this information via the radio).

5. **Go live!**

   If you are conducting radio talk shows,

   - select appropriate people from different communities to participate,
   - allow listeners to call in so they can make comments or ask questions,
   - ensure that the show's hosts and guests are punctual about arriving at the studio and
   - if you are using recorded CDs, ensure that people are available in the studio who have been trained on how to operate the equipment.

   If you are using spots or jingles, the radio presenters will play them at prearranged times.

Megaphones

Megaphones are especially useful in crowded settings, such as camps and emergency distribution sites. In all case, but particularly in a distribution setting, it is important to do several things:

- Develop clear messages. Each team member needs to give the same message to reduce confusion and keep people calm.
- Test the message and the messengers.
- Keep people at the back of the queues informed about what is happening. If people at the back are not kept informed, there is a danger that they will push to the front and compromise people's safety.
- Make sure you have spare batteries.

Examples from the field

Ensure that community committees do not become gatekeepers

In Pakistan, CRS uses community committees as the primary way to share messages with communities and to modify projects. Staff understand the risks of relying on committees. Committee members may not pass on the information to the community, for example, or the information may not reach groups that are more vulnerable. Staff implemented several solutions:

- To clarify the role and expectations of the committee, CRS signed an agreement with the committee members.
- To ensure that messages reach all vulnerable groups, CRS program staff participated in the formation of the committee and confirmed that the committee included representatives from different groups. CRS' team also observed who the community listened to during the initial meeting and ensured they were part of the committee.
- To communicate with the community more quickly, the team contacted more than one person from the committee.
- To minimize the risk that the community would perceive the committee as a "gatekeeper," CRS shared staff's phone numbers and set up a dedicated hotline for feedback and complaints.

The team learned that following up with the committee is essential and that they should not be afraid to call the committee more than once with a message. When staff visit the field, they verify that the message has been shared by talking to community members.

A related resource

For guidance about some of the risks associated with overreliance on committees and about reviewing the role and perceptions of an existing committee, see *Camp Committee Assessment—A Tool for Deciding How to Work With Camp Committees*, available at http://www.eshelter-cccmhaiti.info/jl/pdf/CCAT_en_September_2010.pdf.

High levels of mobile phone ownership do not guarantee that SMS will be effective

In 2012, Infoasaid found that despite very high levels of phone ownership in Bangladesh, levels of SMS messaging are extremely low. SMS is impossible for most owners because most handsets do not support Bengali characters.[5]

Related resources

For FrontlineSMS software, user guides and summaries, see http://www.frontlinesms.com/.

To determine whether SMS might be suitable for your program, see "Assessing the Mobile Environment: Factors Affecting the Suitability of SMS and Mobile

5 "People Talk by Mobile in Bangladesh, but They Don't Text," Infoasaid, http://infoasaid.org/news/people-talk-mobile-bangladesh-they-don-t-text/.

for Communicating With Disaster-Affected Communities," available at http://infoasaid.org/sites/infoasaid.org/files/infoasaid_frontline_sms_context_analysis_checklist.pdf.

Find ways to reach people during their daily activities

In Haiti, the International Organization for Migration produced a series of prerecorded dramas on cholera prevention, hurricane preparedness, domestic violence and youth participation. Community radio stations broadcasted these programs and *tap-taps* (the local buses that most Haitians use on a daily basis to travel around the city) played the programs for their passengers. The shows—distributed on discs to participating *tap-tap* drivers—often feature actors discussing common issues and devising solutions. The programs encourage audience participation by offering listeners a small prize for calling a free phone number and answering a set of questions related to the show's topic.

One hundred fifty *tap-taps* played the programs, and one driver even commented that the shows helped his business: travelers chose his *tap-tap* because the programs gave them something interesting to listen to during their trip.

People will pass along information if it is relevant to their lives

Radio is the cheapest way of sharing messages with communities in Uganda. CRS produced a series of radio talk shows and jingles to support peacebuilding and agriculture projects. Community radio stations broadcasted the programs in the local languages. Many farmers participated in the talk shows. Young people, women and community leaders also took active parts in the talk shows.

CRS found that those with a radio would share what they learned with those that did not have radios. People discussed the shows during community social gatherings. For example, women shared ideas from the talk shows whenever they met in the market, in the streams or in their gardens. Many would travel long distance to take their answers to the radio stations for the show's competitions.

A related resource

For more information on using radio (and other forms of media), see http://www.internews.org/.

TIPS

Include communication responsibilities in job descriptions

You can build communication tasks and competencies into job descriptions. They should serve as a basis for recruitment, performance reviews and staff development.

Responsibilities for communication will depend on the size of the program and the context. But staff need to feel that communication is important to managers in order for programs to effectively and consistently communicate with communities.

Example tasks

Ensure quality communication and dialogue between CRS, partners and the community.

Work with field teams and community members to identify information needs and appropriate methods for communicating with the community. Depending on which communication methods the program selects, this position may need to

- meet regularly with community-based organizations (CBOs), local leaders and other notables to keep them informed about the program,
- coordinate and facilitate monthly integrated community meetings with other sector staff and partners,
- ensure main action points are communicated to relevant programs managers,
- take the lead in maintaining and updating community notice boards and
- develop flyers, posters and other materials.

Work with technical advisors, field teams and others to develop messages for program participants and the community.

Collaborate with field teams to roll out messages and collaborate with the design, monitoring and evaluation team to monitor the messages' effectiveness.

Capture feedback from program participants and others, and share this feedback with the appropriate manager for action.

Example competencies

Effective verbal and written communication skills. Should be able to adapt communication style to suit different audiences.

Effective facilitation skills. Should be able to facilitate group discussions.

Attention to detail. Should be able to develop accurate written materials.

Action orientated. Should be able to follow up on feedback to ensure positive outcomes.

HANDOUT

Why develop a communication plan?

Communication is essential to accountability

By communicating about CRS and our work, we can improve our programs and show respect for the people we serve. Good communication helps us 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**. An informed community will be more able to participate in programs. It will also be able to provide feedback and engage in meaningful dialogue about the program.
- **Ensure that the right people know about services and entitlements.** Participants should also know how to access these resources.

The international relief and development community has identified a number of practices for good communication. Catholic Relief Services follows the Emergency Capacity Building Project's definitions for its programs. Many other agencies follow the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership standard.

Build communication into programs from the outset

Effective communication will not happen by accident

Managers need to actively support communication activities. For best results, communication should be incorporated throughout the program cycle, including in the following stages:

- **Program proposal.** Be sure to include a communication plan in both the narrative and the budget.
- **Implementation plan.** Don't forget to allocate communication responsibilities to specific team members.
- **Monitoring, evaluation and learning.** Include communication activities here so staff will consider communication to be an important way of working and so the program can make improvements based on what it has learned.

Teams need the right mind-set

Team members should understand the purpose of communication. They should have a real desire to engage in dialogue with community members and to empower them through the program. Otherwise, the communication plan will have little effect.

Teams need the right skills

Effective communication is a skill. Even with the right mind-set, team members need certain competencies to engage with communities and "translate" information into easily understood messages.

How else can we promote accountability?

In Haiti, CRS built on international standards to develop an accountability framework. It describes in detail six key elements of accountability:

- Leadership for strong accountability to program participants and communities
- Design, monitoring, evaluation and learning
- Prevention of abuse and sexual exploitation as part of programs
- Active information sharing and communication with program participants and communities
- Strong community participation and clear targeting criteria
- Feedback mechanisms for program participants and communities

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

Examples from the field

People affected by emergencies want basic information

A survey of 630 refugees in the Kenyan Dadaab camps found that more than 70 percent of newly arrived refugees lacked information on how to register for and access aid. A similar numbers of people said they needed information on how to locate missing family members. The vast majority of refugees interviewed said they considered access to information "very important" to their lives in the camps.[6]

Communication helps improve collaboration and staff safety . . .

In Sindh, Pakistan, CRS established representative community committees to help implement projects and to facilitate information sharing between the community and CRS. The committees and the community had access to staff phone numbers and a dedicated hotline for feedback and complaints. Northern Sindh has a history of sporadic tribal conflicts, so communication with the committees has been vital for alerting staff about recent outbreaks of fighting. For example, committee members recently alerted staff that there was a conflict and that it wasn't safe to visit. Committee members notified staff when it was safe to visit again.

By sharing how to communicate with CRS and taking the time to earn the respect of the community, develop a strong relationship and respond to community feedback, CRS protected staff. The community felt comfortable contacting CRS and knew how to get in touch.

. . . and it builds trust with authorities

Arman Datuk Marajo, a subdistrict secretary in West Sumatra, Indonesia, says that CRS earned his trust by working with his office: "CRS often met with us in this (sub-district) office to discuss their program. They consulted with us, especially when they started the project. It is a very good initiative. We appreciate how CRS was proactive to counter some of the questions people in the communities had about them being Catholic. Issues and misunderstandings were clarified effectively. During the coordination period, CRS asked for our consent and shared their plan. It is a good thing. The government here supports CRS."

---

6 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/.

CASE STUDY

How a resettlement program in Haiti used a communication plan to improve results

In Haiti, CRS helped families that were living in camps after the January 2010 earthquake to move into safer accommodations in neighborhoods. As part of the program, small groups of families received training to strengthen their life skills. Topics included how to resolve family conflicts and how to manage money. CRS social workers supported individual families to help them develop their own plan for how they would move out of the camp. Finally, the program offered families a choice of a one-year rental subsidy, a new transitional shelter or a repaired home.

Developing a communication plan

The program manager recognized the importance of developing a communication plan: CRS needed to ensure that it clearly and consistently communicated the right messages at the right time. Otherwise, the camp might receive a sudden and unmanageable influx of people.

While preparing to implement the project, the program manager and program officer developed a communication plan and communication materials. The field team of 15 staff was briefed on the plan during their program induction. They practiced answering questions that might arise during family registration.

The program incorporated communication activities in the implementation plan for each camp. As a result, information sharing became an integral part of program activities.

Implementing the plan

To reduce the risk that new families would move into the camp, CRS did not announce the program in advance. Instead, the first interaction occurred when the CRS team registered the families. The team wore CRS T-shirts and ID cards so they were easily identifiable.

Within a few days of the registration, CRS and a representative from the mayor’s office held an introductory meeting with the camp committee, followed by a town-hall–style meeting for camp residents. The meetings explained the program and told families how they could contact CRS. After the town-hall meeting, CRS staff stayed in the camp several hours to answer questions and hand out flyers summarizing the program.

Throughout the program, staff were in the camp every day, providing ample opportunity to answer camp residents’ questions. In addition, families and community members could contact CRS through a free hotline to ask questions, provide feedback or make complaints about the program.

Revising the plan

As the program continued, the team saw a need for additional communication activities:

- **Meetings with small groups.** Since it was too difficult to answer individual questions during the town-hall meeting, the team added a day of meetings with small groups before starting the life skills component. During these meetings, team members answered everyone's questions and repeated the program's messages. This small-group format was critical for information sharing, and it helped prevent rumors about the program.
- **SMS messaging**. When there were delays or problems, the program used SMS messaging to communicate with families in the camp. This demonstrated the program's commitment and quelled rumors. For example, when the program needed to suspend activities because of security incidents, the team sent the following message to participants in Creole: "CRS informs you that due to pressure and demands from a group of people in the camp, we are obliged to suspend the program until the pressure and demands stop. For questions, call 277 for free." Then the team sent a second message that expressed its commitment to working in the neighborhood and its hope to return once the pressure ceased.
- **Testimonials**. Team members invited former program participants to speak at the town-hall meeting. The former participants provided testimony that CRS kept its promises in other camps. This gave people another reason to trust CRS.

Results of the plan

The program manager observed that using a strong approach to communication improved the program in the following ways:

- **More knowledge**. Participants better understood the program. They had more knowledge about the program's criteria for selecting participants, and they better understood how to benefit from the program once selected. This was critical for managing expectations. It helped prevent perceptions that CRS wasn't keeping promises. It also prevented arguments about who should benefit from the program.
- **More trust and participation**. Camp residents heard consistent messages multiple times and in different ways. This helped families believe the messages were true, which improved their participation and enthusiasm.
- **Quicker implementation**. By making sure the camp residents were 100 percent clear about the program before starting the activities, the team was able to quickly move into the actual programming. Because the families understood what their options were and what they needed to do, they were able to plan ahead for their lives and quickly move out of the camp.

CHECKLIST

Standards for communication in emergency situations

This checklist is for programs that respond to emergencies. As programs move from the emergency phase to the reconstruction phase, use CHECKLIST: "Standards for communication in development programs."

Minimum standards

Your information

Information about CRS or the partner

- [ ] Mission and core values

Information about the program

- [ ] Program goals and objectives
- [ ] Planned activities (including start and end dates)
- [ ] Criteria and process for program participant selection (including number of people who will be selected)
- [ ] Details about partners who are involved in project implementation, and details about joint activities

Information about how to give feedback and make complaints

- [ ] Contact details (including how people can recognize a CRS employee)
- [ ] People's right to provide feedback and complaints

Your communication approach

- [ ] You use more than one method (combining oral and written approaches)
- [ ] You use methods that ensure vulnerable groups (women, girls, men, boys and others) can access the information
- [ ] All staff are identifiable when they go to the program site
- [ ] Staff are well informed about all programs being implemented in their geographic areas

Good standards

Your information

Information about CRS or the partner

- ☐ Mission and core values
- ☐ Code of conduct and other relevant commitments

Information about the program

- ☐ Program goals and objectives
- ☐ Planned activities (including start and end dates)
- ☐ Criteria and process for program participant selection (including number of people who will be selected)
- ☐ Details about partners who are involved in project implementation, and details about joint activities
- ☐ Relevant budget information (subject to security considerations)
- ☐ How people can participate in the program

Information about how to give feedback and make complaints

- ☐ Contact details (including how people can recognize a CRS employee)
- ☐ People's right to provide feedback and complaints
- ☐ The program complaint and response mechanism

Your communication approach

- ☐ You use more than one method (combining oral and written approaches)
- ☐ You use methods that ensure vulnerable groups (women, girls, men, boys and others) can access the information
- ☐ All staff are identifiable when they go to the program site
- ☐ Communities have recommended how the program should communicate with them
- ☐ The program adjusts its communication methods based on community feedback (including feedback from different groups such as women, girls, men, boys and other vulnerable groups)
- ☐ The program shares information, giving communities enough time to influence major decisions
- ☐ Staff are well informed about all programs being implemented in their geographic areas

- [ ] A communication plan has been developed and is being implemented
- [ ] Program budgets include communication expenses

CHECKLIST

Standards for communication in development programs

This checklist is for development programs. If your program responds to an emergency, use CHECKLIST: “Standards for communication in emergency situations” instead.

Minimum standards

Your information

Information about CRS or the partner

- ☐ Mission and core values
- ☐ Code of conduct and other relevant commitments

Information about the program

- ☐ Program goals and objectives
- ☐ Planned activities (including start and end dates)
- ☐ Criteria and process for program participant selection (including number of people who will be selected)
- ☐ Details about partners who are involved in project implementation, and details about joint activities
- ☐ 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

Information about how to give feedback and make complaints

- ☐ Contact details (including how people can recognize a CRS employee)
- ☐ People’s right to provide feedback and make complaints
- ☐ The program complaint and response mechanism

Your communication approach

- ☐ You use more than one method (combining oral and written approaches)
- ☐ You use methods that ensure vulnerable groups (women, girls, men, boys and others) can access the information

- [ ] Communities have recommended how the program should communicate with them
- [ ] The program adjusts its communication methods based on community feedback (including feedback from different groups such as women, girls, men, boys and other vulnerable groups)
- [ ] All staff are identifiable when they go to the program site
- [ ] The program shares information, giving communities enough time to influence major decisions
- [ ] A communication plan has been developed and is being implemented
- [ ] Program budgets include communication expenses
- [ ] Staff are well informed about all programs being implemented in their geographic areas

Good standards

Your information

Information about CRS or the partner

- [ ] Mission and core values
- [ ] Code of conduct and other relevant commitments

Information about the program

- [ ] Program goals and objectives
- [ ] Planned activities (including start and end dates)
- [ ] Criteria and process for program participant selection (including number of people who will be selected)
- [ ] Details about partners who are involved in project implementation, and details about joint activities
- [ ] Relevant budget information (subject to security considerations)
- [ ] How people can participate in the program
- [ ] How the impact will be sustained after the program
- [ ] Progress of the program in relation to goals and activities
- [ ] How input from participation has contributed to decisions
- [ ] Key staff roles and responsibilities

Information about how to give feedback and make complaints

- ☐ Contact details (including how people can recognize a CRS employee)
- ☐ People's right to provide feedback and make complaints
- ☐ The program complaint and response mechanism

Your communication approach

- ☐ You use more than one method (combining oral and written approaches)
- ☐ You use methods that ensure vulnerable groups (women, girls, men, boys and others) can access the information
- ☐ Communities have recommended how the program should communicate with them
- ☐ The program adjusts its communication methods based on community feedback (including feedback from different groups such as women, girls, men, boys and other vulnerable groups)
- ☐ All staff are identifiable when they go the program site
- ☐ The program shares information, giving communities enough time to influence major decisions
- ☐ Active information sharing continues throughout the entire program cycle
- ☐ The program conducts periodic reviews to understand whether the information provided is relevant and understood by target audiences (including women, men, girls, boys and other vulnerable groups)
- ☐ The program adapts its communication approaches based on the reviews

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

General resources on communication

Case studies, tools and training materials from CRS, available on CRS' intranet at https://global.crs.org/teams/Accountability/Pages/default.aspx.

Case studies and tools on information sharing from the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, available at http://www.hapinternational.org/case/studies.aspx.

Training and communication materials from the Emergency Capacity Building Project, available at http://www.ecbproject.org/accountability/accountability/.

Case studies, reports and tools (including country media and telecoms landscape guides) from the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities Network, available at http://www.cdacnetwork.org/resources/.

Generating a positive dialogue with partners

Partnership Scorecard from CRS, available soon.

> CRS plans to launch the Partnership Scorecard by the end of 2013. For more information, contact Linda Gamova, linda.gamova@crs.org.

Setting up feedback mechanisms

The Danish Refugee Council Complaints Mechanism Handbook. Copenhagen: Danish Refugee Council, 2008. http://www.drc.dk/relief-work/how-we-work/humanitarian-accountability-framework/complaints-mechanism-handbook/.

> This handbook focuses on how to establish complaint mechanisms in humanitarian projects. Aimed at practitioners and managers, the handbook includes a step-by-step guide, as well as practical tools and exercises to help staff think through the process of designing a tailored complaint and response mechanism.

Complaint and Response Mechanisms: Resource Guide. Monrovia, CA: World Vision International, 2009. http://www.wvifood.org/docs/FPMG_CRM_Manual.pdf.

> This guide contains a collection of resources for establishing and implementing a formal complaint and response mechanism in food distributions. The guide focuses on community help desks and suggestion boxes.

Accountability as a whole

The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management. Geneva: HAP International, 2010. http://www.hapinternational.org/pool/files/2010-hap-standard-in-accountability.pdf.

> The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership published these standards for managers to help them design, implement, assess, improve and recognize accountable programs.

The Good Enough Guide: Impact Measurement and Accountability in Emergencies. N.p.: Oxfam GB and World Vision International, 2007. http://www.ecbproject.org/the-good-enough-guide/the-good-enough-guide/.

This guide provides a set of tools for field workers to help field workers strengthen accountability in emergencies.

Catholic Relief Services
228 W. Lexington Street
Baltimore, MD 21201 USA
Tel: 410.625.2220

For more technical resources, visit
www.crsprogramquality.org