

HOW TO PREPARE AN EFFECTIVE DISSEMINATION PLAN OF THE NATIONAL REPORT?

COMPONENT 1 CONSOLIDATION OF THE NATIONAL DRUGS OBSERVATORIES
WG 1.5 CAPACITY-BUILDING FOR THE ELABORATION OF FIRST COUNTRY REPORTS



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How to prepare an effective Dissemination Plan of the National Report?

**Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the
Caribbean and the European Union on Drugs
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The word to **disseminate** comes from the Latin, where *disseminare* means "scattering seeds". In the field of communication, it means "to broadcast a message to the public without direct feedback from the audience"¹. In the case of dissemination of the national report, this simply means getting the report and its findings to the people who can make use of them. The importance of dissemination is widely recognised. Almost every funding body requires a "dissemination plan" to be part of the application for funding or a project. Likewise, the amount of resources available and tools for preparing a dissemination plan and carrying out an effective dissemination has grown recently.

The "Whys" – Why do we disseminate our findings? Why do we need a Dissemination Plan?

Each institution's "priority reason" for dissemination may differ, but it will generally develop around:

1. Making a difference with the information collected ("regardless of how innovative or transformational research is, it will not make an impact unless it is communicated in a timely manner to the audiences that can directly benefit from it"²) or
2. Delivering the organisation's value for money. As most National Drug Observatories (NDOs) are public institutions, their work is paid from public money and their purpose is to derive value for the public.

An additional value the organisation will receive is increasing its visibility, which generally can have a positive impact on its work. Building an image of a trustworthy organisation which is the hub of knowledge in the field of drug situation monitoring can in turn help with obtaining funding, getting access to data, etc.

So, we understand why dissemination is important but why invest additional time in the creation of a dissemination plan? Because planning is indeed better than getting stressed,

¹ "Communication as... Perspectives on Theory." Shepherd, Gregory J., John, Jeffrey St., Striplas, Ted (eds.) (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 211-22. Peters, John Durham. "Communication as Dissemination".

² Brigham Research Institute, PATIENT-CENTERED COMPARATIVE EFFECTIVENESS RESEARCH CENTER (PCERC): Research Dissemination Best Practices Resource Document. Downloaded 6/5/2018 from <http://bwhresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/PCERC-Dissemination-Best-Practices-Resource-Document.pdf>

panicking and forgetting the best ideas at the last minute. It's beneficial to sit together with "team-mates", brainstorm, and collect best ideas but also to plan the resources (such as communication channels already in place, budget, or human resources) and time needed for realistic completion of the tasks at hand. There also needs to have some discussion of what to do if something goes wrong – perform a risk analysis and identify possible "plans B". At the same time, it is useful to list, at the planning stage, some indicators of success of the entire dissemination process. Even a short evaluation will provide feedback and help the dissemination team members to learn from their experience.

Placement within the broader communications strategy and differences between communications strategy and dissemination plan

As it was mentioned earlier, dissemination is part of communication and similarly, a dissemination plan should be placed within a broader communication strategy of the organisation. As, the COPOLAD initial working document for the activity 1.5 rightly points out: "The production of the National Report should be set within a broader communication strategy that identifies objectives, audience, different techniques and contents of publications and the management of public relations with the media and journalists." In this case, the national report will serve as one of the most prominent tools to not only disseminate the findings from the data that was collected in its production, but also to communicate about the existence of the organisation -the National Drug Observatory (NDO)- and its work.

However, even though the dissemination plan for the national report should be grounded in the organisation's communications strategy, these two documents should not be confused. There are some important differences between them, which are summarised in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Differences between communications strategy and dissemination plan

	Communications strategy	Dissemination plan
Content of the document	<p>A single, coherent, strategic document. It sets out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the nature of the communication problem or challenge • the key considerations in addressing it • the choices that have been made • the key drivers of those decisions (crucially, insight into audiences) • the resources required • the stages to go through • the evaluation criteria 	<p>Short, concise document, often just a filled-in template or table.</p>
Character of the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • considers the wider context • tends to take a longer-term view • avoids the detail of individual activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focuses on the task at hand (e.g. dissemination of the national report) • sets out all the important details
Questions answered by the	<p>A strategy provides answers to 'what?' 'why?' and 'who?'</p>	<p>Plan fills in more detail around 'when?' and 'how?'</p>
<p>(Source of information on the communication strategy: UK Government Communication Service: Writing a Communication Strategy. London, 2014)</p>		

Consequently, if the organisation has a communications strategy in place, it is advisable to consult it before drafting a dissemination plan. One may find in the strategy some important and helpful information. Part of the communications strategy may also be some kind of “Style Guide” which will determine the colour schemes and logos to be used in the layout of the national report and other materials, which will be produced for national report dissemination.

If your organisation does not have a Communication Strategy yet and you would like to go on to develop one, some links to useful materials can be found in the “Further resources” section.

Key considerations of the dissemination plan

Some areas should be considered before preparing a dissemination plan. Among these are:

Materials for dissemination (national report and its supporting products)

While the dissemination exercise described in this chapter will be centred around the national report itself, there may be many other supporting materials which can be created for the purpose of dissemination of the national report. Such possible products are listed in Table 1, which can also be used as a checklist.

<input type="checkbox"/>	The national report itself, in printed and electronic formats
<input type="checkbox"/>	Flyers, hand-outs
<input type="checkbox"/>	Policy briefings
<input type="checkbox"/>	Presentations - official presentation with key messages, adjusted presentations for various conferences, meetings or workshops (scientific, with policy makers – e.g. parliament).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Posters at conferences and meetings
<input type="checkbox"/>	Press releases including “tasters”
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dear Colleague Letter to send to partners
<input type="checkbox"/>	New landing page for multiple products (on NDO’s website)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Social media posts
<input type="checkbox"/>	Blogging – blog posts/online articles
<input type="checkbox"/>	Podcasts
<input type="checkbox"/>	Videos
<input type="checkbox"/>	Short communications in the institutional Newsletter
<input type="checkbox"/>	Scientific publications: papers in national and international journals
<input type="checkbox"/>	Infographics and infographic videos – can be standalone products but also part of the above

Communication channels

Although the communication channels are very much interconnected with materials to be disseminated, it is useful to also consider communication channels for dissemination. The

choice of the channels will sometimes not be of the people carrying out dissemination, for example if they organise a press conference and journalists from various media – such as radio, televisions and newspapers – present themselves.

Main communication channels will include:

- Various events, mainly scientific and professional events such as conferences, meetings of professional organisations, public awareness events, etc. List of events where the national report can be potentially presented, would be helpful in planning dissemination
- Meetings by invitation (e.g. parliament invitation to present the national report)
- Newspapers and magazines
- Radio
- Television
- E-mail, especially newsletter service
- Internet pages – organisational website, blogs, other websites
- Social media – This is nowadays a very powerful communication channel, where communication becomes increasingly sophisticated and some know-how is useful. Some resources on how to go about social media can be found under “Further resources”.

Audiences

It is important to consider key audiences, whom we want our product disseminated to in order to tailor key messages to them. It is helpful to understand who they are and spend some thoughts on where and how to reach them. This process is sometimes called “stakeholder analysis”. Target audiences should be well defined and their information-seeking practices should be identified.

If people actively search for drug-related information they will indeed all too often “just google it”. See a link in “Further resources” to Google’s support page aimed to improve the visibility of the organisation’s web-page on Google search engine.

While there may be differences from country to country in particular examples, the main groups of key audiences for dissemination of the national report can be summarised in the following four groups:

Internal or “semi-internal” audience	People working on the national report with the NDO, directly or indirectly.
General public	Usually indirectly communicated to, through journalists/media.
Professionals and the scientific community	Professionals in the field (both working in demand and supply field), including civil society organisations (patient rights, NGOs, organisations of users, etc.), scientists, researchers, universities, students, etc.
Policy-makers	At various decision-making levels (national, regional, local)

It is intuitive, that the key messages and materials to be disseminated will differ among these groups. So will the level of detail and language used to communicate to these audiences. Namely, the general public will require the lowest level of detail and most simple and straightforward communication messages. Policy-makers will need a very good summary, perhaps some well-structured information (such as policy briefings) and ideally a possibility to discuss this information in person. On the other hand, professionals and the scientific community (of whom the internal audience is in fact a sub-group), will require the highest level of detail and complex and well-worded messages.

Policy-makers as a key audience

The content of the present chapter was presented at the meeting of 3rd Working Group on National Reports on Drugs in Panama city on the 4th of June 2018.

During discussion about the topic, it was highlighted that policy makers form an absolutely crucial audience for dissemination of the national report, but also other work of the NDOs.

This is natural because they hold “the keys” from the resources – resources for funding monitoring as well as interventions in the drugs field. Likewise, policy-makers can have great influence on public opinion. Therefore, even the smallest NDOs need to have ways of communicating with policy-makers, informing them, involving them, and do a certain level of lobbying for their cause of monitoring the drug situation. Most NDOs involved in COPOLAD recognise this and work closely and as intensively as possible, with the policy-makers.

Working with journalists – good practice example

The Panamanian National Drug Observatory is one of the smallest in the region. Despite that, it is one of the observatories, which recognises the importance of working with media and does so systematically. It organises training seminars for journalists, open days, prepares materials for this audience etc. The philosophy behind this work is to “train” the media in a non-offensive way, in order for them to understand the drugs field and to be able to communicate about it to the public in a sensitive and appropriate way.

Possible dissemination partners, messengers

Dissemination partners can be a great asset of a dissemination campaign. It could be departments, institutions or individuals, who will help with dissemination. Another support of the dissemination campaign can be the use of “messengers” – influential spokespersons to spread the key messages. It requires identification of people or organizations that are viewed as credible with each of the target audiences and agree with them on some collaboration. These people or representatives of organisations can, for example, open the press conference or just be quoted in the event’s press release (containing a jointly prepared quote). An example of this is EMCDDA’s press release quoting the European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, chair of its own Management Board, its Director, etc.

Key messages

Care should be taken when preparing the key messages which will be communicated in the process of dissemination of the national report. It is useful to write them down in preparation for the launch of the national report, as they will form the basis for all the communications around the national report. It is generally advised, that the key messages should be clear, simple, easy to understand, worded in an appropriate language, which is tailored to the key audiences (i.e. for the different key audiences, one should use different “languages”, appropriate to them) as well as to the venues of communication.

Another common recommendation is to use graphics to convey messages. This also has to be handled with care as one picture can be worth a thousand words, but it is not always the case. See “Further resources” for some useful guidelines to help create good graphics.

A quote from a manual on dissemination of research findings will also apply to the dissemination of the national report: “Effective messages explain what your results mean, why they are important, and what action should be taken as a result.”

As it may often happen that the employees of NDOs will be delivering key messages during interviews (some of these interviews may even be live), it is always useful for them to have some sort of media training. Resources from Science Media Centre (link in Further resources) can also be helpful.

Considering risks and devising “plans B”

For each task on our dissemination plan, it is useful to do some thinking about what could go wrong and what the possibilities to go about it are. Having a “plan B” might save some stress and time at the last moment. Some examples include having in mind an alternative speaker for the main press conference in case the originally invited one(s) cannot attend, knowing the dates of other events to avoid date clash of the launch of the national report with other similar events, thinking of alternative funding sources or of possible additional human resources, should they be needed or should one of the team members be unavailable to do the originally planned work, for any reason.

Ethical and sensitive issues in dissemination

Surely, there is no need to talk about general data protection and client privacy issues, as this subject is widely known and considered. However, there are more subtle issues, which should also be kept in mind and considered, especially when drafting the key messages for dissemination. Science definitely has to be communicated, but one needs to responsibly choose the right form. Among the potential risks can be strengthening stigma against drug users, or eliciting an incorrect reaction of the policy-makers. For example, if a study has calculated how much money was spent to treat addictions, it would be best communicated together with a notion of how much more money was potentially saved for the society by that. In this way, importance of balancing information and perspectives by presenting facts from both sides of the story in unison is highlighted. In addition, information can all too often be

misinterpreted by journalists, intentionally or unintentionally. This risk is difficult to tackle, but clear and simple messages will help to some extent.

Other issues can arise, which can be politically or socially sensitive. It's useful to be aware of the current cultural and political climate and take it into account when formulating communication messages.

Timetable

It is advisable to plan the timing of the different activities related to dissemination well. A very useful tool is a time axis, created in addition to the dissemination plan template and filled in from the main deadline (e.g. launch of the national report) backwards.

Additional time needs to be planned for thorough quality control, especially double-checking of the data in the national report and the related materials. It is hard to find anything more embarrassing than a big mistake in the data or graphs on the launch day.

Another question is the timing of dissemination. When should dissemination start? Dissemination itself does not need to wait – it can start even before drafting the national report by informing the respective target groups that NDO is working on it's – in some cases very first – national report, what it will contain (bullet points) and when it will be published. This will create what is sometimes called 'pull' for the data collection and reporting – i.e. a waiting audience for NDO's outputs.

Another aspect of timing and set of dates and deadlines to keep in mind are those followed by the policy-makers. Examples of these are dates and deadlines of development and ratification of policy documents, budget approvals, or launching of projects and programmes. It can be useful to launch the national report just in time to serve as the basis for a drug policy document (strategy, action plan) or to increase the visibility of drug problems and possible interventions when policy makers are debating and approving important budgets and budget lines where drug monitoring, treatment, prevention, etc can obtain funding.

Planning of resources

Human and budgetary resources need to be planned carefully. It is important to have real commitment of people, agree on who will do what and how it will be funded. It is important to consider all the possible costs. For example, travel related to the dissemination, layout and

printing of the national report, its possible translation, equipment and space rental costs for the main press conference, etc.

Evaluation of the actual dissemination

Evaluation of the dissemination exercise is not something to be done solely after the completion of the dissemination process. It actually starts with setting some (ideally measurable) targets already in the dissemination plan. The evaluation of the organisation's dissemination activities does not need to be extensive in order to be useful. The main purpose is to learn from experience which will in turn improve future dissemination exercises.

The main questions to be answered will be: Did the dissemination reach the intended audiences? What is the evidence on how many people it reached?

One can work with qualitative and quantitative data to answer these questions. Qualitative data can be collected by talking to colleagues and dissemination partners. Both qualitative and quantitative data can be obtained from press monitoring: especially after a press conference launching the national report, it is useful to monitor press and media in general in order to know how many articles/communications has the launch generated and which topics did the journalists pick up on. Quantitative data can be obtained from web analytics tools – for example number of downloads of the electronic version of the national report or social media statistics (e.g. number of likes and shares of the post about the national report on Facebook) and other sources (e.g. presence at the main press conference, or attendance at meetings where the national report will be presented).

Another useful tool to evaluate and plan for the future is a short web survey linked from the organisation's web-site, asking users to share their experience and main purposes for which they use the provided information. While its representativeness is questionable, it can provide useful ideas.

“Compact dissemination package” for the most cost-effective dissemination of the National Report

Resources are limited everywhere and therefore it can be useful to think about “minimal dissemination package” for the national report on drugs, which would ensure the best value for money.

This package may include:

1. National report in its physical and electronic version(s). (including an Executive Summary)
2. New landing page under the organisation's website for the national report and any related products.
3. Good quality official presentation of the national report.
4. Well written press release.
5. Press conference with good organisation and communication with the journalists well beforehand, where the national report is officially "launched" (introduced).
6. Social media post(s).

Any other elements chosen according to the country's situation and available resources will be of added value.

Further resources (web pages, online tools and courses, manuals and guidelines, etc.)

General leaflet about dissemination and dissemination plan from UK's National Institute for Health Research. The pdf contains useful links to other material – case studies of dissemination and tips for preparing various materials of dissemination such as policy briefings, press releases and social media use: <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/funding-and-support/documents/funding-for-research-studies/manage-my-study/How-to-disseminate-your-research/dissemination-guidance.pdf>

Google's own help pages "Get your website on Google": https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/34397?hl=en&ref_topic=3309469

and a broader set of instructions "Get your content on Google" <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/6259634?hl=en>

Social media guides:

<https://knowhownonprofit.org/campaigns/communications/social-media>, which also has many "how-to" guides built in.

<https://www.skillsplatform.org/charitysocialmediatoolkit/>

<https://www.charitycomms.org.uk/charity-comms-social-media-guide>

Guide to help formulate the social media strategy: <http://www.nhsemployers.org/-/media/Employers/Publications/Social-media/Social-Media-Toolkit.pdf?la=en&hash=01169E5910A982EEB9730E679AFCAB2288D31C3F>

How to use blogging and microblogging (including social media posts) to disseminate research <https://www.elsevier.com/connect/story/career-development/career-tips-and-advice/how-to-use-blogging-and-microblogging-to-disseminate-your-research>

Resources for writing a Communications strategy:

<https://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Communications-Strategy>,
https://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/media_wysiwyg/Writing%20a%20communications%20strategy%20%2818.02.16%29.pdf

<https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Writing-a-comms-strategy.pdf>,

Public relations resource: UK's Chartered Institute of Public Relations <https://www.cipr.co.uk/>

Specialisation “Public Relations For Digital Media“ (5 online courses)
<https://www.coursera.org/specializations/public-relations>

How to write an effective press release: <http://sciencecommunicationmedia.com/seven-guidelines-making-newsworthy-science-press-release/>

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/zach-cutler/press-release-tips_b_2120630.html

<https://www.marketingdonut.co.uk/pr/writing-a-press-release/a-complete-guide-to-writing-an-effective-press-release>

<https://www.procopywriters.co.uk/2015/09/how-to-write-an-effective-press-release/>

<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/press-release-template-ht>

Comprehensive data visualisation guide, containing all the basics plus many useful further resources:

<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/data-visualisation>

Link also contained in the previous guide: The graph selection matrix:

http://www.perceptualedge.com/articles/misc/Graph_Selection_Matrix.pdf

List of online tools to create visual marketing products – helpful in creating infographics, pictures and videos on a budget <https://www.canva.com/learn/visual-content-creation/>

Some resources with ideas and examples of infographics: <https://www.canva.com/learn/how-to-design-infographics/>

Tools for creating infographics: <https://www.creativeblog.com/infographic/tools-2131971>

<https://www.canva.com/create/infographics/>

Useful layout tips for infographics by Venngage: <https://venngage.com/blog/how-to-make-an-infographic-in-5-steps/>

How to make a great presentation: (from TED)
https://www.ted.com/playlists/574/how_to_make_a_great_presentation

“10 tips on how to make slides that communicate your idea”, from TED’s in-house expert
<https://blog.ted.com/10-tips-for-better-slide-decks/>



Proyecto financiado
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Science Media Centre publications on various topics (including difficult questions in a media interview, engaging with media, etc)

<http://www.sciencemediacentre.org/publications/publications-for-scientists/>



Dissemination planning template

Activity (material/event)	Audience(s)	Deadlines (also consider a separate timeline with main deadlines)	Responsible people	Necessary funding	Possible risks and ways to mitigate them	Targets for later evaluation	Notes (e.g. key messages, location, ethical issues)
<i>e.g. National report, printed and electronic version</i>				<i>Proof reading Layout Printing ...</i>			
<i>National report summary (flyer)</i>							
<i>National report web- page</i>							
<i>Main press conference</i>							
<i>Official PPT presentation</i>							
<i>Poster at the conference “...”</i>							



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Evaluation template

Dissemination activity	Initial target	Accomplished target	Lessons learned and notes for future disseminations



Clauses *ad cautelam*, clarifications and exemptions

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