



## IFS STRATEGY ANNEX 6 Communications Strategy

### INTRODUCTION

The IFS Communications Strategy is a crucial element in the overall IFS Strategy, complementing the Fundraising and Financial Plan and the Logical Framework. The IFS Communications Strategy is a living document that incorporates new and emerging communications platforms and techniques.

### NEW TRENDS IN COMMUNICATIONS

Three trends have greatly influenced the ways organisations communicate in the public arena. First, organisations are paying increased attention to communicating their work, which is helping them reach out to larger audiences. Second, there has been a veritable explosion in communications channels, which even hitherto reticent and publicity-shy organisations are increasingly adopting. Third, a global trend toward transparency is also encouraging an increasing number of organisations to actively share their work.

### RATIONALE FOR A NEW STRATEGY

While IFS has been actively engaged in communications, the three above-mentioned trends imply that the public space is becoming increasingly crowded. As more organisations jostle for a share, it has become a challenge for organisations supporting science and research (such as IFS) to claim their rightful place in that space. With television channels often dictating policy and drowning the voices of scientists and researchers, there is an increased tendency among donors to invest their resources in organisations that are better at communications and can spread the word in a timely and appropriate manner.

However, during the past few years, a new challenge has emerged, namely to ensure accurate and proper dissemination of facts. This necessitates the need to refresh and recreate an IFS Communications Strategy that is more in tune with emerging challenges and can help IFS remain at the forefront of science-supporting organisations.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The objective of the IFS Communications Strategy is to significantly enhance the public profile of IFS and raise its brand value and recognition as a premier organization, while at the same time increasing the visibility of its work through grantees, scientific advisors, partners and networks. The Communications Strategy will also contribute to the overall objective of IFS, which is to enhance capacity in promoting science communication, fostering public engagement, and enhancing the capacity of early career scientists in Low- and Lower-Middle-Income Countries (LLMICs) to influence, lead, and network.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The Communications Strategy seeks to significantly contribute toward the realization of the IFS Vision, particularly in:

- Contributing to science literacy
- Communicating researchers' findings to the public at large, including scientists, politicians and policy-makers, donors and private interest groups, and
- Networking and collaborating with the global research community in shaping research agendas, both locally and globally.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Communications Strategy achieves its aim by:

1. Enhancing the use of communications tools by all IFS stakeholders
2. Acting as a communications hub for sharing information, knowledge, new developments and ideas
3. Enhancing capacity in science and research communication
4. Strengthening the IFS brand, and
5. Providing accurate, appropriate and timely information.

### KEY MESSAGES

#### Investing in Future Scientists

- Proven 45-year track record
- 8000+ research grants awarded
- Award of USD 92 million in grants
- 1400 voluntary and pro bono scientific advisors

## ELEMENTS OF THE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The IFS Communications Strategy is based on the five pillars of Audience, Brand, Collaboration, Dynamism and Engagement.

**AUDIENCE:** The IFS Communications Strategy is people-centric, making the audience the focal point, with each communications activity exploring ways to target each audience according to its needs and requirements.

**BRAND:** The Strategy seeks to enhance the IFS brand and produce identity guidelines as well as an overarching framework for all communications activities, both internal and external, that will contribute to strengthening the IFS brand.

**COLLABORATION:** The IFS Communications Strategy is not restricted to the IFS Secretariat but includes everyone from donors to grant recipients. The Strategy requires a commitment from everyone and promotes a collaborative effort to strengthen the IFS brand.

**DYNAMISM:** The Strategy is dynamic, assuming a proactive approach that adapts to emerging situations, new research and the emergence of new challenges.

**ENGAGEMENT:** The Strategy favors the creative use of multiple communications platforms, including both traditional and newer channels to ensure that audiences remain engaged with IFS.

## AUDIENCE

The Communications Strategy places people as the heart of its activities. Different audiences require different types of information, and this in turn requires the use of varied platforms to reach diverse audiences. The central message must be consistent, and communication should be adapted according to the needs and requirements of each audience.

The IFS concept of audience includes both internal and external, with the focus being placed on people.

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### INTERNAL

1. Governance (including the Board of Trustees, advisors and reviewers)
2. Donors
3. Secretariat
4. Grant recipients
5. Sister organisations (i.e., strategic partners)

We adopt a collaborative rather than a competitive approach. That is why we consider sister organisations (or strategic partners) an internal audience.

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## EXTERNAL

1. Policy makers
2. Governments and international organisations
3. Experts, scientists, academicians, researchers and practitioners
4. Opinion makers and influencers
5. Mass media (as both a vehicle and audience)

Most activities involve multiple audiences (see table below for an example). The primary audience also varies depending on the activity and event.

ACTIVITY	PRIMARY AUDIENCE	SECONDARY AUDIENCE
Communication for fundraising	Donors	Policy makers Governments
Communication training	Grant Recipient	Local partners
Press conference	Media	Donors Partners Policy makers

## BRAND

IFS requires an overall branding strategy and specific branding guidelines that will help distinguish it and help it carve out a niche. The branding strategy needs to be comprehensive, covering all communication modes, including digital, print, online and social media. The strategy will strengthen the IFS brand and provide a distinct identity for the organisation, which will appeal to its audiences while providing enough flexibility to incorporate new communications channels and collaboration with other organisations.

Elements of the brand guidelines will include:

1. Logo guidelines: The logo is the central element of the brand strategy. The IFS logo will have specified color coding (including RGB, HEX, CMYK and Pantone values) in addition to providing guidelines on size, font, curvature and use.
2. Identity documents: IFS documents, whether publications or presentations, need to have a modern and consistent look, and the new brand strategy will ensure that these are adopted by everyone at IFS.
3. Templates: Templates include documents (e.g., Microsoft Word, iOS Pages), presentations (e.g., PowerPoint, iOS Keynote) and others.
4. Imagery: Images used for IFS communications activities should follow a standard format (i.e., size, dpi resolution) and ensure due sourcing.

5. Social media: Branding guidelines will be implemented not only through existing social media channels but also through newer channels that may emerge in the future and that IFS may wish to adopt.
6. Products: IFS-branded products include promotional materials, e.g., calendars, pens, T-shirts, memory sticks, posters or roll-ups.

Branding strategy steps include:

1. The formulation of the IFS Strategy will involve discussions with the Trustees, Secretariat staff, advisors, sister organisations and stakeholders.
2. Once approved, implementation of the brand strategy will require rigorous incorporation of the brand guidelines by everyone. This may require workshops for both internal and external audiences along with the creation of a regular feedback mechanism.
3. Promotion of branding principles and the IFS brand begins at home. Active usage of brand guidelines will lead to internationalization of these guidelines.
4. Active use of branding will be ensured at all IFS events and activities, especially conferences and workshops as well as in all IFS publications.
5. Dissemination of brand guidelines among grant recipients as well as external audiences is key to a wider recognition of the IFS brand.
6. Active involvement of travel grant recipients to promote the IFS brand and disseminate information regarding their respective projects.
7. Engagement of influencers (in terms of social media followers, regular bloggers, expert public speakers) in promoting the IFS name via blogging, social media and networking.

## COLLABORATION

Collaboration is key to the IFS Communications Strategy, with IFS acting as a platform for collaboration by all stakeholders. The Strategy is not restricted to the IFS Secretariat but includes everyone from donors to grant recipients. The Strategy requires a commitment from everyone, in order to promote a collaborative effort designed to strengthen the IFS brand. Collaboration will create a closer network of experts and practitioners and lead to the emergence of a communications hub, thus enabling more effective dissemination. While the IFS Secretariat will act as such a hub, grant recipients will be provided with additional support in terms of training and capacity-enhancing to promote the IFS brand. This will require hands-on training and experience on the part of all IFS scientists, experts and staff who will act as mentors for grantees.

An important component of the IFS Communications Strategy will be the focus on project communication activities by grant recipients. Enhancing the capacities of grantees in terms of their communication skills will help recipients assume a lead position in communicating and disseminating information related to their respective projects. This will include hosting press conferences, issuing prior-approved press releases, and preparing flyers or brochures on the project, infographics of results achieved and active social media use.

## DYNAMISM

The Strategy is dynamic, adapting to emerging situations, new research and new challenges. It is also dynamic in its approach, with the communications team assuming a proactive role in IFS activities. Dynamism is also exhibited while identifying potential opportunities for communication and suggesting media activities and outreach that encourage regular interaction during all phases of work with everyone in IFS.

This is a dynamic strategy which will constantly monitor new and emerging communication practices and incorporate their uses whenever required. If a new communication channel emerges that is considered appropriate for dissemination, IFS will take the lead in its adoption. Similarly, if a communication channel is losing traction (e.g., Google+ has been phased out), then IFS will not hesitate to cease devoting its resources to that channel.

Adopting a new channel will enable IFS to reach out to more audiences while at the same time requiring an investment of both human and material resources to launch and maintain the channel. Failing to adopt a popular channel could mean missing an opportunity to win and retain the attention of our audiences. This is where a dynamic strategy scores over a static approach.

## ENGAGEMENT

The Communications Strategy encourages continuous engagement among all stakeholders. Engagement is not restricted to internal players but also reaches out to external audiences, particularly sister organisations and strategic partners. This is achieved by engaging audiences through a creative use of multiple communications platforms, including both traditional and newer channels to ensure that audiences remain engaged with IFS. Every communication activity will seek to incorporate various channels and platforms that can be adopted and modified to suit our requirements. A story that can be told in a press release can also be told in the form of a video, or a series of tweets or Facebook posts, or it may form part of our publications and presentations. This enhances engagement with audiences that may be more accustomed to a particular platform.

Feedback loops are integrated into communication channels to ensure engagement. For instance, Twitter messages and engagement are an important element of social media use. Similarly, engagement on Facebook or LinkedIn has the potential to draw in additional audiences. Timely response to their queries and suggestions helps add quality followers. Similar engagement is required during workshops and conferences, where engaging audiences is critical to effective communication.

Facilitation of engagement through online forums (e.g., Salesforce) for scientists to identify common interests, share opportunities and network among themselves, is an important part of engagement. Sharing of best practices by IFS experts can also be integrated in the website and blog posts.

A crucial element of the communication strategy is engaging diverse grantees and building a network in the overall IFS family.

## CONCLUSION

The IFS Communications Strategy aims to adopt the latest techniques and to adapt them to the needs of the organisation. The Strategy seeks to provide an overall framework that can serve as a guide for project or event-related communication, and other organisational activities. Finally, the Strategy takes a collaborative rather than a competitive approach to working toward a better today while preparing for a better tomorrow.

SAMPLE COMMUNICATION ACTIVITY PLAN

CATEGORY	DELIVERABLES/ PRODUCTS	TIMELINE/ FREQUENCY	TARGET AUDIENCE	SECONDARY AUDIENCE	OFFICE RESPONSIBLE	COMMENTS
Mass Media	Press Conference (1)	Launch or Completion			Grantee + IFS	Joint work between IFS and Grantee
	Press Releases (2)	Launch + Completion				
Publications	Brochure	Launch				
	Poster (2)					
	Progress Report (2)					
	Final Project Report (1)	Completion				
Multimedia	Project Video					
	1-min field visit					
	1-min talking heads					
Online	Webpage	Monthly				
Social Media	Facebook	Weekly				
	Twitter	Weekly				
	Instagram/ Flickr	Monthly				
	LinkedIn	Quarterly				
Outreach	Field Visit/s					
	Seminar/s					
	Workshop/s					
	Conferences (2)	Inaugural + Completion				

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