

## Posts

Older &gt;

## Strategising Research Communication at CSTEP: developing a communications strategy

📅 On 30 Jul, 2015   👤 By [Leandro Echt](#)   💬 With 0 Comments

[Editor's note: This post was written by Arushi Sen, Senior Communication Officer, and Dr. Annapoorna Ravichander, Head of Communication and Policy Engagement at the [Center for Science, Technology and Policy](#) (CSTEP). 'Strategising Research Communication at CSTEP' is a two-part article that traces CSTEP's experiences in formally instituting communication strategies to achieve certain organisational objectives. Part 1 describes the processes of development and implementation of a Communication Strategy. Part 2 will focus on the need for a dedicated team and the advantages of having a team over alternative methods of communication adopted by other organisations.]

Communication activities such as reading the newspaper, talking to people, chatting on social media have become an integral part of our daily routine. However, when communication becomes a means for achieving a certain goal, then the activity loses its casual nature; it requires strategising. At the Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP), a Think Tank, research communication is an activity that is guided by a strategy or 'master plan'. CSTEP plays an important role in the policy making process of India. The uniqueness of this role is that it provides public policy research, conducts evidence-based analysis, and provides suggested solutions on issues of great national importance.

According to [Emily Tynes](#), Director of Communications for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and co-author of a [guidebook](#) for non-profits, "In the world of non-profits, strategic communications is an orchestrated use of channels of communication to move and influence public policy or to promote an agenda." Thus, for effective communication of research for policy impact, developing a communication strategy cannot be an afterthought.

### Deconstructing a Communication Strategy

At CSTEP, a communication strategy and a team to implement it were built based on the following factors:

- CSTEP has a strong alignment between outcome (impact on policies) and actions (grounded in research)
  - Policy impact is not an afterthought but an integral part of the research conducted by our think tank
  - Understanding the various aspects of policy and technology are equally important
- CSTEP's vision is grounded in a Theory of Change that links desired results to a process or sequence of change, from defining a research problem to generating an evidence-based product. The choice of research projects at CSTEP is based on the following factors:
  - The issue should be important to the nation and topical
  - Availability of competency and human resources.

CSTEP's Communication Strategy has been developed for planning communication activities at various levels: organisational, programme, project, event, etc. From a documentation perspective, we believe that a communication strategy should include the following elements:

- Statement of final goal/impact
- Core message and context
- Intended audience groups
- Pathways/medium of communication for maximum impact
- Timeline of activities

Key questions that a communication strategy should answer:

- Outcomes expected as a result of the activities planned – Goal
- Is the approach right? – context
- Is the right person communicating? – Pathways to communicate
- Is the communication conveyed at the right time? – Timeline
- Can we do it? – Availability of resources
- Is the success measurable? – Indicators

## SEARCH

## SUBSCRIBE

Your email:




## TOPIC GUIDE

[Topic Guide: Research and policy](#)  
[Introduction to the Topic Guide](#)  
[Research Agenda and Production](#)  
[Research within the Policy Process](#)  
[The Communication of Research](#)  
[Capacity building](#)  
[The monitoring and evaluation of research for influence and impact](#)  
[Useful websites and organizations](#)

## IN CASE YOU MISSED THEM

[Strategising Research Communication at CSTEP: developing a communications strategy](#)  
[Evidence-based policies: building what is really possible](#)  
[Using knowledge to better design and evaluate policies: the General Directorate of Social Policy Analysis and Evaluation in Honduras](#)  
[Our need to talk about power & knowledge in evaluation & policy cultures](#)  
[Going beyond "Context matters"](#)

## TAGS

2013

2014

capacity  
building

Capacity  
Development

Change

CIPPEC

### Developing a Communication Strategy

A communication strategy is typically developed keeping in mind the need, audience and expectations from different stakeholders. At a programme or project level, Think Tanks need to plan the strategy such that the core message and important milestones are shared in a timely manner.

At CSTEP, a Communication Strategy was formally initiated in 2013, to primarily initiate the outreach and policy engagement activities so its brand name could be established over the coming years. Earlier, researchers would play this role, sometimes successfully and sometimes unsuccessfully.

It was at this time that IDRC initiated the [Policy Engagement and Communication \(PEC\)](#) programme for all Think Tanks in the South Asian region. CSTEP also took advantage of this programme and participated in the same with full gusto. Thus the PEC-PAC-CSTEP tripartite began in Bangkok in September 26-27, 2013 when IDRC organised an Inception Workshop for the [South Asian PEC](#) programme.

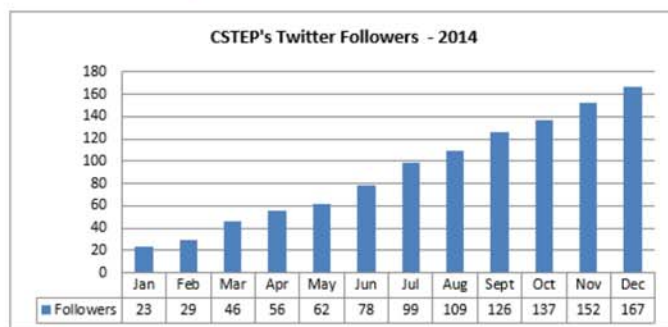
- The Workshop allowed space for small group discussions and sharing information. One of the key highlights was the TED presentations. CSTEP was assigned a facilitator who identified objectives to take CSTEP to the next level with respect to activities related to communication and policy engagement.
- One of the main objectives identified was to establish a CSTEP 'brand' to reach new influential audience. Henceforth, the word 'brand' was embedded in our thoughts and ideas and we worked on innovating new ways of using different communication tools to achieve this objective.

The Workshop not only brought forth key factors that are involved in developing viable communication strategies but also helped several Think Tanks, including CSTEP to realise the need for constituting a Communication and Policy Engagement (CPE) team with the necessary skills to achieve maximum exposure. Based on the requirements at CSTEP, a Graphic designer, Media Specialist and Database Consultant were engaged to form a team, along with a Head who ideated with the team, planned and oversaw all the activities.

In February 2014, IDRC planned a workshop in Kathmandu, specifically for all the CPE teams of South Asian Think Tanks. The workshop, aptly titled "[Developing a Communication Strategy](#)", gave a new fillip to the team in understanding the need for a strategy at CSTEP. The workshop further cemented some of the concepts that were already initiated at CSTEP. The team learnt through a practical implementation method to develop a simple and clear communication strategy.

CSTEP's Communication Strategy was revisited based on the lessons learned in Kathmandu and several activities identified in the Strategy are being implemented on a regular basis.

For example, using social media as a tool for large-scale engagement was identified as one of the most effective methods of communication in the Strategy. We have been able to reach out to several media organisations, Think Tanks, government departments, funders and subject experts by following them and also updating them regularly about various activities, reports and articles published by CSTEP. In turn, CSTEP's presence in various social media platforms is slowly expanding and news about the organisation's work is being shared [globally](#).



Conceptually, when a project is planned for example, for 1 year, a communication strategy is planned to ensure that sufficient visibility is given at different levels and times of the project. The image below gives an overview of the same.



These activities are planned keeping in mind the potential and relevance of the project, its timeline, and audience and most importantly if there are any commendable outputs/results that can be expected. For

Communication

Communications

conceptual framework

evaluation

Evidence

evidence-based policy

evidence-based policymaking

evidence-informed policymaking

Funding GDN

Grupo FARO

Ideas Influence

information

knowledge

Latin America

learning

lessons learned

monitoring

monitoring and evaluation

online courses

online learning

online training

Policy

policy influence

Policy makers

policymaking

Politics

politics of evidence

research

Research Agenda

Research and Ideas

research and policy

research communications

research uptake

Social media

Think Tank Initiative

Think Tanks

Topic Guide

example, CSTEP started working on a project related to the development of Smart Cities in India, last year. It was prompted by the government's announcement of building 100 Smart Cities in the country. The process shown in the image above was applied to this project; the project was announced on social media and five Op-eds have been published. Now, we are in the process of finalising the Project Report and planning a Dissemination Workshop in association with [NITI Aayog](#) (Indian government's research wing).

We believe that the process of research communication requires a wholesome approach including planning, quality checks, visualisation and data management. These aspects are key pieces of a puzzle which cannot yield effective results in isolation. Hence, developing a Communication Strategy has helped us (CSTEP's CPE team) to plan and implement a plethora of activities, at various levels, in a focused manner to ensure maximum impact.

✦ [Communication](#) , [Communications](#) , [communications strategy](#) , [CSTEP](#) , [research communications](#) , [strategic communications](#) , [Think Tanks](#)

---

🗨️ **THIS POST HAS 0 COMMENTS**

---

#### Leave A Reply

5 + nine =

---

#### META

[Log in](#)

[Entries RSS](#)

[Comments RSS](#)

[WordPress.org](#)

[\[Un\]Subscribe to Posts](#)

---

#### SUBSCRIBE

Your email:

---

#### STAY IN TOUCH

[Contact](#)