Getting the Message? Structural Fund Publicity and Communication

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Preface

The research for this briefing paper was undertaken in preparation for the first meeting of Phase III of the Structural Fund exchange of experience network IQ-Net, taking place in Dortmund, Nordrhein Westfalen, Germany on 19-21 February 2003.

This paper is a product of desk research and fieldwork visits among national and regional authorities in Member States (notably in member regions of the IQ-Net consortium) in Autumn 2002. The field research team comprised:

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Getting the Message? Structural Fund Publicity and Communication

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Information is at the heart of Structural Fund programming. Given the intricate and constantly-evolving nature of the Structural Funds and the organisations involved in individual programmes, making sure that key information is sent to the right group at the right time can entail a daunting array of tasks. Applicants and project-holders need to understand what can and cannot be done with Structural Fund co-financing. Programme managers require information on the programme's progress to make strategic decisions. The wider public should be informed and engaged about the role of the Structural Funds in local and regional development. In all these areas, the dissemination of information via publicity and communication is a central, not an adjunct, programme activity.

In the current round of Structural Fund programmes, more emphasis has been placed on publicity and communication than before. This is reflected most prominently in the approval of a dedicated EC regulation to govern this area, albeit that it enshrines fundamentally similar obligations to those in place previously. There is clear evidence that programmes have responded to these more prominent obligations. They are pursuing more integrated, strategic approaches to information activities, embodied in: the elaboration of communication plans as required by the regulation; the dedication of more resources to these activities, both in personnel and financial terms; the development of further communication skills; and, the mobilisation of a diversity of communication tools. In carrying out a largely EU-driven agenda, however, many programmes have found themselves introducing more strategic approaches to publicity and communication driven by their own operational reasons.

In reviewing how programmes have addressed their information activities, this briefing paper explores how programmes are communicating with a diversity of audiences to pursue different aims and boost programme performance.

Setting out the scope for publicity and communication

The EC regulation defines the scope of publicity and communication relatively narrowly, focusing on increasing the visibility of programmes to the public and the transparency of programmes for actual and potential applicants. Structural Fund programme communication plans of course reflect these aims. However, they are often explicitly broader in scope. In particular, many go beyond ensuring visibility to potential applicants by committing themselves to facilitating the effective participation of applicants in the programme. Even the broadest communication plans, however, do not embrace the full gamut of communications activities which are in reality undertaken by any programme, and which also encompass, for example, all those activities associated with managing and steering the programme.

To varying degrees, all programmes in practice have to address three audiences: the general public; applicants and grant-holders; and those involved in the management and delivery of the programme.

Informing the public

Programmes recognise their need to raise the profile of the Structural Funds among the public. The 'public' is a diverse group, consisting of the population at large, potential applicants to and beneficiaries of programmes and programme stakeholders, but all are served by similar activities. The focus here is on 'announcing', passing on key messages to the public without necessarily requiring responses. Rather than seeing these as supplementary 'public relations' tasks for the programme, it can be useful to see them as more operationally beneficial activities, since they help to generate a positive public environment which can facilitate the programme's implementation, and also promote opportunities to potential applicants and ensure that all relevant economic development bodies are aware of the opportunities and direction of the Structural Funds.

Publicity takes place through a number of channels. The programmes themselves produce a variety of publicity material directly, for example, through publications, exhibitions and advertising. In addition, extensive use is made of the mass media, and programmes have relied on TV, radio and newspapers to raise awareness of particular projects and of the programme as a whole. Projects also play an important role in publicity through their obligation to acknowledge the EU assistance they have received. In all cases, publicity can be optimised by understanding the benefits and limitations of using each channel and adapting the messages being sent to fit the medium and the audience.

Communicating for successful projects

Programmes inform and engage applicants and grant-holders. They aim to make sure that they have all the information required to decide whether an application is appropriate, to make a good-quality application and to implement their project in line with regulatory obligations and good-practice principles. The key is being able to move potential grant-holders from knowing *what to do* – in terms of requirements, deadlines, etc – to knowing *how to do* it. Here, the aim is to help the target group to gain a deeper understanding of the processes of project application and implementation and the practical skills to do this.

Two-way communication is a stronger priority with this group than with the general public. Tools which support interactive, personal communication are particularly important, such as events, workshops and one-on-one meetings, used in conjunction with documentary sources of information such as programming documents, guidance, toolkits, newsletters and websites. The important point here is understanding that the information required by applicants and grant-holders is complex, in flux and often, in part at least, uncodified. To ensure its effectiveness, communication must be centred on the needs of target groups, taking into account their familiarity with the Structural Funds and their ability to digest information.

Communicating for a successful programme

Facilitating discussion about programme management is an important – although not always explicit – goal of programme publicity and communication. Administering and directing a programme involves a range of partner organisations whose information needs also have to be addressed if the programmes are to run smoothly. This entails several tasks: providing relevant

information to the different committees and bodies involved in directing the programme; informing all those involved in programme delivery of their operational obligations (particularly intermediary bodies who are responsible for taking forward parts of the Structural Fund programme in a decentralised way); and, reporting on programme progress to national authorities and the Commission. The tools used here are rooted in the importance of encouraging dialogue and ensuring open and accessible communication between programme management and other groups.

Enhancing publicity and communication capacities

Achieving these multiple aims requires programmes to develop the skills and structures to co-ordinate and carry out the various tasks. Programmes have responded actively to the challenge. Communication action plans have been drafted laying out their principle objectives, main target audiences and important information activities and, in many cases, these plans have been updated as programme circumstances change. To have the ability to perform these activities, extensive capacity building has been undertaken, with the recruitment of experts, provision of specialised training and organisation of exchange of experience.

Evaluating publicity and communication

Lastly, given the pivotal importance of communication, it is important that programmes take a critical approach to their communication activities, establishing mechanisms to monitor and evaluate their activities in this area. This activity might address individual tools or the whole strategy, as appropriate. As with other aspects of the Structural Funds, it is only by appraising their effectiveness of past activities that future publicity and communication initiatives can be optimised.

Getting the Message? Structural Fund Publicity and Communication

1. INTRODUCTION

Information is at the heart of Structural Fund programming. Given the intricate and constantly-evolving nature of the Structural Funds as a whole as well as the shifting profile of organisations involved in the individual programmes, making sure that key information is sent to the right group at the right time can entail a daunting array of tasks. Applicants and project-holders need to understand what can and cannot be done with Structural Fund co-financing. Programme managers require information on the programme's progress to make strategic decisions. A further ambition is to inform and engage the wider public about the role of the Structural Funds in local and regional development. In all these areas, the dissemination of information via publicity and communication is a central, not an adjunct, programme activity.

With the current round of Structural Funding, publicity and communication has become a far more visible and strategic feature of programming. Within programmes, action plans have been drafted, budgets for publicity and communication have been widely increased and dedicated programme staff designated to co-ordinate and drive forward information activities. At an EU level, the European Commission has placed a sustained emphasis on the importance of publicity and communication, highlighting programme obligations in this area, supporting capacity building, skills development and good practice among programmes, and enhancing its own information dissemination.

From the perspective of programmes, the significance of Structural Fund publicity and communication is twofold:

- as an **obligation**, in response to the EU's own publicity and communication agenda; and
- as an **incentive**, to improve programme performance by improving the distribution of information within programme delivery and management.

First, new obligations have been placed on programmes in this area. An innovation of the present period of Structural Fund support has been the introduction of a Commission regulation specifically dedicated to publicity and communication measures for Structural Fund assistance.[1] Regulation 1159/2000 has two broad requirements:

- that programmes inform potential and final beneficiaries as well as key programme participants with a view to making the available Structural Fund assistance more transparent and visible; and
- that they inform the general public about the role of the Structural Funds and their overall impacts.

[1] Commission Regulation (EC) no 1159/2000 of 30 May 2000 on information and publicity measures to be carried out by the Member States concerning assistance from the Structural Funds. The Regulation can be found at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/regpub_en.htm.

In essence, the regulation aims to give greater prominence to the existing publicity requirements and make sure that they are acted on in a more vigorous and structured way. In response, programmes have been required to improve their approach to publicity and communication: developing a communication plan; identifying clear budgets and staff resources; and, outlining their actions.

Second, the new prominence of publicity and communication has not simply been driven by the Commission's own agenda. There are powerful incentives for programmes to take a more strategic view of their publicity and communication activities. The Structural Fund environment is complex and constantly changing. With the current programming round, a stronger emphasis has been placed on some issues such as the horizontal themes and improved physical monitoring. This has required improved ways of communicating these issues more clearly to programme participants. Moreover, programmes are under new pressures created by the 'n+2' rules. With expenditure targets set for Structural Fund programmes for the end of 2003, great stress has been put on keeping up a steady flow of good-quality projects and then securing their timely delivery. Reinforcing the importance of project generation and subsequent expenditure has been a recurring priority for a number of programmes. In some cases, problems in these areas have led to especially determined publicity and communication efforts to avoid the risk of resource decommitment.

At the same time, the available tools for disseminating programme information are creating new opportunities for programmes. The use of internet and web-based communication is becoming progressively more widespread. Wider access to the internet by relevant administrations opens up possibilities for more cost-effective and efficient ways of disseminating information electronically, enabling programmes to explore new ways of publicising the Structural Funds.

Programmes have actively responded by taking an increasingly ambitious approach to publicity and communication in the current programming round. These responses have not simply been an acceptance of an EU-driven requirement, but a recognition that the benefits of publicity and communication are apparent in improved programme management.

In reviewing how programmes have addressed their information activities, this briefing paper explores how programmes are communicating with a diversity of audiences to pursue different aims and boost programme performance. To do this, the paper is structured into the following sections.

- **Setting out the scope for publicity and communication**: The paper begins by reflecting on what is encompassed by Structural Fund publicity and communication (Section 2). The EC publicity and communication regulation is relatively narrow in its definition, and many programmes define their communication plans more broadly than this. However, a key observation is that the breadth of communication activities undertaken by any programme is in reality greater than that included in any of the communication plans. Communication is the foundation of all Structural Fund programming and a wealth of operational communication takes places which is arguably neglected by the plans. To structure the discussion, this section identifies three broad areas of publicity and communication activity, and these are addressed in turn in the following three sections.
- **Informing the public.** The first of the main target groups for publicity and communication is the public (Section 3). In particular, this section outlines the different channels used by a programme to inform and engage the public in the Structural Funds: directly through its own publicity (**3.1**); via the media (**3.2**); and through acknowledgements by individual projects (**3.3**).

- **Communicating for successful projects.** The second target group for communication is applicants and grant-holders. The section focuses on how programme delivery can be enhanced by improving communication with these groups (**4.1**) and how applicants and grant-holders can develop the 'know-how' for developing and managing good-quality projects in a Structural Fund context (**4.2**).
- **Communicating for a successful programme**. The third key target group for publicity and communication is those bodies responsible for the steering of the programme. Communication is essential in both programme management (**5.1**), where decisions are taken on the programme's strategic direction, and delivery (**5.2**), in some contexts involving communication via those intermediary funding bodies which are charged with taking forward parts of the Structural Fund programme.
- **Enhancing publicity and communication capacities**. In order to address these three target groups, programmes need to have the strategic framework, organisational capacity and individual skills to carry out the necessary tasks. Section 6 highlights how programmes have responded by developing communication plans to guide their activities (**6.1**), changed their resourcing and organisation of publicity and communication activities (**6.2**) and undertaken capacity building (**6.3**).
- **Evaluating publicity and communication**. Lastly, monitoring and evaluation systems are essential if programmes are to enhance their practices. Section 7 reviews the context for evaluation (**7.1**), the different approaches which can be used (**7.2**), and ways of measuring changes in different key audiences: the public (**7.3**), applicants and grant-holders (**7.4**) and programme partners (**7.5**).

2. DEFINING THE SCOPE OF PUBLICITY AND COMMUNICATION

A strategic approach to Structural Fund publicity and communication activities begins by considering their scope. Programmes have used the obligations set out in EC Regulation 1159/2000 as their starting point, but, in practice, have usually encompassed a broader array of activities in their communication plans than the Regulation requires. The whole range of communication activities undertaken by programmes is broader again, once operational and management-related interactions are taken into account. This section explores the scope of communications activities by identifying and categorising the wider array of programme communications – addressing not only the public and the project level (encompassing both applicants and grant-holders), but also the interactions between those involved in steering, managing and delivering programmes.

Turning first, then, to EC Regulation 1159/2000, this lists two core aims – and obligations – of publicity and communication activities:

- to inform the general public about the role played by the EU in co-operation with the Member States in the assistance concerned and its results; and
- to inform potential and final beneficiaries, as well as a range of other relevant organisations, about the opportunities offered by joint assistance from the EU and Member States in order to ensure the transparency of such assistance.

The table below categorises the aims set out in the resulting communication plans developed for IQ-Net partner programmes. Of course, the analytical process involves interpretation, and must be seen as schematic. In the table, the two main EC aims, focused on public visibility and transparency to applicants, are represented as shaded columns. Not surprisingly, all the communication plans prepared by programmes as a result of the Regulation reflect these two aims. The Italian LED Operational Programme, for example, mirrors them very closely. However, many programmes go beyond them to include a supplementary objectives, which can be interpreted as a deepening or extension of these two core aims.

Deepening the first core aim – raising public awareness of the EU contribution to regional development – two programmes have objectives which extend beyond this into encouraging and informing a wider strategic debate about the value and contribution of the Funds. In Nordrhein Westfalen, one of the stated objectives of the communication plan is to "accompany and support a critical discussion about the goals, content, results and effects of regional structural policy in the aid areas". In the West of Scotland, the longer-term debate is targeted, with the explicit aim "to influence the planning of the way in which the SF will be organised in Scotland after enlargement".

Table 2.1: A categorisation of communication plan objectives

	Public awareness of EC/EU contribution to regional development	**Informing wider strategic debate**	**Visibility of opportunities, transparency**	**Effective implementation - quality, efficiency**
EC aims set out in Regulation 1159/2000	**X**		**X**	
Niederösterreich, Austria	X		X	
Steiermark, Austria	X		X	
Denmark	X		X	X
NRW, Germany	X	X	X	X
Programme for Local Entrepreneurial Development (LED OP), Italy	X		X	X
Toscana, Italy	X		X	
País Vasco, Spain	X		X	X
Norra Norrland, Sweden	X		X	X
East Wales, UK	X		X	
West of Scotland, UK	X	X	X	X

The second core EC objective is to ensure that the opportunities presented by Structural Fund programmes are visible to relevant audiences. Many programmes go beyond a commitment to visibility by explicitly committing to provide follow-through support for applicants and implementers. (Of course, these activities may in practice be present in other programmes, but not contained in their plan.) Examples are:

- "to increase awareness of the programme, generate interest and *facilitate applications*" (Danish Objective 2 communication plan);
- "to disseminate all information relevant for the correct use of the programme resources" (País Vasco); and
- "to support programme implementation through the provision of practical information about aid conditions and experiences" (Nordrhein Westfalen).

Proposals for supporting participation in Structural Fund programmes go beyond a one-way flow of information to include networking for the sharing of experience and best practice. For example, in Denmark, one of the aims is "to ensure that the 'rules of the game' are known to all involved, create a common profile across institutions and develop a network for exchange of information" (Denmark Objective 2).

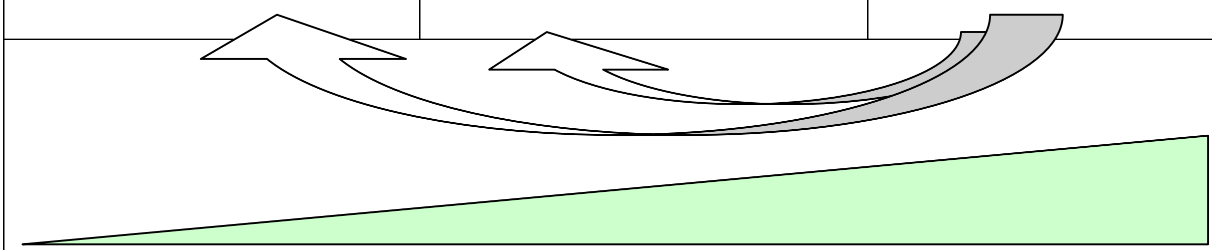
While the scope of the communication plans varies, as seen above, it is probably fair to say that few of them encompass the whole breadth of the communication activities which are undertaken in connection with any Structural Fund programme. To take forward the discussion of Structural Fund publicity and

communication activities, this paper interprets the scope of the field very broadly, to consider the communication challenge in the round.

In fact, *three* broad sets of communication activities can be identified and will be used to structure the discussion in the rest of this paper. These are summarised in the figure below. The first broad area is **informing the public**. This matches the first of the two main EC priorities laid out above. The second set of activities, **communicating to generate and deliver successful projects**, equates with the second priority area described above – making opportunities visible and, under the wider definition used by some programmes, providing follow-through support to ensure successful project (and thus programme) delivery. However, the third area, **communicating for a successful programme**, is a distinct set of activities encompassing the many interactions involved in designing and steering multi-dimensional economic development programmes in a partnership context. This final set of activities may not be addressed explicitly by communication plans, perhaps because it is more concerned with the operational mechanics of a programme, but it is integral to the web of communication taking place, often generating the perspectives or decisions which are disseminated under the other two activities. In the figure, the arrows aim to emphasise how the results of discussions about programme direction feed back into the other two sets of activities, focusing and informing them.

Figure 2.1: The three main focal points of Structural Fund communication

Informing the public	Communicating for successful projects	Communicating for a successful programme
Announcing	**Informing & engaging**	**Discussing**
 As an aspect of publicity, this usually involves the one-way flow of information about the Structural Funds at an overall and a programme level, with general messages being sent out for audiences that are not closely-defined.	 At a more advanced stage of communication, it becomes important to raise awareness of *specific* opportunities among relevant audiences, informing them through the use of targeted messages and group or one-to-one communication, and then to engage and facilitate participation.	 Discussing involves intensive multi-directional dialogue between groups, usually to steer policy change or shape a programme and its structures. It often happens through committees, thematic working groups and fora designed for wider consultation.



One-way ➔ Increasing depth & intensity of communication ➔ **Multi-directional**

This sub-division is based around the idea that, broadly speaking, there are three key constituencies of actors with whom programmes must communicate, and that each of them is involved in a different character of communication transactions. The three constituencies are; the public; applicants and grant-holders; and, those involved in steering and managing the programme.

- **The public.** Awareness of the opportunities – and ultimately the value – of the Structural Funds among the general public is a task highlighted in the Regulation. Public awareness is important for several reasons. From a practical perspective, it helps to encourage participation in funded projects (eg. informing enterprises or individuals of the opportunities on specific projects supported by the programme). More generally, public attitudes to EU funding can shape wider political decisions about the use of match-funding and the future strategic direction of programmes. Influencing the public means influencing the media, so the latter have also often been defined as a key group in the publicity and communication strategy.
- **Applicants and grant-holders – the project implementers delivering the programme on the ground.** This mainly comprises the programme's beneficiaries: potential applicants, who are targeted by publicity about EU funding opportunities to encourage project applications; actual applicants, who receive information on how to make project applications; and, grant-holders, who need to be made aware of their regulatory obligations.
- **Those involved in managing the programme.** Depending on how the programme is being implemented, management-related communication needs to take place between a number of groups. These include: programme partners, particularly those participating in official fora, such as monitoring committees, and including Member State and Commission authorities; a wider group of programme stakeholders, particularly those involved in match-funding decisions; and, in regions where programme delivery is 'subsumed' to some degree, those intermediary bodies responsible for taking forward parts of the programme.

Of course, these groups are not mutually exclusive, and their composition would vary depending on context. However, they provide a useful shorthand.

As the figure above suggests, the different audiences are reached by different communication activities. The process of **informing the public** largely encompasses activities focused around **announcing** – making sure the programme is 'on the map'. Announcing tends to involve activities which can be categorised as 'publicity': the main aim is to let others know that an activity is underway or an opportunity is available, but no response is *necessarily* required. Using site signs or news items to bring the contribution of the Structural Funds to the attention of the public is an example of this type of activity.

Communicating to generate and deliver successful projects, in turn, is focused on a process of **informing and engaging** target audiences**.** Dialogue-based activities often build on awareness built by announcing-type activities. There may be a wish to engage a target audience more actively in a given area (eg. moving from being aware of funding opportunities to making an application) and to build their capacity and practical know-how.

Finally, the communication associated with **steering a programme** is about multi-directional processes of interaction in which new positions are derived or decisions made. In the figure, these interactions have been called **discussing.** Those being communicated with are active partners in management processes.

Table 2.2: Disaggregating communication activities: announcing, informing and engaging, and discussing

Informing the public	Communicating for successful projects	Communicating for a successful programme
Announcing	**Informing and Engaging**	**Discussing**
Communication target groups		
The wider public Final beneficiaries – firms and trainees 'Stakeholders' – the community concerned with the economic and social development of the region The media, as a channel to communicate with the public Potential applicants	Potential and actual applicants Grant-holders	Programme partners actively involved in steering the direction of the programme, often as committee members Intermediaries working directly with project applicants and grant-holders
Aims of communication		
Public awareness of EC/EU role in regional development		
Visibility of opportunities, transparency		
	Effective implementation – accessibility, quality, efficiency	
		Informing strategic debate
Responses sought		
Awareness of the Funds and their contribution to regional development. Positive view of 'Europe', and its relevance to citizens. Awareness of opportunities.	Enhanced volume and quality of applications. Improved ability to comply with regulations in delivering projects.	Active input to steering the programme. Generating new positions which then need to be communicated back to wider audiences. Operating as an effective, cohesive partnership
Communication tools		
Mass media Infomercials Exhibitions Conference presentations	Websites Programme leaflets/flyers and programming documents Guidance and toolkits Seminars, conferences and meetings Dedicated phone lines	Committee and working papers Evaluation studies Committee and working group meetings Guidance to intermediaries

Table 2.2 further disaggregates Figure 2.1. For each broad area of communication activity (informing the public, communicating for successful

projects and communicating for a successful programme), it highlights the main target groups, aims of communication, the responses which are sought from these target groups, and some of the most useful communication tools. The three broad categories of communication and the headings are explored more fully in the three following sections of this paper.

A few preliminary points should be made. First, the three categories – of actors or their associated communication needs – are not mutually exclusive. An actor could be a part of all three categories (eg. a senior economic development worker in a local council might sit on a programme committee, might have made project applications, and would also be part of the wider public). Alternatively, they might only participate in one type of communication. Likewise, some communication tools can be employed to serve multiple purposes, conveying different types of message to different target audiences. This is especially true for tools such as websites and newsletters. Websites are particularly versatile, able to provide general information for the interested observer, specific and detailed operational information for those actively engaged in the programme, and even fora for interactive debate on policy issues. In contrast, some communication channels are narrower: press articles are more clearly associated with publicity activities, for example, and seminars with operational communications.

Second, multiple tools are often employed in combination, to contribute to the same objective. Here, a suite of communication tools interact with and reinforce each other. As illustration, potential project applicants may receive a lot of the application information remotely by downloading documents and receiving news updates from a programme website, but they also often require more intensive forms of communication with programme staff on the eligibility of their specific projects.

Third, in considering communication, a recurring theme is the effectiveness of the activity undertaken. It is arguably easier and cheaper than ever before to make large amounts of information widely available. In particular, websites allow direct, instant ‘publication’ of existing materials to a global audience. However, more is not necessarily better communication. Good communication is not simply about putting messages out blindly, but making sure they are received and lead to the desired effects.

Lastly, it is necessary to recognise the limitations of different tools. While more and more information is being passed to target groups through electronic tools such as websites, there is always a need for communication based on dialogue and discussion, such as specialist seminars on particular topics and one-to-one meetings with applicants. Although a substantial amount of Structural Funds information can be codified and presented in written form, much of it remains tacit and can only properly be conveyed in person. This is for two reasons. First, every project is unique in some way, and it is not possible to provide practical guidance which predicts and addresses every possible combination of circumstances. There is therefore always a need for interpretation of ‘grey’ areas. Second, the information required for applying for Structural Fund support and managing projects changes on an ongoing basis, as rules and practices are clarified, making it difficult to codify them comprehensively.

3. INFORMING THE PUBLIC

The central aim of the first main strand of communications activity is to reach the public, informing a wide audience about the Structural Funds and engaging their interest in the activities being funded. This broad area of activity equates to the **announcing** function described in the previous section. Activities here are very much about reporting and can be thought of as having a publicity focus. Communication here is predominantly one-way – transmitting messages to an audience some of whom may respond directly, but many of whom are only intended to receive the information.

The aim of activities in this area changes across the programming cycle: at the start, the task is to raise awareness about the existence of programmes, often presented as a 'win' in terms of new resources available to the region and anticipated positive economic impacts. Later, the task is to illustrate progress achieved. In some cases, this takes place throughout the programme lifetime, as projects are approved or completed. In others, these activities are focused around the closure of programmes, when an overview of activities and achievements becomes available.

There are two prominent motivating factors for this type of communication. The first is accountability and transparency, ensuring that the public is aware that EU funds exist and how they are used – a third of the EU's budget, after all, is dedicated to regional development. The second is enhancing European public relations, underlining the positive role of the EU in addressing economic disparities in Europe.

From the perspective of programme managers, however, this area of publicity serves further functions which are more immediately vital to programmes:

- **Setting the context,** raising public awareness in order to create a positive environment in which to take programmes forward.
- **Promoting opportunities to potential direct applicants** to the programme, and to those who might benefit from the projects it supports (eg. firms and trainees). The aim here is to raise awareness among a wide audience, going beyond those who have already participated in the past to increase the pool of potential participants.
- **Getting on the 'economic development map',** ensuring that all those involved in resource allocation and service provision in the target area are aware that the programme is taking place.

The target audience for programme publicity is 'the public' - but who is this? The aims of publicity which are set out above indicate that, rather than being an amorphous audience, they are differentiated. In fact, three broad groups can be identified, echoing the programme-level aims of publicity.

- **The public at large**, as overseers of government accountability and citizens of Europe, are targeted by the need to ensure the visibility of programmes and enhance public relations with the EC/EU.
- **Potential programme applicants and beneficiaries.** This group encompasses past, current and future grant-holders and the wider community of final beneficiaries of interventions, whether they be training schemes or business development initiatives, and those who will use any facility or initiative co-financed by the Structural Funds.

- **Stakeholders in the well-being and advancement of the region.** This includes politicians, public institutions and the socio-economic development community. Those who are involved in designing or delivering programmes or allocating resources in any field which interacts with the scope of the Structural Fund programme are especially relevant.

Even within these groups, there is differentiation between sub-groups, in terms of their interests, the messages which need to be conveyed and the best channels to do this. Among stakeholders, for example, reaching the economic development community might require information to be disseminated via specialist publications targeting a diversity of different sectors, eg. community economic development, training, business development and innovation. Among the wider public, people consume different media depending on their age, interests, etc, which also has implications for how messages are taken to them.

It follows that the first step in designing an effective approach to publicity is to decide who, amongst the population, is a target and why. In many cases, in fact, the broad approach may be guided by political decisions rather than being shaped by the programme. In some contexts – within the bounds of the publicity obligations, of course – relatively little profile is sought for European programmes, sometimes on the basis that European funding bolsters other national and regional public sector interventions, and that this is what should be the focus of any information effort. In other contexts, publicity is much more concerted, with a wide diffusion of information for specialist and non-specialist audiences alike, especially where the European contribution to a region is highly valued as an additional source of resources and policy innovation.

Faced with the problem of reaching a vast and varied public with limited resources, some programmes focus their efforts on reaching defined groups who need to be aware of the Structural Fund programme, working on the basis that an overspill of information across wider groups is a likely and, indeed, welcome side effect. For example, an 'infomercial' placed in the regional press to advertise a programme bidding round targets a particular audience, but will be seen by more people, who will, as a result, become aware that this activity is underway in their region.

Whatever approach is taken to programme-level publicity, a common aim is to work within the context of wider Structural Fund communication activities which provide general and overview information about the Funds at the European and national levels (see boxes below). Programme-led announcing activities can be thought of as fitting within a broader cascade of interconnecting mutually-reinforcing publicity actions. The aim is to supplement not duplicate this effort.

EC-LEVEL STRUCTURAL FUND PUBLICITY

Since the European Structural Funds are a core element of the EU budget, communicating about them is a high priority of the European Commission. DG Regio leads communications about the spatially targeted Structural Funds. It has undertaken an increasingly significant volume of publicity and communications activity guided by its own priorities. Its efforts have increased steadily in scale, range and professionalism. DG Regio's *Inforegio* website has become a key resource (http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/index_en.htm). While an important part of the website's mission is to inform the policy community, it is accessible to all, providing transparency and visibility. In particular, it is well connected to other portals through which citizens seek information about the aims, activities and achievements of the EU. The integration of the Inforegio website into the Europa website provides enhanced connectivity.

The website is an information resource in itself, with a programme database, for example, but also provides access to a range of other information sources which are also available in documentary form, with downloadable newsletters, brochures and other one-off publications, official texts, maps, and explanatory guidance. As an information tool, Inforegio has increased transparency. Previously, it took significant effort by specialised researchers to compile overviews of Structural Fund activities, or even to access basic information about how they worked.

AUSTRIA – NATIONAL WEBSITE CO-ORDINATING GENERAL STRUCTURAL FUND INFORMATION

In some cases, the national level is active in publicity, providing overview information about the Structural Funds in a given Member State and a gateway to more specific information at the programme level. A good example is the Austrian national regional development co-ordination body, ÖROK, which has established a comprehensive website for introductory Austrian Structural Fund information. The webpages are used to provide authoritative and consistent general information on the Structural Funds (http://www.oerok.gv.at/).

ÖROK was viewed as an appropriate organisation to do this because it has a general role in co-ordinating regional policy issues and because it provides the secretariat function for the various Austrian Structural Fund Monitoring Committees.

The contents of the user-friendly site include:

- an overview of the Structural Funds in Austria;
- a portal to all Austrian Structural Fund programmes including programme summaries;
- an 'assisted area navigator' in the form of an electronic map of Austria which indicates the Structural Fund eligibility, if any, of individual municipalities;
- competition policy and state aids information; and
- information on the legal basis for EU regional and structural policy, including easy access to key documents such as regulations.

The site is complemented by more detailed and specific information provided by individual Austrian programmes.

From the point of view of any individual programme, perhaps three strands of publicity activity can be identified for the Structural Funds:

- messages generated and issued by the programme itself, eg. using a website or programme-specific newsletter;
- information communicated via the mass media; and
- the acknowledgements of Structural Fund support which are made by individual projects, eg. through award letters or billboards.

Each contains their own specific challenges, and consequently, are discussed in turn below.

3.1 Publicity issued by the programme itself

For the programme level, communicating effectively about the Structural Funds is challenging. It is relatively easy to 'go through the motions' of informing the public and the stakeholder community, but genuinely raising awareness about European programmes is more difficult. Often, messages are emitted, eg. via websites or press releases, but fail to reach their target audience or reach them, but without having the desired effect.

Economic developers are not usually professionally trained in communication and have limited resources and time to dedicate to communicating with the public and the stakeholder community. In terms of the public at large, Structural Fund information is competing with information about a myriad of other issues to capture the attention of a demanding, media-literate audience, which wants to be entertained or engaged as well as informed. Furthermore, it has to reach out to audiences who are not necessarily interested in the messages being conveyed. Even those who could be seen as stakeholders may not at first fully appreciate the relevance of the information being conveyed to their areas of interest. Compounding this, Structural Fund programmes are a difficult subject matter to communicate about in lively ways, being abstract, jargon-ridden and complex.

Experience among IQ-Net regions allows a series of messages to be identified for successful publicity in this demanding context.

- **Target activities carefully, and focus them on clear aims.** Work through a deductive process to identify who is being targeted and why, and use this to shape the messages and choose the media. What media do target groups use and how can they best be convinced to consume the material placed there? In choosing the means of communication, be clear what the aims are from the materials produced. How, when and why will the tool be used, and to what effect? Be open, but also guard against generating unrealistic expectations among audiences – publicity can have a negative impact if it generates a huge volume of inappropriate enquiries from the public for ineligible project ideas. Also, try to balance cost with aims – some initiatives would be too expensive, relative to their likely impact.
- **Plain speaking.** Minimise unfamiliar jargon and technical language. Use a non-specialist to 'vet' all text and confirm that this has been done successfully. It is difficult for someone already familiar with the terminology and systems to identify terms and expressions which will discourage non-experts.
- **Be brief.** The Structural Funds are complex, and it is preferable to focus on a few targeted messages than to overwhelm the potential audience. Once interest is engaged, follow-up materials can go into more detail, with even

more specific, intensive and tailored follow-up for potential programme applicants. Many programmes try to prepare a coherent range of inter-connecting materials with levels of ascending detail to respond to varying needs: brief initial documents are complemented by more detailed or specific information sources such as full programming documents, evaluation studies and guidance notes. Leaflets or brochures highlighting key features of programmes are frequently used, eg. in Niederösterreich, Steiermark and Denmark.

- **Use communication professionals.** Contract in professional support, eg. by using an advertising agency for any advertisements which go beyond placing a notice in an official regional journal. The Niederösterreich newsletter was made more appealing to its readership by harnessing the skills of the *Land* government information office in its production. The move towards e-government is likely to be driving a general growth in the expertise of public institutions in communicating clearly with the public and making their activities more transparent to them. It may be that this provides new resources and skill sets from which Structural Fund programmes can also benefit.
- **Underline relevance.** Find ways to make abstract subjects more concrete, relevant and memorable. Materials need to be vivid and credible and capture the public imagination. This may mean relating information to local contexts rather than regional ones, bringing out its relevance to daily life, and focusing on the human angle. Any communication should use a minimum of text and maximise the use of illustrations where possible. Provide access to project examples to illustrate in concrete, practical terms what can be done. Newsletters and websites are good media for this. Websites also allow the establishment of searchable project databases. The Austrian communication plans placed a particular emphasis on 'personalising' publicity and communication to combat the anonymity of EU themes and allow target groups to recognise the direct relevance of programme activities.
- **Use originality to capture the audience.** Being original about information initiatives contributes to their impact. Use humour or metaphors, or organise something unique.
- **Brand image.** Programmes can become more noticeable by developing a specific visual identity and slogans for the programme and the programme management unit. This makes a programme more memorable, and enables fragments of related information from different sources to be more easily inter-connected. Branding might consist of the introduction of a logo on a website, or could extend right across all materials and outputs of a given programme – eg. the use of yellow with a blue accent as key colours in West of Scotland programme materials, the flexible use of a new logo in Nordrhein Westfalen, and the introduction of a sporting logo and slogan ('Making the Leap') in Toscana. In Nordrhein Westfalen, the new logo is part of an effort to underline the existence of the Objective 2 programme as an entity in its own right. Branding has not been judged appropriate in every context, however. For example, it is the exception rather than the rule in Denmark. Here, there are strong reasons not to have common branding, including the small size of Danish

Nordrhein Westfalen Objective 2 logo

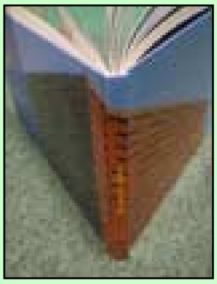
programmes which could make it costly, and a preference for direct communication over publicity actions.

Two examples are given below of initiatives which show how programmes can be publicised memorably. The first describes a Basque public exhibition showcasing regional and urban development projects enabled by the Structural Funds and, the second, an original campaign in North East England to highlight the ERDF contribution to a major infrastructure investment.

BASQUE EXHIBITION OF STRUCTURAL FUND PROJECTS

In the País Vasco, a public exhibition entitled '*Europroyectos'* was held in 1999 to showcase the interventions implemented with Structural Fund support from 1989 to 1999 and thus to celebrate 10 years of European support.

The exhibition was designed to appeal to a diverse public.



- It was held in former shipbuilding premises, restored using the Structural Funds.
- Guided tours of the exhibition were organised to enrich the visitor experience.
- A bilingual book (in Spanish and Basque) was published providing a more permanent record of the exhibition.
- The book and exhibition were richly illustrated, with appealing images highlighting personal endeavour, architectural originality, etc.

The event was vigorously promoted eg. inviting schools and widely distributing leaflets and invitations, and was received well by the public, with an attendance of 40,000. The initiative helped the public to perceive Europe as something close to their daily lives, not just an abstract concept. Bilbao has changed a lot in 20 years and this has happened in part because of EU Structural Fund support. The exhibition told this story vividly, making it more tangible.

USING SURPRISE:
WHERE ARE THE FUNDS? YOU'RE SITTING ON THEM![2]

In North East England, when the Structural Funds were used to extend the light railway system from Newcastle to Sunderland, the opportunity was taken to use this infrastructure to publicise the value of the Structural Funds to the region and its people. To publicise the contribution which European Funds had made to this significant and high-profile project, the trains on the line were painted in the European colours of yellow and blue and 32 advertising spaces were made available for European messages inside the carriages.

An advertising agency devised slogans to show that the Structural Funds were directly benefiting people in the North-East. Signs were placed above the heads of passengers saying: "You are now sitting on a whole load of European money". This slogan put users at the centre of attention and underlined the practical connection between them and the region's Structural Fund programme.

[2] Adapted from the Report on the Second meeting of the Informal Group for the Implementation of Regulation (EC) 1159/2000, Brussels, 18 September 2002. Contribution made by the North East of England Information Officer, Rachel Murphy.

3.2 Communicating via the mass media

The mass media, notably regional television and radio stations and the press, are an important communication channel for Structural Fund publicity. There are notable examples of successful use of the media to communicate about Structural Fund activities. In North Jutland, for example, ten 15-minute programmes describing a series of Objective 2 projects in detail were screened on prime-time regional television. More often than not, however, the response of the media to Structural Fund stories is lukewarm. Press releases are prepared, but lead to little if any coverage. Even if they are taken up, there is risk involved: messages are passing through a filter and will be interpreted and re-presented by media. Successful communication here presents a range of specific challenges.

- Overall public opinion and, thus, the mood of the media is not always pro-European.
- Structural Fund programmes are not obvious media material. The language surrounding the Funds can be negative and technocratic and programmes are abstract. In addition, bland propaganda-type announcements are out of place in the news.
- Failure, 'scandals' and disagreement are more newsworthy than success, quiet progress or consensus.
- Even if press releases are taken up, this is an indirect form of communication. It is never certain that the messages transmitted to the media will be the same as the ones which are eventually broadcast. The initial communicator has little or no control over what is ultimately reported.

A review of resulting coverage can demonstrate the difficulties. Press reports about the Aquitaine 1994-99 programmes were found to fall into two groupings, neither of which fully answered the programme's publicity needs. First, there was a series of general articles whose presentation and content were not very attractive and which only dealt with the financial aspects of Structural Fund interventions. Second, another set of articles presented specific projects. These had a tangible approach and were well illustrated, but did not present the general framework of the programme and mentioned European funding using vague and varying designations.

This poses the question, how can Structural Fund programmes be made more interesting to the media? The following techniques and principles have been used successfully by IQ-Net partner programmes, with the aim of increasing media interest in programmes and maximising the chances that the resulting articles will be consumed by the public. Some messages echo those above which addressed publicity actions led by the programme.

- **Enlist professional help.** Use a dedicated press office or employ someone with journalistic training to simplify messages, remove jargon and give stories an appropriate newsworthy 'twist'. Toscana hired a trained journalist to prepare press releases and liaise with the media, to ensure the effectiveness of these activities. In another case, training was undertaken to equip programme actors with the skills to interface effectively with journalists.
- **Shape stories to command more attention.** Of course, communications with the media need to minimise the Euro-jargon which can act as a barrier. Going beyond this, press releases are more likely to be taken up – and the resulting articles actually read – if they highlight the local dimension or the human interest angle of a story, rather than abstract trends. Concrete events at a human scale will capture attention. Ensuring that photos of people can be included in any press coverage has also been shown to be helpful.

Nordrhein Westfalen has recently improved its use of the media by issuing locally-targeted press releases written in such a way that they could be readily used by media sources. Uptake has increased as a result. Nordjylland has also focused on providing the press with 'success stories with a human face'.

- **Capitalise on wider trends to show why the programme matters.** 'Piggyback' Structural Funds news onto relevant wider debates which are capturing the public interest. In Denmark, the Objective 2 programmes have tended to get good press coverage at the regional level, in part because of a wider positive attitude towards European initiatives, but also because economic development is a major public issue in the region.
- **Cultivate relationships with media contacts.** This ensures that, when stories arise, there are contacts who are already briefed on the basics of the Structural Funds. This helps to combat the barrier posed by the complexity of the Funds, and can also provide an effective solution where the media is predominantly Euro-sceptic.
- **Communicate in ways which help the media professionals.** The media need access to clear, succinct background information, and contact details to follow up ideas. The Toscana Objective 2 programme has structured their contact with the media by targeting a sub-section of their website to media needs. On the website, one of five site areas targets the media. As the box below explains, this section contains press releases, contact details for further information on the Structural Funds, the programme newsletter and a glossary.

TARGETING DIFFERENT AUDIENCES IN TOSCANA

A good illustration of a targeted website is that for the Tuscan Objective 2 programme (http://www.docup.toscana.it/home1.htm). The information contained here is structured by the various audiences using it, notably local authorities, intermediary organisations, consultants and entrepreneurs, programme beneficiaries, stakeholders and the general public. There are five main sections:

- **Cos'è DocUP** (What is the SPD?) where a brief presentation explains the SPD, Objective 2 and the Structural Funds in a language accessible to all;
- **DocUP News** including calls for tender and deadlines as well as other news;
- **DocUP gestione** (SPD Management) with information on the Monitoring Committee (composition and internal regulation), the calendar and the minutes of Monitoring Committee meetings, as well as official documents;
- **DocUP servizio** (SPD Service) with information organised by target groups who participate in the programme or are interested in its progress (local authorities, intermediary organisations, associations and consultants); and
- **DocUP media** with press releases, the newsletter, links, a glossary and information on the programme's free-phone information service.

3.3 Communicating about the Structural Funds – project acknowledgements

Individual projects have an obligation to publicise the Structural Fund contribution to their activities. Their very existence effectively communicates about the programme's contribution to the region. Typically, capital projects use plaques or signs acknowledging the European contribution made, while revenue projects acknowledge the contribution on supporting materials including presentation slides used at events, brochures and letter paper. Both might seek media coverage and/or run events where acknowledgement is made.

Again, a range of good practices can be highlighted for those liaising with projects, which help projects to comply with their obligations, and thus increase the volume and quality of publicity highlighting the contribution of the programme. In some cases, the approach is focused on compiling guidance, whilst in others (eg. Spanish programmes), an individualised approach may be relied on more, highlighting the issues at seminars and conferences and in the course of meetings between measure managers and/or programme managers and project implementers.

In particular, the following appear to be helpful in ensuring compliance and consistent communication by projects.

- **Communicate early and clearly** with grant-holders about their publicity obligations, and provide easy access to official logos, accompanying phrases, etc, in formats which are ready to use.
- Websites provide an excellent forum for **guidance to implementers** about their publicity obligations (see box below). Where sites have a page addressing this, they typically contain: downloadable graphics and the technical information required by printers or web managers to make effective use of these elements; tips on maximising the impact of communication, including examples of successful project publicity; and contact details for further information.
- **Reduce the cost and effort involved** in publicising the European contribution to a project, where this is appropriate. In some cases, initiatives have been undertaken to help smaller projects and organisations minimise the cost of compliance with publicity obligations. Examples include achieving economies of scale by sourcing standard wall plaques, and printing stickers to customise the existing stationery of grant-holders, rather than requiring costly new print runs. In Wales, Structural Fund posters were printed, which are distributed on request to implementers for display on their premises.

Welsh Structural Fund poster

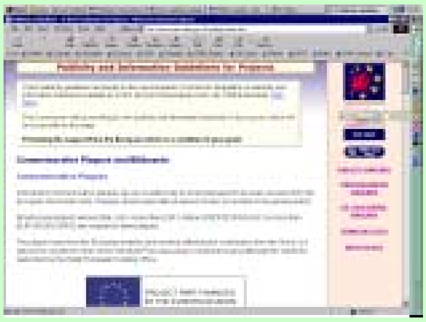
- **Collecting and checking examples of publicity during the claims process** ensures that there is time to correct misunderstandings and propose improvements if projects are not complying. It also provides programmes with a range of examples of successful publicity initiatives, which may benefit others.

GUIDANCE ON PROJECT PUBLICITY OBLIGATIONS IN WALES

http://www.wefo.wales.gov.uk/publicity/index.htm

Clear, comprehensive guidance about the publicity obligations projects have to meet, and how they can best do this, is provided on the Welsh Structural Fund site, one of the earliest sites to provide such support.

The site is straightforwardly structured and provides a range of specific advice about how to comply with requirements, depending on the type of project and the means of communication chosen. It is generally easier to publicise a capital project than a revenue one, so the guidance covers both, addressing:



- commemorative plaques, billboards and posters;
- publications (leaflets, newsletters);
- electronic information (websites, audio-visual material);
- information events;
- information to final beneficiaries (including acknowledgements in letters and certificates); and
- press releases.

The pages also provide downloadable resources, including logos, technical information for printers, advice on bilingual acknowledgements (in Welsh and English), an order form for standard Structural Fund posters and contact details for further clarification.

4. COMMUNICATING FOR SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS

4.1 Objectives

A second major tranche of communications activity is ensuring that potential and actual project implementers have all the information they need to assist successful project – and thus programme – delivery. These activities equate with the **informing and engaging** activities which were highlighted in Section 2 of this paper. Addressing these operational tasks positions communication as an integral and essential part of programme management.

Communication is important in any management context, but this is not always addressed explicitly at the strategic level in the Structural Fund context. Communicating with projects is not always included explicitly within communication plans. Nonetheless, more programmes than before appear to be thinking actively about communication activities 'in the round', encompassing not just external communication about the programme, in the form of publicity, as discussed above, but extending their consideration to operational communications with applicants and other involved organisations. Thinking about information flows in what are often complex networks or partnership-based environments can be important in helping to ensure the core aims of programmes are met. There is still potential to go further in this direction, however: one of the conclusions of the March 2002 DG Regio publicity and communication event was that information activities were still not sufficiently incorporated into programme management.

What communication activities are appropriate varies between contexts, of course. Some, but not all programmes have to drive bidding rounds, for example.[3] However, overall, the task is to shape appropriate communications solutions which support the passage through the whole project lifecycle, from an idea to a completed project – raising awareness of opportunities, encouraging applicants to come forward, supporting the application process and then seeing that projects are implemented successfully. In more detail, there are three broad areas where communication can support the project level.

- **Promoting opportunities:** raising awareness of opportunities offered by the programme to existing and new participants. Often, a first step here is to raise the profile of the programme in general, and then to keep it visible and in the minds of those who could be potential applicants or whose strategies would benefit from being aligned with the Structural Funds programme. Promotion would highlight the key features of the programme (aims, objectives, priorities and measures) and broadly what was eligible for support. Much of this overlaps with and would build on the wider publicity activities discussed in Section 3.
- **Facilitating access to opportunities.** Once interest in opportunities has been engaged at a broad level, the next stage is to facilitate access to the programme by interested parties. The scope of activity could include providing further detail on eligible activities, application processes and timetables, verifying the potential eligibility of proposed projects and providing practical support Among the context-specific communication tasks may be responses to misconceptions about access to European funds (eg. breaking

[3] Taylor S, Bachtler J and Rooney ML (2001) Implementing the New Generation of Programmes: Project Development, Appraisal and Selection, *IQ-Net Thematic Paper*, 7(2), European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. http://www.eprc.strath.ac.uk/iqnet/iq-net/reports.html

down the perception that the Structural Funds are 'too difficult' or explaining the jargon that can act as a barrier) and/or to communicate about distinctive elements of the Structural Funds, including the priority placed on the horizontal themes.

- **Facilitating implementation.** Once projects have been selected for funding, the next challenge is to ensure compliance with Structural Fund regulations during implementation and to secure the supply of necessary information about project progress (including financial claims and monitoring data). Sometimes, this extends to supporting good project management more generally.

The challenges for effective operational communication relate to the nature of the audience, the information to be conveyed and the channels used to convey it. First, the target audience consists of many and diverse organisations who are, or could be, eligible for programme resources. They are first communicated with in their capacity as potential or actual applicants, then, following approval of their projects, as Structural Fund grant-holders. Some targets are known to the system already because they have participated before, but there are other potential participants who may be harder to identify, yet whose participation also needs to be invited – especially to maintain the programme as open and transparent. In addition, audiences vary – both as institutions and individuals – in terms of their degree of knowledge, experience and know-how in dealing with the Structural Funds. Information needed by one may be too basic for another.

Second, the Funds, the programmes to which they contribute and the rules governing them are complex, which means that there are many issues about which to communicate. The advice to be given also differs depending on the Fund and the type of project proposed (eg. ERDF or ESF, with additional tailoring based on the type of project). Compounding this, the environment is not static, causing existing messages to evolve and new messages to emerge as the programme progresses. If resources are consumed unevenly, for example, measures with high demand may need to be closed early, and measures with low demand promoted more vigorously. Likewise, the mid-term evaluation may lead to shifts in the scope of priorities and measures which have to be communicated to applicants. Finally, lists of potential eligible expenditure may change as a result of programme management discussions or clarification of regulatory ambiguities.

Third, as described above, while communication between programme managers and applicants/grant-holders is direct in some cases, in others it has to be indirect, with messages being transmitted via a network of so-called 'intermediary organisations' who are not part of the programme management team proper, but are responsible for taking forward particular areas of the programme. This presents its own set of challenges, and these will be discussed as part of the third major area of programme communication: communicating for a successful programme (Section 5).

4.2 Communicating with applicants – establishing 'know-what' then 'know-how'

From the point of view of potential and current applicants, the communication process involves a progressive deepening of interaction. Provision of broad overall information is a first stage, followed up with more specific and detailed information relevant to the field of the potential applicant. Finally, advice and support unique to that applicant is usually needed. The implication is that communication is rarely a single transaction but an incremental, iterative process. It is not always a linear progression, but can have ruptures. Once a project is approved, it is often 'handed over' within an organisation from the designer to the

implementer and financial manager. This means more basic background information may need to be imparted again, before a more targeted and practical communication process can begin to address implementation issues.

Communication does not just deepen – its nature changes, moving from awareness raising to building practical abilities. At first, the focus is on the simpler processes of developing 'know-what', 'know-why' and 'know-when' – a phase about imparting information and broad understanding. Then, building on this foundation, the focus shifts to the more challenging task of developing 'know-how' – developing a command of the practical skills involved in, for example, completing the application form, establishing quantified indicators, reporting and monitoring.[4]

Communication at the 'know-what' stage often relies heavily on written sources which set the context and explain parameters and requirements, for example, programming documents and guidance documents. Human interaction at this stage tends to be more limited, but is nonetheless still valuable, helping to accelerate the process of overall orientation through what can be a maze of written materials, ensuring that time is not wasted, eg. for projects which are ineligible, and providing reassurance.

It is at the 'know-how' stage, however, that human interaction comes into its own, this time with the documentary sources in a supporting role. The widespread reliance on interpersonal communication here reflects several aspects of the task to be undertaken.

- **Uncodified knowledge.** Not everything about a process like Structural Fund application can be codified and, indeed, it would be inappropriate to try to convey all information in written format. Every project has unique elements requiring a unique interpretation of rules in a specific context. Rather than try to predict every eventuality in advance, the most resource-effective way to address this is to apply human expertise.
- **The need for hands-on experience.** Know-how is distinct from know-what in that it needs to be built up by gaining hands-on experience, facilitated through interaction between applicants and advisory experts. This is a process involving observation and imitation, and practice and correction. In the innovation literature, there is a parallel in the distinction between the 'knowledge society', focused around possessing and emitting knowledge, and the 'learning society', which shifts the emphasis subtly towards building the ability to *absorb* and *apply* knowledge. The latter aims arguably need a different style of interaction.
- **Time limits.** Programmes are being implemented within tight timescales – embodied at a micro scale by application and claim submission deadlines. In a dynamic, complex environment, the targeted advice of experts can help to accelerate the tasks to be undertaken.
- **Establishing a relationship.** Direct interaction can establish positive working relationships where the programme and its actors are seen as partners in a process, not controllers, and as helping to design solutions rather than put up barriers.

Most programmes – whether they operate under differentiated or subsumed systems – place people at the heart of their interactions with projects, with documentation in a supporting role. For example, in the País Vasco, the European team in the Bizkaia district council works to ensure that the projects

[4] For a fuller discussion, see Johnson B and Lundvall B (2001) *Why all this fuss about codified knowledge?* DRUID Winter Conference, 18-20 January 2001, Denmark.

under their jurisdiction are fully informed of their obligations, understand the systems in use and are fully able to provide the monitoring and claims data needed, to the timetable specified. This is done primarily through person-to-person contact with relevant departments and organisations, since this is believed to be more effective than offering ‘faceless’ guidance and making anonymous requests which take longer to absorb and can more easily be ignored.

Likewise in Denmark, the UK and Sweden, the emphasis of operational communication is very much on two-way rather than one-way channels. In Denmark, the fact of having small regions and programmes is believed to enable these personalised and interactive forms of communication to predominate. However, they are also considered important in larger programmes. Indeed, in France, a significant gearing up is taking place in every programme, focused around a style of interaction which goes beyond informing to more pro-active ‘*animation’*. This has been done to combat the slow progress in the programmes, which threatens to lead to a loss of resources to the regions in question.

GOING BEYOND PUBLICITY AND COMMUNICATION:
***’ANIMATION’* IN FRANCE**

In France, faced with low demand for available Structural Fund resources, DATAR has proposed a pro-active approach to facilitate access to French Structural Fund programmes. Among the pillars of the proposed approach is ensuring that there are sufficient actors to go out into the field to meet and work with actual and potential applicants. This is very much a ‘hands-on’ approach, about accompanying applicants through the process, helping them in the application of rules to a specific context and in defining and structuring their projects.

The French vision of *animation* is about being accessible and building relationships to facilitate access to resources. This places the applicant/grant-holder at the heart of programme processes, shifting the balance away from more detached programme management approaches. The initiative is further strengthened by being integrated within a wider national *animation* strategy, whose objective is to articulate communication, co-ordination and *animation* activities at the programme level as well as between programmes.

The *animation* approach requires selected actors to help applicants to design good, ie. eligible, projects. In fact, there is no shortage of good ideas worthy of public support, but problems have arisen in bringing these ideas forward to the Structural Funds as a potential source of financial support. The potential leaders of promising projects often lack the necessary skills and experience to formulate and structure their project in a manner that will guarantee their eligibility. This is the problem that *animation* aims to address by ensuring that regional development actors are properly trained to detect, help design and accompany good projects. This will hopefully have a learning effect whereby local actors will be better prepared to respond to any future requirements which may be set by the European Commission.

The preceding discussion established that interactive approaches are a fundamental element of communication in a Structural Fund setting, enabling supportive relationships to be built with those accessing the Structural Funds, and providing customised guidance. Indeed, as the French example above illustrates, there is evidence that interactive approaches are growing in importance. However, it is also necessary that these techniques find their place within a wider suite of communication tools. How can the different tools available be organised to provide optimal communication with applicants and grant-

holders? Here, a balance is being sought between the quality of the communication to be provided and the resources available to deliver it: interactive approaches, especially those based on one-to-one contact, have significant financial and personnel implications, making it essential to deploy them selectively.

To address this area, the following sections examine the main interactive and documentary tools used for engaging with applicants, and consider how they can be exploited to best effect.

4.2.1 Maximising the efficiency and effectiveness of interactive tools.

The principles governing the use of interactive communication tools are straightforward: the more tailored the subject matter, the smaller the group that should be targeted.

To disseminate standard messages to a large number of people, large-scale events or conferences provide an excellent, resource-effective tool. They are often associated with the programme development stage, when consultation on potential strategic options may be very wide, and with the programme launch, wherever there is a specific Structural Fund application process. In Norra and Nordrhein Westfalen, events were run to launch the programmes. The box below brings together some tips for good event management. An event can be high profile and additional impact is gained where 'VIPs' such as ministers are involved, a prestigious venue is used and a large audience attends. An event is also efficient in allowing questions to be raised and answered in a shared context, and encourages networking and community building. Some programmes have used them not just at the launch phase, but at key points during programme implementation, when extra impetus is needed or emerging issues have to be shared. Indeed, they may provide an effective channel to disseminate the findings of the mid-term evaluations which will become available at the end of 2003.

Where more specific messages need to be conveyed to a smaller and/or more targeted group, seminars or workshops are a useful tool. They are especially helpful where a process of active group learning is being encouraged. Seminars have been used in the West of Scotland to explain the financial claims and monitoring process to successful applicants, and to develop expertise in understanding and addressing horizontal theme-related issues. In Bizkaia in the País Vasco, seminars have been used to explain the publicity obligations with which projects must comply.

More intensive, time-critical or applicant-specific work lends itself to one-to-one meetings. This might comprise helping an applicant to design their project or to present their case. Very often, the process involves establishing an ongoing working relationship between applicants or grant-holders and a relevant administrator or manager, with additional expertise being brought in as and when needed eg. to respond to the horizontal themes in a given setting. Continuity of contact helps to speed communication and build trust.

One of the challenges here is to ensure that the practices of managers and the information that they convey are consistent. Whether they operate in a subsumed or differentiated system, multiple people are involved in liaising with applicants and grant-holders. Indeed, in Nordrhein Westfalen, the network of intermediaries working directly with projects and Funds extends to hundreds of organisations. This issue is addressed in Section 5.

One-to-one contact is also valuable for initial enquiries, as noted earlier. Any programme must be open to enquiries, whether by potential or existing applicants, and there needs to be a mechanism available to answer these. In many cases, contact is made directly with the relevant programme management unit, whether by phone, visit, letter or e-mail. In other cases, more tailored and higher profile arrangements have been made. In Nordrhein Westfalen and Toscana, a dedicated free-phone information line was established to respond to general queries about the Objective 2 programme, clarifying what activities could be eligible for co-funding, and signposting enquirers to follow-on services where appropriate. In France, at the *Département* level, there are frequently information centres or '*guichets'* (counters) where enquiries about Structural Fund programmes are taken and appropriate referrals made. It can be very beneficial if any enquiry service serves a 'gatekeeper' function, referring relevant enquiries on to the relevant authority, but filtering out inappropriate enquiries and explaining clearly and tactfully why they cannot be taken further.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD STRUCTURAL FUND EVENT?

- **Have clear aims and target the audience carefully.** Decide what is being sought from the event, and be guided by this.
- **Organise to maximise participation and impact.** Have meetings in accessible locations, and advertise them widely and well in advance. Also circulate accessible materials before the event to stimulate active engagement. Make the event vivid by choosing a venue which is relevant to the subject being addressed to give it life and impact (eg. hold an innovation-related event in a technology centre whose development benefited from Structural Fund support). Give events a lively title, and secure well-known, influential and engaging speakers.
- **Involve the audience.** Allow plenty of time for questions. This provides an opportunity to clarify issues en masse and to benefit from the reservoir of collected knowledge to generate new insights. If workshop sessions are built into the programme, use creative techniques such as role playing and brain storming to maximise active engagement.
- **Build in the next steps.** Prepare good quality conference materials which will provide a longer-term resource, and establish clear channels for follow-up. Record the conclusions of an event so that they benefit the wider economic development community – eg. on a website or in a newsletter. It is important that momentum does not simply dissipate.
- **Evaluate.** Seek feedback from participants, and build the lessons into any subsequent event.

4.2.2 Maximising the efficiency and effectiveness of written sources

What documentary resources are used in support of interactive contact, and how can they be deployed most effectively? Written sources have two tasks to fulfil. They communicate a foundation of static principles to all, and can also provide vehicles to ensure that the community is kept up to date about any changes. It is important to remember that, depending on the context, written materials might actively be used both by applicants or grant-holders themselves, and by the intermediaries who work with them.

Core programme documentation primarily comprises reference documents, forms and guidance. In terms of reference documents, the central ones are the Single Programming Document and Programme Complement. To make the information more accessible, these documents often form part of an incremental suite of information consisting of a flyer with basic information about the Structural Fund programme, a brochure with more detail and the programming documents themselves.

Any brochure or flyer would ideally be non-technical in nature, engage interest and provide enough information to establish whether it may be worth any potential applicant pursuing their enquiry further. In Wallonia, a vivid integrated information campaign has been run for the Hainaut Objective 1 transition programme, taking up a sporting metaphor and using a range of communication channels, with infomercials inviting those interested to write or phone for a longer brochure, again organised around a sporting theme (see box overleaf). Once interest is established, the more technical SPD becomes relevant.[5]

The SPD and Programme Complement are not used directly by applicants in all contexts, but, where they are, it can be useful to present them in ways which facilitate their use as working documents, with easily navigable sections, for example. In some cases, to avoid overwhelming applicants, a document has been created which combines the most operational sections of the SPD and the Programme Complement. Often, they are now directly downloadable from the internet. In some cases, the increased accessibility has been gained at a cost of the attractiveness and ease of use of the documents created.

The programming document sets out what is required but not how it should be done. **Guidance and toolkits** are used by many programmes to communicate requirements to applicants and grant-holders in a clear and structured way. At its simplest, guidance includes step-by-step support for specific parts of a Structural Fund process, eg. filling in a grant application form or understanding and meeting Structural Fund publicity obligations. In some cases, thematic guidance has been prepared. For example, at Scottish level, toolkits were written on mainstreaming equal opportunities and on monitoring. In some cases, the scope to create interactive guidance has been exploited, eg. through interactive application or monitoring forms with automatic checks and built-in advice. An example of a British interactive ESF form can be downloaded here: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/esf/documents.shtml.

Where there are many elements of guidance, some programmes have compiled them into a reference volume or **'manual'** for ease of use. Manuals have been compiled at various stages for programmes in the Netherlands, the West of Scotland and Nordrhein Westfalen, providing core guidance on access to and use of the Structural Funds. This has multiple benefits, saving time for both applicants and managers, making the advice given by intermediaries more consistent and building confidence among applicants, who have the reassurance that they have access to a structured body of information which will help them with their queries as they arise, enabling them to work more independently.

[5] A similar integrated campaign, run by Toscana, was reported in a previous IQ-Net paper: Downes R and Bachtler J (2002) Programme Review: December 2001 – April 2002, *IQ-Net Thematic Paper*, 11(1), European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow.

RAISING AWARENESS THROUGH ADVERTISING
THE HAINAUT OBJECTIVE 1 TRANSITION PROGRAMME, BELGIUM

A recent Wallonian advertising campaign to promote the Hainaut Objective 1 transition programme illustrates many of the recommendations about effective communication of the Structural Funds. To raise awareness of funding opportunities, an integrated campaign was planned and prepared by a professional agency, comprising 'infomercials' in the press, a television advertisement, and a bus advertisement. Following up on these broad messages, a 12-page colour brochure was printed and distributed to half a million addresses in the region.

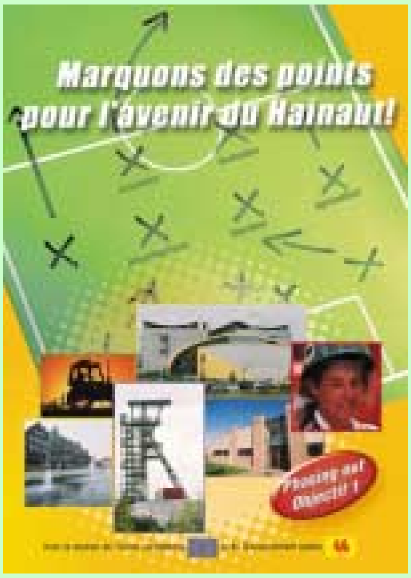
The campaign was made coherent and memorable by its focus around the theme of sport. This theme was chosen because "sport and the economy share many common values: participating, winning, team spirit, creativity, strategy, surpassing expectations, learning". In addition, the sporting metaphors made a theme which was relatively abstract and distant from the citizen more accessible and memorable, reinforcing this by using vivid images, powerful symbols and inspiring slogans.

Aiming to provoke curiosity, the campaign was colourful and based more on lively images and ideas than lengthy and technical text.

Further detail on the campaign, including the television advertisement, is available here: http://www.objectif1hainaut.be/promotion/contenu_prom.htm.

One of the advertisements placed in regional newspapers

Front cover of the follow-up brochure



Over 300 buses carried advertisements for the programme

There is a need for the core programme information and guidance to be stable. The perception that a system is in constant flux undermines willingness to invest

time in getting to grips with the details. At the same time, the programme is in a process of ongoing evolution right from its launch, with new developments on a regular basis which need to be circulated to existing and future participants alike. Newsletters and websites (especially if used in conjunction with an e-mail alert service) both provide an effective channel to stay in touch with the programme's community of interest and to keep them appraised of significant changes or events. Increasing numbers of programmes have a newsletter and an actively maintained website. The first box below illustrates the perceived benefits of a new newsletter in Nordrhein Westfalen. The two subsequent boxes highlight some good practice in maximising the effectiveness of these tools.

Newsletters are especially valued by some programmes which recognise that, while websites are useful, not everyone has access to the internet. There can be real value in providing information in hard copy form – not least to give the programme a 'physical presence' as a live entity. Where they can be accessed, however, websites have the potential to transform the openness and efficiency of communications activities in a partnership context. A distinctive aspect of websites as a resource is that they allow direct, user-driven access to documentation and other resources essential to the programme. On the one hand, this means that communications with applicants and grant-holders can be streamlined by making materials directly available and providing the answers to many of the most frequent queries. On the other, websites potentially generate more work by attracting increased interest in the programme.

THE BENEFITS OF A NEWSLETTER
THE NORDRHEIN WESTFALEN EXPERIENCE

The new Nordrhein Westfalen newsletter is a quarterly four-page publication written in a lively journalistic style. The publication has been successful since its launch, generating a new stream of feedback and enquiries.

Content

The top half of the first page details programme developments, usually based on the quarterly monitoring reports or reflecting the Annual Implementation Report. It provides a brief but essential overview of the implementation of the programme for a much broader audience than would read the monitoring reports. Through this, the newsletter contributes to programme transparency. The bottom half of the first page comprises an interview with a key individual. The centre pages consist of project examples, especially where they offer competitive tendering opportunities. Finally, the back page contains short notices, reports on events or answers to frequently asked questions.

Benefits of the newsletter

- The newsletter lets people know the extent and nature of the contribution which the Objective 2 programme makes to regional economic development, an important role in a subsumed system. In particular, it has been possible to show that a wider range of projects is supported than many people think.
- Every three months people are reminded of the EU and of what the Objective 2 programme is about.
- Information is disseminated regularly to a wide audience about programme progress, increasing openness and transparency. Compared with the approach taken in the previous programming period, the amount of information on programme implementation which is disseminated via the newsletter is considered to be "revolutionary".

WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE NEWSLETTER?

Is a newsletter the right medium? A newsletter embodies the programme it reports on, becoming its ambassador and messenger. It is important to ensure that a newsletter is the right medium to communicate and, if so, to design it carefully so that it fulfils its missions. Difficult questions should be asked at the design stage:

- Should there be a newsletter at all?
- Who is the target readership and will they in reality read a newsletter?
- What will the newsletter achieve?
- What is required from the newsletter, and what are the needs of the audience? These two are often distinct, and making sure they are both covered can increase the appeal of a publication.

How should it look? It is only once the need for a newsletter has been confirmed that the more practical questions about its format should be asked. Here, decisions should be based on the aims, and the understanding of the audience.

- How frequently should the newsletter be issued and how long should it be?
- What style is most appropriate?
- Will the newsletter be produced in-house or outsourced?
- How should it be distributed (eg. hard copy or e-mail)? How will the mailing list be managed?

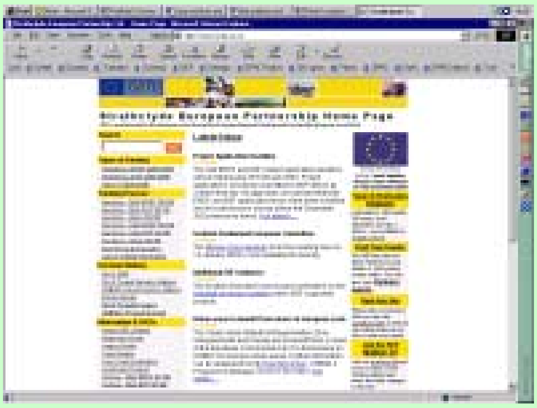
What makes it an effective tool? There are many options for the form and content of newsletters. Some principles can be highlighted.

- As with other channels of communication, minimising jargon, emphasising the human angle and providing specific project illustrations can be effective.
- The style should emerge from an understanding of needs. While some programmes have opted for a professionally produced newsletter, others have chosen simpler options. This can be a good choice, if it is driven by audience needs. The North East of England newsletter has prioritised ease and speed of production and distribution over visual appeal, for example. Their newsletter is a plain word-processed document, but contains a wealth of up-to-date technical information, clarification and advice which is of direct relevance to the programme community. It is this high relevance which makes it essential reading.
- A range of techniques make newsletters more readable. The Nordrhein Westfalen newsletter is only four pages long, which contributes to its ease of production (requiring a single A3 folded sheet) and makes it more likely to be read. The West of Scotland and Welsh newsletters, while longer, have a colourful, lively presentation which helps to make them more accessible to their target audiences.

BUILDING A GOOD STRUCTURAL FUND WEBSITE

A review of Structural Fund-related websites allows a number of principles of good website design to be identified.

- **Accessibility to as many users as possible.** This means: ensuring the site has a simple address; registering it on main search engines so it can be found easily; designing it to be viewable with low specification screens and software; and ensuring it is quick to download, even where connections are poor (which has implications for the use of moving images and large graphics). In terms of addresses, a dedicated website can be more visible and easy to find than a set of web pages which are a sub-set of the site of the managing authority (eg. www.docup.toscana.it, www.ziel2-nrw.de).
- **Prioritising fast access to rich information.** The primary role of a site is to provide information answering the needs of its audience. The site should be clearly organised so users can find what they are looking for quickly and easily. Animated introductions, for example, may delay access to information without adding value. A site should have minimal on-screen text: it is better to make texts or technical information available as downloadable pdf documents, where possible. The exception is, for example, where the text is rich in hyperlinks and there are real connectivity benefits in having the text on screen.
- **Visual appeal.** If possible, but without sacrificing the over-riding need for clarity, speed and simplicity, a site benefits from a strong visual identity, achieved through logos, use of colour, etc. The West of Scotland site is a good illustration of a compromise between visual appeal and simplicity. www.wsep.co.uk



- **Developing as an ongoing resource.** If the ambition is to use a site as a key means of communication, target audiences must be encouraged to visit and revisit. A regular e-mail circular advising registered users of recent changes provides an effective method of encouraging repeat visits. In North East England, a 'Stop Press' page highlights new developments. More generally, a news page ensures that a website remains fresh and that important current issues are instantly visible. Providing genuinely useful resources, such as a comprehensive links page, phone numbers, or access to key downloads such as forms, regulations and guidance, is ultimately the best way to become a core resource. Content, of course, has to be authoritative and up to date, otherwise the site's credibility is undermined and users will return to more traditional means of communication.
- **Interactive content, exploiting the unique strengths of websites.** There are some ways of conveying information which are particular to websites. Exploiting these makes a website a distinctive resource in itself, not simply a channel for material available by other means. For example, in addition to hosting downloadable documents, websites can include: discussion fora, interactive maps, searchable project and postcode databases, downloadable graphics, links pages, and search facilities to find particular documents easily and quickly.

Having considered the main types of written resource used by programmes, a few principles can be highlighted about the use of documentation. First, it is important to avoid generating an excessive amount of information. This can make understanding the programme confusing and excessively time consuming for target groups. Audiences need to be sure that they are fully appraised of everything they need to be aware of and that there are no key issues which they have missed. To provide reassurance that target audiences have the full collection of up-to-date documentation which they need to undertake given processes, some programmes have organised this onto a free-standing CD-Rom. This also enables them to work more quickly and easily if they do not have easy or good quality internet access.

In terms of keeping actors appraised of changes, we have already seen that newsletters and websites play an important role as disseminators of new developments. However, at the same time, a robust policy of updating is also needed for documentary reference sources, to ensure that these are kept up to date.

4.2.3 The communication package

In communicating with applicants and grant-holders, it is clear that a range of resources will be called into play at different times, and that the resources must be coherent with each other and provide a cohesive source of support. A final piece of advice is that asking some fundamental questions can help to assess performance in terms of the overall communication solution which is in place. Some examples for reflection are given below.

- Do applicants and grant-holders believe that the information made available to them is serving their needs? Do they have confidence in the system? Do they believe it is open and fair?
- Are target groups getting the messages they need, and how and when they need them (bearing in mind that different actors differ in their needs)? Are responses adapted to specific needs, and are they clear and consistent?
- Do target groups have enough information freely available that they are empowered to help themselves by looking up answers, where appropriate, or are there barriers to this? For example, can they download documents directly, or do they have to use time applying for them in writing?
- Are messages open, yet clear and targeted enough that they do not generate a large volume of irrelevant enquiries which consume resources to no benefit?
- Is the available written information perceived to be stable and trustworthy? The perception that a system is in constant flux undermines willingness to invest time in getting to grips with the details.
- Are there effective channels to keep target groups appraised of changes?
- Are target groups able to apply the knowledge as know-how, where appropriate?
- Has the programme been able to use communication effectively to resolve management issues which have arisen, eg. low demand on a measure, late claims, inconsistent monitoring data?

5. COMMUNICATING FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMME

The last objective of publicity and communication focuses on programme management, particularly how information is distributed within the programme itself and between the programme and the main actors involved in its operation and strategic development. Programmes have a range of organisations that participate to varying degrees in the management, steering and actual running of the Funds. Depending on the nature of their responsibilities, different types of agencies have different information needs. As a whole, these different organisations need to be adequately informed for several reasons.

- **Partnership**. The long-established importance of partnership in programme design and delivery has strengthened the need for an efficient way of disseminating relevant information between partners so that they can carry out their designated tasks within the programme. Indeed, it can be critical in ensuring the continued active engagement of partners in the first place.
- **Complexity of Funds**. The operation of the Funds has become increasingly complex in the current programming round. In terms of the scale and variety of information and the timescale on which major changes take place, managing that complexity has become a priority task for programme management.
- **Reporting obligations**. For national and (especially) Commission authorities, programmes have a range of reporting obligations which need to be carried out and have increased in the current period.

The driver for this aspect of publicity and communication is the need to engage actors in the actual running and direction of the programme. The point has been well made in Nordrhein Westfalen, where there has been an ambitious gearing up, as reported in the following quote from their communication plan:

> *"More than in the past, a wide range of interested organisations (intermediaries, potential project implementers, politicians and the broader public) should be actively and pro-actively addressed in order to draw them into the implementation of the programme. Information and publicity measures should not be targeted primarily at presenting and justifying past support activities but should aim to draw relevant groups early into a communications process about the objectives, targets and instruments of the programme with a view to facilitating a critical discussion about results and effects."*

Communicating for a successful programme can be broken down into a series of publicity and communication tasks. First, programmes need to provide relevant information for running the programme to a variety of different partner organisations who are typically involved in management and monitoring committees and other groups and who consequently need to be directly engaged in the programme's operations. The kind of information they require varies from straightforward notifications of forthcoming events and meetings to more detailed analyses of expenditure trends, changes in appraisal and selection criteria for projects, etc.

Second, among the partners involved in steering the programme, there are two privileged ones which have particular information requirements: the Commission and, depending on the context, relevant Member State authorities. Programmes have significant formal responsibilities for communicating with the Commission in particular. They must present the relevant DGs with required information at certain junctures (such as the Annual Implementation Reports), respond to *ad*

hoc requests for information and enter into dialogue with Commission officials on potential problems or forthcoming issues of likely significance.

Third, it is essential to inform all those involved in programme delivery – whether those directly within the Secretariat or arms-length funding intermediaries – of their operational obligations in making awards and monitoring project progress. Intermediaries are particularly significant players in 'subsumed' systems of delivery and in any programme involving a decentralised, 'package' approach to programme implementation. The programme may need to disseminate information regarding application processing and decision procedures, award-holder obligations, the horizontal themes and requirements for collecting monitoring data on financial and physical progress.

These three audiences taken together are perhaps smaller and more easily identified than the two main audiences discussed in the preceding sections, the public and potential and actual project-related contacts. The size of the audience facilitates the two-way interactions between different groups which are essential for effective programme delivery, sharing information and generating new positions. The successful operation of the programme depends on the ability to pass on key information, highlight potential organisational differences and limits, and reach decisions and common understandings as quickly and efficiently as possible.

For this to occur, communication has a different quality than with other target groups. It may be more frequent and/or intensive, and involves processes of inviting partner input in order to generate new positions and decisions. As a result, it falls into the category of programme **discussion** tasks identified above. In addition to using formal structures and communication channels, a strong premium is placed on informal communication between those involved in the operational aspects of a programme. Alongside the more formal, scheduled events, incidental and *ad hoc* interactions take place constantly among the Structural Fund community. For most programmes, the nature of the implementation system and the informal links between funding agencies mean that contact within programme management is on-going as a matter of course. Such informal communication puts strong emphasis on the development of personal relationships between key partners.

Three distinctive groups of partners who are involved in programme management were mentioned above. While there is some overlap between them – as, indeed, there is between programme management and applicant groups – they each have their own specialised information needs. To explore this in more detail, the sub-sections which follow address the groups in turn:

- **Programme direction.** Under this heading, two related audiences are addressed:
  - **steering partners**: this encompasses those partners who have a voice in the strategic steer of the programme, principally through their participation in key programme-management decision-making bodies; and
  - **reporting partners:** focusing on those partners which oversee the activities of a Structural Fund programme, notably relevant Commission and Member State authorities.
- **Programme delivery.** This section addresses those programme management and intermediary organisation staff who are directly engaged in delivering the programme through regular interaction with prospective and actual applicants and grant-holders.

5.1 Informing programme direction

Programme direction comprises all those activities relating to the strategic management and steer of the programme. This ranges from one-off, far-reaching issues such as changes to resource allocations on the basis of mid-term evaluation results to more frequent decisions on individual project awards. As programme management is closely linked with partnership, decision-making entails involving a range of organisations, but, for the most part, they can be summarised simply as follows.

- **Steering partners**. This group of partners is heavily involved in programme decision-making and advising, principally as members of committees and management groups charged with overseeing operational issues. They usually consist of representatives of regional/local public bodies closely aligned with the programme as well as national government units responsible for the Structural Funds.
- **Reporting partners**. Several bodies have important accountability roles in overseeing Structural Fund programmes, notably government financial departments at national level and the European Commission.

For both, the focus in communication is principally on flows of **strategic** information necessary for the conduct of the programme, such as updates and changes to the programme's regulatory obligations, breakdowns of financial trends and bottlenecks in project generation within the wider policy community. One of the outcomes of the interactions is new decisions and positions, which then trigger further needs for communication. However, each sub-group has specific information needs that will need to be addressed differently.

5.1.1 Steering partners

Partners who are members of key management groups of the programme have several information needs linked to the decisions these groups take. Depending on the system for Structural Fund delivery, this information ranges from recommendations on project applications to summaries of the programme's financial progress. In general, it must be accurate, succinct and disseminated sufficiently in advance of meetings to enable partners to assess it and form a view. Occasionally, this is 'sensitive' information to which access is restricted.

However, it is not just the type of information that needs to be considered for this group, but how communication takes place. It is important to bear in mind that there are two stages to communication here: first, communication in the form of discussion between steering partners in advance of any decisions; and second, the communication of those decisions to other parties. Elements of good practice are associated with each stage.

a. Stage 1: communicating amongst steering partners

Whether decisions are being made about the programme as a whole or individual projects, steering partners need specially-held events at which issues can be discussed and decisions taken. Often held in a 'closed' environment, these will usually take the form of regularly-held meetings involving a limited membership of partner representatives. These meetings can be effective discussion channels when the following issues are taken on board.

- **Regular meetings**. When taking place at regular intervals, committee meetings can reinforce partnership by strengthening the working relations between partner organisations as well as their engagement with the

programme. The confidentiality of the proceedings facilitates the intensive and open communication essential for this aspect of programming.

- **Stable membership**. A stable rota of representatives can encourage more informal and efficient environments for communication by promoting an understanding of the contexts of different partners and frankness of views. While, over the long term, a rotation of new members will reinvigorate the group, stability in membership will facilitate communication within management.
- **Effective presentation of information**. The information presented to management groups should be timely, up-to-date, fitted for its particular purpose, focused and streamlined. As steering partners can have limited time to devote to their Structural Fund responsibilities, communication needs to take account of the competing pressures on representatives. This can be aided by providing summary papers of key agenda issues in advance of meetings and the use of presentations to introduce issues.

On a more experimental basis, website fora and specially-developed intranet networks can prove a useful adjunct to meetings. Where important policy issues are to be discussed, an electronic discussion forum may be a means of canvassing views on particular options in advance of meetings. Although a forum is unlikely to resolve any emerging differences of opinion, it can be helpful in identifying the key points for discussion at meetings.

b. *Stage 2: communicating between steering partners and others*

Once management groups have reached decisions, the outcomes need to be conveyed more widely. Disseminating the decisions taken by steering partners is another important task of the programme, typically carried out by the Secretariat. A recent innovation by some programmes has been to publish minutes on programme websites. However, making such information *available* to others is not the same as making it *accessible*. Rather than just archiving documents, programme transparency and communication can be improved by:

- making clear the contents of the key documents without having to open or download whole files;
- drawing out key management decisions and implications as part of the news section of the website; and
- notifying other partners and affected parties using a newsletter or e-mail bulletin.

Communication can also take place more informally between those partners directly involved in programme management and other organisations which have a stakeholding interest in the programme's development. For example, partners participating in the management groups directing the programme are individuals representing wider organisations. Programme communication covers not only the transactions between these individuals within the groups, but also how key information is relayed back to the organisations being represented. In other words, the communication channels *within* organisations can be as important to the smooth running of the programme as the channels *between* organisations. In many cases, the partners represent a larger pool of organisations which together form their sector, but which cannot all take part in programme management, such as, for example, voluntary organisations, which can be so numerous that only a selected number are directly brought into the running of the programme.

5.1.2 Reporting partners: national authorities and the Commission

Programme management has several partners to whom they must make account for the programme's progress. These include national authorities, with whom communication can take place at specific intervals – for example, regular meetings about operational progress and annual reviews of programme performance – as well as on an *ad hoc* basis when issues of strategic priority arise. As already seen, national authorities can also have a significant role in co-ordinating publicity and communication activities between different programmes. Providing such information to a regular timetable reinforces the need for programmes to have a system in place for the efficient collection, analysis and transmission of key programme information. It ensures that programmes have to take stock of their progress outside of the regular evaluation timetable.

Similarly, the European Commission is a key reporting partner. As has been seen, the Commission has an important role as a provider of information through the Inforegio website and a myriad of publicity activities. The Commission is also critical in communicating and interpreting Structural Fund obligations and guidelines to programmes. As with communication with other programme partners, a set of formal communication instruments and channels is supplemented by informal flows of information, particularly where positive relations are developed between Commission desk officers and programme officials.

For their part, programmes have a range of information requirements to fulfil which are set by the Commission. These requirements are largely 'clustered' at different points in the programming life-cycle. Interactions may be particularly intensive at the start of a programming period, with negotiations over the SPDs, and at the mid-term and final evaluation stages. Across the rest of the programming period, the Commission relies heavily on regular reports on programme progress, notably the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs), especially since Commission representatives are no longer required to attend Monitoring Committee meetings. Preparing the AIRs may exploit information and analysis already compiled for national authorities and/or monitoring committees, and may provide an important opportunity to step back from immediate operational concerns to take stock of programme progress in the round. This can generate overviews which can then feed into informing programme management more generally – and thus lead into other communication activities.

5.2 Informing programme delivery

In Section 4, the generation, selection and subsequent administration of projects was addressed as a self-contained set of programme activities with its own communication challenges. There, communication issues were explored from the point of view of the applicant or grant-holder. However, this area of activity also has communication implications for those actually involved in conveying the messages. How do those who are interacting with projects ensure that they have all the necessary information at their fingertips to be able to support projects effectively, and that they are providing support which is consistent in both quality and content?

There are two scenarios for who might work with projects. In the first, some or all communication takes place *directly* between a Structural Fund programme management unit or secretariat and applicants or grant-holders. This would typically be the case under 'differentiated' systems, such as those in the UK and Sweden, where there are dedicated programme management and project decision making structures. Here, the central communication issue is one of

ensuring that there are effective tools and systems available *within* the programme management unit, to ensure that the information given out is consistent, that the most appropriate support is made available, that emerging issues can be addressed on a shared rather than an *ad hoc* individual basis, and that appropriate common reference sources are available to make communication more efficient. The tools for internal communication are relatively prosaic, with an emphasis on direct one-to-one contacts, meetings and the use of intranet, but it is still important to ensure that such tools are in place and work effectively.

In the second scenario, notably in so-called 'subsumed' Structural Fund management systems, communication takes place via a sometimes very extensive network of intermediary organisations, each charged with taking forward specific parts of the Structural Fund programme alongside their mainstream activities. This has some clear implications for communicating Structural Fund-related messages to applicants and grant-holders. The routes chosen must respect the norms of this institutional framework, including established lines of communication and spheres of responsibility. In Nordrhein Westfalen, for example, the Objective 2 secretariat does not communicate directly with project implementers. Instead, it works via several hundred intermediaries who are responsible for implementing the programme in respect of those projects. In these circumstances, the challenge for the Structural Fund management unit is to support the communication efforts of others.

It is already difficult to ensure that everyone involved in a single Structural Fund management unit is communicating consistently. The challenge across a diversity of regional organisations, whose first and central concern is not necessarily the Structural Funds, is much more difficult. In subsumed systems of Structural Fund delivery, domestic funding agencies need to understand programme obligations and procedures in order to make award decisions and monitor project progress. These can derive from the Structural Funds generally (such as the need to ensure the EU's horizontal theme criteria are being met in application appraisals) as well as the programme more specifically (such as collecting monitoring data in line with the programme's indicators). From the perspective of programme management, this not only entails co-ordinating the dissemination of standardised programme information across a potentially diverse range of intermediaries, but motivating this group of intermediaries to continue working on behalf of the programme. Intermediaries need to be supplied with appropriate information which allows them to inform applicants efficiently and effectively. The messages they pass on need to be tailored to their sector, yet consistent, authoritative and, crucially, up to date. In addition, from the point of view of the programme, there may be a need to ensure that intermediaries give Structural Fund-related messages appropriate visibility, something which is not guaranteed given the many competing communication priorities.

A first issue in deciding on a strategy for communicating with the intermediaries who help to take a programme forward is to define who they are, in order to make this 'virtual' community of Structural Fund managers more tangible, identify its information needs and ensure that all groups are covered by any solutions devised. An example of defining the community is given below for the French context, where intermediaries have become a critical element of a strategy to secure greater uptake of European funding opportunities in French Structural Fund regions.

DEFINING INTERMEDIARIES IN FRANCE

In France, three concentric circles of actors have been identified who are responsible for the *animation* of programmes – working with applicants to help to support the flow of successful projects. Identifying these groups helps to ensure that, whatever channel an applicant takes to work with a programme, their interlocutor is appropriately prepared.

– **Programme managers.** In their role as *animateurs*, the expectation is that they should not act as strict managing authorities in the narrow sense, but should be pro-active, accepting a prime responsibility to identify potential applicants and help them to design better projects, ie. project engineering (also known as *le montage de projet* in French, literally 'building-up' projects).

– **Key animation representatives** (or *référents animation*). These are people whose services are beneficiaries of the Funds, but who are not programme managers themselves. For instance, the *sous-préfets* (the State representatives at the sub-departmental level) are often asked to answer questions about the Funds put to them by potential applicants. Therefore, it is crucial to identify and train a *référent animation* in each *sous-préfecture* so that applicants are correctly oriented towards the right channels. Here, the main objective is to avoid applicants abandoning their projects under the impression that applying for Structural Funds is too difficult.

– **External organisations and experts** who can provide potential applicants with personal and tailored help. For instance, in the field of cultural services, two key contacts in the Paris Euro Info Centre have been trained to provide advice on the Structural Funds. Consultants are also a group who may be involved in working with applicants in preparing applications or fulfilling selected project management tasks such as compiling monitoring data.

What mechanisms can best help to ensure that intermediaries are informed and prepared? A critical step in any solution which is designed is to base it around an appropriate tone of relationship with this wide community of actors. They are partners in delivering the Structural Fund programme, a situation which lends itself to building collaborative relationships based on shared responsibilities and aspirations. More particularly, intermediaries are organisations existing 'horizontally' to programme secretariats. While they have clear Structural Fund duties to fulfil, they have independent priorities and administrative procedures. In order to ensure these gel with the programme as a whole, negotiation is critical, with intermediaries understanding the urgency of some tasks (such as collecting monitoring data) and programme managers appreciating the organisational limits under which intermediaries operate. Accessible and well-used channels of communication must exist between the organisations. In many respects, this raises similar challenges – and demands similar solutions – to communication for programme direction.

The following examples illustrate some ways in which programmes have addressed the communication challenge posed by the community of intermediaries.

➢ **Active involvement in defining the communication plan.** It can be beneficial to involve intermediaries in the definition of the communication plan and then in any steering mechanism, finding out what their information needs are and how they would like them to be addressed by the programme management unit or other appropriate organisations.

- **Shared reference tools.** Programme handbooks and guidance have often been produced to provide an accessible and standard description of programme obligations and procedures for intermediaries. For example, in Nordrhein Westfalen, a handbook of support has been drafted on the Objective 2 programme for the benefit of intermediaries and other bodies implementing the Funds. By containing extensive information on the procedures for application, implementation, claims and monitoring, the handbook reduces the need for the Objective 2 Secretariat to be approached. Once finalised, the handbook will be available to be downloaded from the programme website (http://www.ziel2-nrw.de).
- **Group training for the intermediary community.** Special training sessions can be held with intermediaries on particular topics to ensure common responses to selected issues, developing a shared understanding. A good example is horizontal theme training.[6] Given the higher profile of the horizontal themes in several aspects of programming, training can help those involved with programme delivery to interpret the themes and apply them to their own area of responsibility. Typically delivered by experts (either drawn from relevant units in the programming authorities or external consultants), training can be tailored to cover operational issues of relevance to different types of intermediary. Of course, intermediaries are applying Structural Fund requirements in a setting which already has its own suite of regulations and obligations. As such, it is important to set a collaborative tone in any training offered, exploring possibilities, deepening the understanding of both sides about the potential and limitations of taking certain issues forward, generating new ideas and reaching mutual agreements about what might be feasible.
- **Networking mechanisms.** Establishing a network for those intermediaries who are involved in taking forward aspects of European programmes can be a valuable way of ensuring that this area of individuals' responsibility receives more attention. A networking initiative can afford it a new dynamism and visibility and provides additional motivation. It also helps to build relationships and provides a channel for multi-directional dialogue, problem solving and the sharing of ideas, news and experience. In Rhône-Alpes, for example, a special correspondent has been identified in each of the five *départments* in the region. Each of these *pôles animation* ('*animation*' focus points) is responsible for ensuring that local *animateurs* work as a network to liaise with projects seeking European funding so that they are aware of and can support each other's '*animation*' efforts.
- **Newsletters and websites.** These can be tailored to provide an excellent means of directly communicating standard messages from the programme to both intermediaries and applicants/grant-holders, and of circulating news and other information *between* intermediaries (eg. changes in personnel or scheme rules, and new initiatives which might present opportunities for other new projects to emerge).

[6] Taylor S, Polverari L and Raines P (2001) Mainstreaming the Horizontal Themes into Structural Fund Programming, *IQ-Net Thematic Paper*, 10(2), European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow.

6. ENHANCING PUBLICITY AND COMMUNICATION CAPACITIES

As the preceding sections have highlighted, the number and diversity of publicity and communication tasks is considerable, bringing a range of skills and organisational challenges for programmes. New skills and working methods have been employed, ranging from the ability to organise different programme participants and target groups within a single strategy to more technical areas such as web design and internet programming. Consequently, programmes have had to improve their capacities for co-ordinating and discharging a variety of information activities, developing new abilities, implementing structures and resourcing as a result.

Programmes have responded positively. This can be seen in the development of communication plans providing a framework for activities and how much more focused and better resourced these activities are than in previous rounds. With communication plans as the foundation, programme capacities have been reinforced and underpinned by steering structures, larger budgets, enhanced skills, more active use of outsourcing and external consultants, a wider range of communication tools, and the more intensive and able use of pre-existing tools. To explore how programmes have determined how to build their publicity and communication capacities, this section of the paper focuses on three areas where clear changes have been taking place since the last programming period.

- **Communication plans**. Stipulated by the information & publicity regulation, programmes have actively developed communication plans to provide a strategic framework for their publicity and communication actions.
- **Resourcing**. Whether measured in terms of financial allocations or dedicated personnel, higher levels of resources have been set aside for publicity and communication in the current round.
- **Capacity building and exchange of experience**. As well as allocating more resources, programmes have identified areas where they lack skills or the organisational capacity to carry out their information tasks. To address the weaknesses, increasing use is being made of specialised training and recruitment, external consultancy and exchange of good practice.

6.1 Developing a publicity and communication plan

One of the distinguishing features of publicity and communication in the current programming round is how a more explicitly strategic approach to information activities has been enshrined in key documents. Indeed, a concrete requirement of Regulation 1159/2000 has been that programmes must produce an action plan, laying out the aims, objectives and tasks associated with programme publicity and communication. Although some programmes have responded to the EU obligation with limited plans included within their programme complements, there is a widespread recognition that the process of strategy development in this area can be very fruitful. The stages of development echo in miniature the Structural Fund programme development process itself: a consideration of needs and prior practice at the start, from which aims and objectives can be defined, followed by the actions to deliver them, their resourcing and plans for monitoring and evaluation. As with Structural Fund strategy-making, the benefits of this approach lie in a greater understanding of how publicity and communication can be used to enhance programme performance.

The communication plans mark a more co-ordinated and considered approach, based on deeper reflection. In some cases, they may only reiterate activities already conducted by the programme, but, in bringing together what were previously disparate actions within a single framework, programmes have been able to adopt a more strategic view. Developing the content of these plans is a deductive process which starts by identifying specific audiences and their information needs, in order to target information activities. Consequently, an effective plan can benefit from considering of the following.

- **What has been done in the past**. Before deciding what should be done, it is worthwhile understanding what publicity and communication activities have been carried out in previous programming rounds and how effective they have been. This should not simply be a list of previous actions and their costs, but a more rigorous attempt to assess how useful different activities have been. Complementing this, some programmes have found it worthwhile to work out a baseline audit of the levels of awareness of their programme among different groups. For example, the North East of England conducted its own review of earlier publicity and communication efforts – using the results of final audits – concluding that 20 percent of projects had not complied properly with publicity requirements. Another good example of this took place in Italy (see box below).

BASELINE AUDIT OF AWARENESS:
OBJECTIVE 1 PROGRAMME FOR LOCAL ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT, ITALY

In Italy, a diagnostic audit was made of the awareness of various target groups of the national and EU contributions to economic development: specifically, law 488/92 (the fundamental law underpinning Italian regional policy) and the Objective 1 Operational Programme for Local Entrepreneurial Development. Carried out in 2001, the investigation had the objective of identifying baseline levels of knowledge with a view to informing future publicity and communication activity. It was conducted in two parts:

- a qualitative audit on a representative sample of entrepreneurs, consultants, officers from professional organisations and media operators, interviewed through telephone questionnaire surveys, on their awareness of law 488/92 and the Objective 1 programme; and
- a focus group involving the officers of IPI's local information offices on the general levels of awareness of these policy areas.

The results can now be used to measure any impact of the programme on different audiences' recognition of the value of the Structural Funds to the regional economy.

- **What has to be accomplished**. Following an appraisal of what has worked in the past, plans should make clear what the aims and objectives of the new strategy are. This should not only draw on what Regulation 1159/2000 stipulates, but also on the specific needs of the programme, identified as part of the strategy development process.
- **The audiences that need to be reached**. In defining the aims and objectives of a communication plan, the programme needs to define who its key audiences are. Indeed, what the programme will do for publicity and communication will be principally defined in terms of what actions are

required for each of these target groups. Identifying these groups and their distinctive requirements is an essential first stage in this process.

- **Which messages should be sent and to what effect**. Once the target groups have been determined, the next step is to consider what information or messages need to sent to these groups, whether this communication is regular or takes place at occasional points in the programme and what impact the messages should have on the audiences.
- **Who should communicate**. As programmes are partnership-based, responsibility for publicity and communication will be distributed between different organisations and individuals. Clear allocation of tasks and timetables is important to ensure that all participants are aware of their obligations.
- **What means should be used for communication**. As will be seen in later sections of this paper, communication tools vary, depending on the type of information and target group. In setting out the tools to be used, communication plans should not simply provide lists of actions, but link each tool to a particular objective and target group. For example, a newsletter should not be produced for its own sake, but be explicitly linked to objectives and an audience.
- **Resourcing**. Above all, communication plans need to be practical documents. They should have transparent and realistic estimates of the financial and personnel costs for the different actions listed (as the following section will explore in more detail).
- **Monitoring and evaluation**. Just as programmes as a whole have to be monitored and evaluated to track performance, so too do publicity and communication activities. Communication plans can be valuable in indicating how individual information actions are to be assessed as well as the effectiveness of dealing with each of the objectives and target groups (as Section 7 will detail).

Bringing these different elements together, it is useful to have a framework which links objectives, actions, target audiences, costs and timetable. This can have several benefits. First, it reinforces the idea that actions for publicity and communication should be derived from strategic objectives. As will be stressed elsewhere in this paper, publicity and communication should not be undertaken for its own sake, but tasks should always be linked specific goals and target groups. In many cases, one task may serve multiple goals – as when a newsletter can be targeted at different audiences – but no task ought to be undertaken without clear objectives in mind.

Second, an action plan timetable provides an accessible framework for monitoring progress of different actions. It is a good starting point for periodic assessments of programme performance with respect to publicity and communication. An example of how this has been done is the North East of England Action Plan, an excerpt of which is presented below. It highlights what is to be done, when, why and with what resources.

Table 6.1: North East of England Action Plan framework for selected publicity actions

Objective	Action	Target audience	Potential costs	Timescale
Ensure the rules on publicity requirements are clear and easy to implement	• Guidance on publicity requirements to be regularly updated and disseminated widely • Provide specific publicity materials to projects • Distribute introductory how-to publicity packs	Project applicants	Posters - £2,000 Merchandise - £600	Posters and merchandise to be ready by 05/2002
Monitor adherence to publicity requirements and keep Commission informed	• Package co-ordinators to report on local compliance • Periodically scan media to judge compliance • Record non-compliance and good practice • Publicity officer to offer good practice advice	Project applicants, package co-ordinators, Secretariat staff, the Commission	None	Records kept systematically from 01/2002. Commission informed annually.
Co-ordinate publicity efforts across the partnership to ensure a consistent message	• Press releases passed to publicity officer • Press cuttings passed to Secretariat for analysis • Secretariat and partnership to collaborate on launches and 'good news' stories • Ensure consistency across different programmes	Project applicants, package co-ordinators, partners	Potential additional promotional costs of £2,000	Ongoing
Ensure quick and easy access to key information and project descriptions	• Set up briefings file with project summaries • Set up photo/publicity material library	Ministers, package co-ordinators, Secretariat staff, the Commission	None	Started by 02/2002
Ensure as much media presence as possible	• Work with Central Office of Information on press releases and media events • Encourage pro-active approach across all partnership press departments • Exploit Metro subway media opportunities • Place adverts in papers around the region	General public, media, the Commission	Metro costs - £7,000 Other ad costs - £3,000	New push from 01/2002

In setting out objectives, the communication plans are not anonymous documents, but reflect the particular circumstances of the programmes for which they have been designed. The Danish aim to “develop a network for exchange of information” reflects the communication challenges faced by the Danish Objective 2 programme as a result of its configuration as five regional sub-programmes. In the West of Scotland, in turn, the emphasis on using communication to help to progress the programme sufficiently to meet ‘n+2’ targets reflects a situation of low uptake of funding opportunities. In the País Vasco, finally, the communication plan does not address project generation, since this is inappropriate to the way in which funding is allocated under the Spanish system. Instead, the plan highlights a core role of those employed as European funding administrators and managers: “to disseminate all information relevant for the correct use of the programme resources”.

At the same time, communication plans are not static. They are frequently treated as working documents, guiding activity and evolving as programmes progress. In some cases, regular reviews of the plans can help them to remain relevant, with the establishment of structures such as steering groups to keep progress under review and make revisions as circumstances change. In some cases, there has already been deliberate re-focusing in the current programming round, in response to new issues that have arisen. For example, the threat of de-commitment under ‘n+2’ has prompted some UK regions to re-assess their plans to encourage more project generation (eg. West of Scotland, East Wales).

Moreover, they are not simply the product of internal processes. External consultancy can be used to gather and analyse information for the strategy. As Structural Fund programmes are delivered by a partnership, any communication plan needs to be developed in a participatory way if it is to ensure that everyone’s efforts are to be engaged and their needs and capacities fully taken into account. Who should be involved in developing the communications strategy depends on the specific institutional context. For example, it should be remembered that it is not just organisations directly involved in the management or use of the Structural Funds who participate in publicising them.

6.2 Resourcing publicity and communication

Financial resources for publicity and communication have been increased in current programmes. Indeed, not only has funding for identifiable information activities grown in the present round, but, in most cases, it is the first time that programmes have collated these activities and assigned specific publicity and communication budgets.

While the evidence of change is clear, examining the new levels of resources is less easy. Nearly all programmes have reported that they have allocated more resources to publicity and communication for this round. However, as they have differing bases for calculating their budgets – particularly the extent to which personnel costs are visibly included – it is difficult to compare spending across programmes. Some indication is provided for a handful of programmes in the table below, showing that programmes typically devote between five and 25 percent of their technical assistance budgets to publicity and communication.

Table 6.2: Selected publicity and communication budgets for 2000-06

Region	Budget (€mn)	% of technical assistance budget
Norra Norrland O1	1.1	8
Steiermark O2	c.0.1	5-10
Nordrhein Westfalen O2	2.5	10
Denmark O2	2.3	13
Toscana O2	2.6	18
País Vasco O2	0.75	24

Leaving aside personnel, the main budget items are typically publications (brochures, handbooks, newsletters etc), conferences and seminars. In the West of Scotland communications budget for 2002, shown in the table below, these costs accounted for over sixty percent of the total budget.

Table 6.3: West of Scotland communication budget expenditure for 2002 (€)

Item	Cost
SEP News (not including printing)	9,000
Publications and printing	38,515
Conferences and seminars (external)	23,250
Seminars (based internally)	9,000
Scotland Week promotion	13,500
Miscellaneous	3,300
Total	**96,565**

For the most part, expenditure on publicity and communication is heavily weighted to the early years of the programme. This is not surprising, given the high level of publicising of award opportunities and application processes required at the start of the period.

Publicity and communication have also been better resourced in terms of the personnel devoted to information activities. In general, programme management units are principally responsible for co-ordinating programme publicity and communication efforts. Within the units, responsibility for progressing publicity and communication matters is now explicitly allocated to a specific individual – a development, in many cases, since the previous programming round. In some programmes, a communication officer has been recruited, whilst, in others, these duties have been added to the responsibilities of an appropriate individual. For larger programmes, a more ambitious arrangement may be in place: for example, the Welsh programmes benefit from the support of a communications team including a Website and Publicity Manager, a Communications Manager and an Events Assistant. Elsewhere, programme managers have taken on most publicity and communication activities.

At the same time, because publicity and communication is so intertwined with other programme management activities, most programme staff will contribute to the implementation of a communication plan. Indeed, most of the explicit budget items listed above refer to the first and second objectives of publicity and communication discussed here: informing the public (eg. Scotland Week promotion by the West of Scotland) and communicating for successful projects

(eg. conferences and seminars). Activities linked to communicating for a successful programme are often not overtly listed as publicity and communication measures.

The links with other operational tasks also mean that, in many cases, overall responsibility for publicity and communication becomes a partnership activity. In Toscana, communication is managed jointly by the managing authority and the office of the Presidency. In the País Vasco, relevant responsibilities are allocated at the level which is most appropriate, with much responsibility decentralised to the three *Diputaciones* in the region. Given the number of organisations involved as providers or consumers of information about a Structural Fund programme, and the co-ordination needed to deliver a communication plan successfully, several regions have established working groups to assist in developing, delivering and monitoring their plans (eg. North East England and Hainaut in Wallonie).

These responses reflect the status of communication as a core management tool in programmes whose design and delivery is based around principles of partnership. They interpret publicity and communication activities as an integral and legitimate dimension of good programme management. Indeed, as the previous sections made clear, in a partnership-based environment, communication is pivotal, whether it be with stakeholders, applicants or partners. A strategic approach to communication needs to be integrated into management as whole in order to provide effective support to all programme activities. Consequently, it may not simply be a matter of designating particular budgets and staff to undertake information activities, but recognising the publicity and communication dimension of all programme management and delivery activities and acting on the implications of this.

6.3 Capacity building and exchange of experience

Programme capacity for undertaking publicity and communication is not just a question of resourcing, but whether the programme has the necessary skills and structures. Recognising the scale of new activity in this area, substantial efforts at capacity building have been initiated at different levels. The following sub-sections first review how EC and Member State authorities have been supporting programme-level capacity building, in particular through network building and exchanges of experience, then consider how programmes have secured the relevant skills to implement their communication plans.

6.3.1 EC-level capacity building

Multiple initiatives have been launched at EU and Member State level to provide support for programme actors in effectively fulfilling their communication responsibilities effectively. At the EU level, the information unit of DG Regio has launched an international network promoting exchange of experience between Structural Fund programmes in publicity and communication. When the first meeting of the network took place in March 2002, it was initially focused on Objective 1 programmes; the initiative has since been widened to Objective 2. The original meeting focused on the requirements for programmes in the current period, outlined key challenges in areas such as evaluation and public awareness, and facilitated initial exchanges of experience between participants by drawing attention to good case-study examples. At the meeting, a smaller working group was established to produce a set of publicity and communication guidance. Similar, subsequent meetings were held in May and September 2002 in Brussels.

To supplement the meetings, DG Regio has provided a space on the CIRCA website for publicity and communication materials, including, for example, downloadable versions of communication plans. A review of the other activities in this network is presented in the box below.

EC SUPPORT FOR COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

DG Regio held a high-profile event for Objective 1 managing authorities in March 2002 under the banner: 'Working together - successful communication on Structural Funds'. Several proposals were taken forward as a result of this event to give real momentum to the publicity and communication effort:

- **Electronic Platform for Information Officers.** This will be facilitated through the establishment of a dedicated intranet resource, the Structural Funds Information Team virtual space, which aims to act as a central point for programmes (http://forum.europa.eu.int/Public/irc/regio/Home/main).
- **Collection of communication plans.** As noted above, the aim is for these plans to be available through an electronic document depository. http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/country/commu/index_fr.htm.
- **Practical Communication Guide.** DG Regio is drafting a Communication Guide which will be produced in all official EU languages and will focus on examples of good practice in publicity and communication. Among the themes which will be addressed are:
  - designing and delivering effective communication plans;
  - evaluation;
  - website design;
  - effective use of the media, including outsourcing publicity tasks and developing relationships with news services; and
  - facilitating access to Structural Fund opportunities.

6.3.2 National initiatives

Initiatives have also been initiated at Member State level, bringing together communication officers often working in isolation on similar tasks. Notable examples of networks exist in Sweden, Denmark and France. In Sweden, NUTEK oversees a network of Structural Fund publicity and communication officers, which meets quarterly, as described in the box below.

SWEDISH NETWORK OF PUBLICITY AND COMMUNICATION OFFICERS

Created in 1995, the Swedish Network of Publicity and Communication Officers originally concentrated on the challenge of explaining the Structural Funds to the Swedish citizen following accession to the EU. In the initial programming period, the main goal of the network was to produce a brochure called 'Developing Sweden', which explained the policies behind the Structural Fund system and the Swedish implementation approach and provided an overview of the individual programmes, contact people, potential beneficiaries etc. For the current programming period, the aim is focused more on developing the competence of network members, as many of these officials work alone, or with few others, and can benefit greatly from a network enabling training and promoting the exchange of ideas.

Topics covered to date include use of the European logo, good practice in website design and how evaluations of publicity and communication activities can be conducted. Other activities of the network, which is serviced centrally by NUTEK, involve:

– regular e-mail contact, partly to ensure that members know each other and to encourage exchange of information and tools within the network;

– regular dissemination of information on relevant conferences, seminars and support materials as well as details of any relevant meetings attended by NUTEK members in Brussels which are of interest to the information officers; and

– consultation on any publicity materials being produced and requests for contributions from individual programme contexts.

Denmark provides a further example of this kind of capacity building. Here, there is one national Objective 2 programme, accommodating five regional sub-programmes. To co-ordinate information efforts, a Working Group has been established on Information Issues, consisting of administrators from the national level and those involved in administering Objective 2 at the regional level. The aims of this group are:

- to formalise and systematise ongoing activities;
- to increase quality by sharing experience;
- to facilitate the creation of national measures where appropriate on behalf of all five programme complement areas; and
- to intensify activities in some regions, especially those with limited Structural Fund experience or limited resources as they represent small segments of the national Objective 2 programme.

Lastly, France has pursued a more holistic approach to publicity and communication capacity building as part of their focus on '*animation*', as described in the following box.

SUPPORTING '*ANIMATION'* AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL IN FRANCE

In France, in response to the slow starts made by many of the current Structural Fund programmes, a significant attempt is being made to invigorate programme delivery. This includes a range of measures taken at national level to help to build capacity in dynamic delivery of the Structural Funds.

– ***Animation* co-ordinator.** A co-ordinator will be recruited and made responsible for *animation* within the national agency responsible for Objective 2, DATAR. Their post will be funded through the national Objective 2 Technical Assistance Programme.

– The agent will facilitate networking between regional animation officers, exchange best practice, design shared documents (eg. terms of reference for the selection of experts) and be responsible for encouraging networking on the French Structural Fund intranet site, REPERE.

– ***'Animation'* network.** Regular meetings will be held to encourage networking between the '*animation*' officers responsible for individual Structural Fund programmes.

– **Shared website resources.** The REPERE site will be further developed as a resource, including with an intranet area for animation professionals and publicly available internet content about French Structural Fund programmes providing first orientations.

– **Free-phone information line.** A national free-phone number will be established to provide general information for potential project applicants.

6.3.3 Programme-specific responses

In parallel with the process of developing communication plans, many programmes have been enhancing their own abilities to undertake effective publicity and communication measures on their own. This reflects the need for those responsible to have not only fully developed Structural Fund knowledge but also access to enhanced communications know-how. Several routes have been taken to build capacity.

- **Contracting in the support of experts**. The use of external specialists has been apparent in the communication strategy-building process (particularly in France and Italy), in building brand image, producing more 'media aware' newsletters and exploiting IT effectively for communication. These experts have taken the form of external public relations and communications companies or specialist units within the wider organisation to which the programme administrators belong - eg. the regional government publicity units in Austria and Italy. Such experts can bring a 'fresh eye' to the communication challenge and a toolkit of new analytical techniques and solutions to boost performance.
- **Enhancing the skills of programme actors**. Programmes have targeted training in particular areas of communication, for example, on how to deal with the press. This is perhaps less widespread currently than might have been expected, but several useful illustrations of its value can be found: including a communication training programme for government workers in Flevoland in the Netherlands. This fits into a wider pattern of interest in effective communication by the public sector as a whole.

- **Direct professionalisation of the communication function**. Some programmes have acquired the necessary skills by directly recruiting experts to join programme management teams, or identifying relevant skills among their existing staff. For example, Norra Norrland hired a dedicated publicity and communications manager for its 2000-06 programme, while the Toscana programme has involved a former journalist on its publicity and communication team to oversee relations with the media.

7. EVALUATING PUBLICITY AND COMMUNICATION

7.1 Context of evaluation

Evaluation of the publicity and communication activities of programmes is required in the Commission's publicity and information regulation, where it states that each communication plan should "include the criteria to evaluate the measures carried out". Above and beyond the Commission regulation, though, there are other strong motives for programmes to assess how useful their activities in this area have been. These were laid out in a paper presented to the 'Working Together: Successful Communication on Structural Funds' seminar in Brussels in March 2002:

- to gain a clear idea of the value and benefits of publicity and communication, especially how it can support overall programme performance;
- to find out whether programmes have been capable of achieving the EU regulation's two objectives: transparency and visibility;
- to know whether the funds used were well spent, as part of the general goal of ensuring value-for-money in the use of EU funding; and
- to strengthen the link between information and the implementation of the programme by ensuring that information is used effectively.

As the previous IQ-Net paper on the mid-term evaluations discussed,[7] these reasons are broadly similar to the more general motives for evaluating the Structural Funds, which can be summarised in terms of three sets of questions.

- What is the contribution of publicity and communication to the success of the programme overall? Are shortcomings in information activities leading to problems in programme performance?
- What are the most *effective* ways that publicity and communication activities can enhance programme success? Are there more useful approaches than those selected by the programme? What has been the impact of these approaches on different target audiences?
- Are there more *efficient* ways of carrying out publicity and communication activities? In terms of financial and personnel resources, how cost-effective are the particular types of actions selected and the manner in which they are conducted? Are the level and distribution of resources for publicity and communication appropriate?

Again, as noted in the previous IQ-Net paper, different actors have different needs for a successful evaluation. Adapting Table 2.1 from that paper, the key interests of the three main actors with respect to programme publicity and communication can be expressed in terms of several different types of accountability.

[7] Raines P and Taylor S (2002) Mid-term Evaluation of 2000-06 Structural Fund Programmes, *IQ-Net Thematic Paper* 11(2), EPRC, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow.

Table 7.1: Interests in the evaluations at different levels

EU level	Informational considerations	**Accountability**
	Analytical considerations	
	Operational considerations	
Member State level	Co-ordination with domestic policies	
Programme level	Programme management	
	Programme effectiveness	
	Regulatory requirements	

The Commission has several sets of considerations in the successful evaluation of programme publicity and communication: an informational use in terms of how effectively the EU contribution to economic development in Structural Fund regions is being promoted; an analytical use as the information will feed into shaping the EU's own strategies and activities; and an operational use with regards to whether the Commission needs to support programme managements in the area of publicity and communication. At Member State level, evaluation of information activities can aid domestic policy co-ordination, demonstrating the level of awareness of the Structural Funds and scope for complementarity with domestic policy goals.

At the level of the programme, evaluations are relevant for four main reasons:

- as a tool for improving programme management;
- as a means of tracking the cost effectiveness of different publicity and communication activities;
- in some cases, as an important component in improving programme effectiveness by sustaining project generation; and, lastly,
- in response to regulatory requirements.

7.2 Approaches to evaluation

In one sense, it should not be necessary to evaluate publicity and communication separately. Publicity and communication should already be evaluated as part of more general programme evaluations. Not only is this explicitly mentioned in the EU's information & publicity regulation, but it is difficult to imagine a full programme evaluation *without* covering communication issues. For example, an assessment of programme management may require an in-depth understanding of how key information and decisions are relayed between different groups in the programme. Poor communication will hinder programme effectiveness, both internally as well as in its dealings with applicants, grant-holders and stakeholders.

However, there is a strong imperative to examine aspects of programme publicity and communication separately as well. Whether included as part of mid-term and final evaluations or evaluated independently during the course of the programme, the evaluation of publicity and communication has distinctive features.

Any framework to monitor and evaluate publicity and communication activities would usefully mirror wider programme-level monitoring and evaluation frameworks in having the following three components:

- a description of the baseline position;
- a monitoring system for data collection; and
- an commitment to carry out a formal evaluation (or, in some cases, evaluations conducted at different points in the programming cycle).

Few programmes have been so rigorous in setting up monitoring and evaluation for publicity and communication along these lines. Although prior appraisals can be used to obtain **baseline information** on the level of knowledge of different aspects of the Structural Funds to date, only a handful of programmes have done so to date, in large part, reflecting how difficult and costly this can be to measure. However, prior appraisals can effectively inform the development of communication plans by indicating appropriate instruments and resource allocation needed to reach different target audiences. They are able to highlight areas where information absorption is weak in different groups, identify potential bottlenecks to publicity and communication, and suggest ways of overcoming these bottlenecks.

Similarly, no formal **monitoring systems** have been set up for publicity and communication as yet. Instead, approaches to collecting data on publicity and communication have mainly been limited to reviewing certain key outputs – such as 'hit rates' for programme websites and print runs of newsletters – often at irregular intervals. Such continuing streams of information are important for feeding into the Annual Implementation Reports submitted by the programmes to the Commission, but do not necessarily provide a good grounding for evaluating the real *impact* of publicity and communication.

Lastly, while programmes are formally required to have mid-term and final **evaluations** in the current round, little systematic consideration has been given to how publicity and communication can be incorporated into them. In several cases, tender specifications for the mid-term evaluations include a requirement to evaluate publicity and communication, but usually without a detailed description of how this should be approached (eg. Denmark Objective 2). In general, communication plans do not explicitly state how information activities will be evaluated.

Nevertheless, if programmes are to raise the value of their publicity and communication, a more sustained, systematic approach to evaluation is essential. In planning an effective evaluation, account must first be taken of the overall aims of publicity and communication in the programme. For most programmes, this principally means focusing on changing levels of knowledge and awareness in key audiences. This not only requires defining the type of knowledge/awareness to be measured, but recognising that this will vary between target groups. For some programmes though, what matters is not just whether information is being successfully received, but whether that information is being used: in other words, the focus is on changing the *behaviour* of target groups, not only their levels of awareness.

Different forms of evaluation may be necessary for different target groups. A hierarchy of relevant, feasible indicators needs to be established for each of

these groups along with practical approaches to measuring changes. To do this, a distinction between three different types of indicators should be made for all groups:

- **outputs**: the direct outcomes of publication and communication activities, such as newsletters or number of meetings taking place;
- **results**: the immediate effects of outputs on those in receipt or benefiting from them (eg. number of people receiving newsletters or attending meetings); and
- **impacts**: the eventual direct and indirect consequences of publicity and communication activities, such as the awareness of, and attitude to, the programme by different audiences and their response in terms of good-quality project applications.

Most programmes typically concentrate on measuring outputs, and, to a limited extent, results, but this is often insufficient for a good understanding of how effective publicity and communication has been. An under-developed aspects of many communication plans is identifying the anticipated *impacts* of the activities to be undertaken.[8] However, omitting this aspect not only impedes meaningful evaluation of activities, but also prevents verification of the strategic coherence of a plan – that the suite of activities to be undertaken should indeed achieve the aims which have been set out.

Not all indicators may be relevant for all groups in different programmes and programmes need to be careful in determining which indicators are most appropriate. It can be useful, though, to see how they can be measured across the different target groups identified in this paper: ie. the public, applicants and grant-holders, and partners involved in programme management. The following sections outline different approaches to achieving this. Given the impact issue mentioned above, summary tables are also included at the end of each sub-section that give examples of the different suites of indicators that can be used to measure outputs, results and impacts.

7.3 Evaluating public awareness

The first task is to evaluate the effect of programme publicity and communication actions on changes in general public awareness. Central to public awareness is the level of recognition and appreciation of the role and significance of EU funding in the region. Evaluation can be used to monitor changing attitudes in the public as well as the coverage, transparency and accessibility of the main outputs of the programme's publicity.

Overall awareness is often measured through attitudinal surveys. A good example is the annual surveys in Ireland to measure public awareness of the Irish National Development Plan, the role of the EU in economic development and the ways in which the public have been informed of these things. Such surveys have been conducted using a mixture of general surveys and specific focus groups. Decisions on whether to make use of these methods will depend on several factors. Where there are political and policy imperatives to gauge public attitudes – as in the case of Ireland, with respect to the National Development Plan – it can make sense for Structural Fund surveys to 'piggy-back' other policy-based surveys. Programme size can also make a difference – for small regions, it may make sense for surveys to be conducted as part of nationwide polls. Lastly,

[8] Indeed, this was one of the issues addressed at the DG Regio conference *Working together on information and communication* held in Brussels on 18-19 March 2002 (http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/country/commu/index_en.htm).

surveys may also need to be more refined in their targeting of the public, focusing on particular groups – for example, the educational or the private sector.

Another approach to tracking public awareness of the Structural Funds is through press office monitoring of newspaper clippings and radio/television coverage of related stories. Some programmes have press offices that track the coverage of the programme in the media – and assess how accurately and positively stories are being presented – while others have outsourced this task to specialised agencies.

Table 7.2: Indicators to evaluate communication with the public

Target group	Output indicators	Result indicators	Impact indicators
➢ The public ➢ The media	➢ Signs/posters/etc. ➢ Press releases	➢ TV/radio coverage ➢ Number/slant of media reports/articles	➢ Public awareness of programme ➢ Public attitudes to programme

7.4 Evaluating applicant and grant-holder awareness and ability

As a target group, applicants need to have a good understanding of the funding opportunities available through the programmes in the first place as well as project eligibility and application procedures and requirements. Similarly, grant-holders should fully appreciate their obligations with respect to award conditions, the provision of physical and financial monitoring data, appropriate responses to the horizontal themes, maintaining their own publicity and communication duties and, not least, recognising the ultimate source of their funding. Awareness can be assessed through direct surveys of grant-holders and potential and existing applicants, feedback surveys at publicity and information events as well as through a variety of proxy measures. Surveys should not only concentrate on those organisations which have made applications, but also those which have not.

Evaluations provide the key opportunity for policy-makers to understand whether any shortcomings in applications and administration may derive from problems in communicating with this target group. To do so, evaluations can usefully investigate the ability of applicant and grant-holding bodies to comprehend fully and react to the information received from the programme. The results of evaluation can assist in determining whether any existing bottlenecks can be overcome by targeting the organisational capacity of applicants and grant-holders – for example, through training in how to use programme application and implementation information – or by changing the amount and format of the information given to this target group. However, evaluation needs to focus on both the recipients *and* givers of information. Programmes can benefit from examining whether key information providers have carried out their obligations – for example, producing newsletters, holding seminars, etc. After all, weaknesses in communication may derive from information *givers* as well as recipients.

If the goal of publicity and communication is to *change* the behaviour of a target group, evaluations will need to focus on application levels. This can be in terms of the programme as a whole or for certain priorities and measures (particularly those which are undersubscribed). At the same time, evaluations should also take into consideration changes in the general quality levels of applications. Improving publicity and communication to this target group can result in higher numbers and shares of relevant, good-quality applications. The same point also

applies to grant-holders – evaluations can be used to track improvements in the quality and regularity of claim submissions and monitoring information.

Table 7.3: Indicators to evaluate communication with applicants and grant-holders

Target group	Output indicators	Result indicators	Impact indicators
➢ Potential and existing applicants ➢ Grant-holders	➢ Application forms distributed ➢ Phone enquiries ➢ Seminar attendance ➢ Applicant meetings	➢ Applicant/grant-holder awareness of key features of programme application and implementation	➢ Overall application levels ➢ Share of good-quality applications ➢ Share of well-run projects

7.5 Evaluating partner awareness

The third key audience is the partner organisations involved in programme management. For partner awareness, what is important is that they have access to the necessary information for the operation of the programme, understand their own responsibilities within the programme, are sufficiently well informed to make strategic decisions about its future and learn of any critical changes in good time. Evaluations need to consider how robust the system is for distributing relevant information within the programme, particularly in terms of its ability to ensure the continued active engagement of partners. They should also give due regard to whether partners directly involved in programme delivery – such as funding intermediaries – are fulfilling their common programme obligations, for example, in providing a standard approach to assessing applications, ensuring claims forms are being processed quickly and competently, and collecting relevant monitoring information.

Much of this can be measured through specific feedback surveys. For example, the West of Scotland programme recently completed a 'customer satisfaction survey' which canvassed project managers and partners for their views on the programme's operation. It was run by an independent consultancy with the participation of c.60 'stakeholding' organisations, c.160 project applicants and the Secretariat staff. It probed respondents about the Secretariat's performance, partner involvement in committees and, more widely, applicant and stakeholder views on how publicity and communication could be improved for different areas of the programme. The survey was also used to investigate in detail the pressing problem of project generation.

Table 7.4: Indicators to evaluate communication with partners

Target group	Output indicators	Result indicators	Impact indicators
➢ Partners	➢ Partner meetings ➢ Handbooks distributed ➢ Newsletter mailing lists ➢ Website activity	➢ Partners attending meetings ➢ Partners making effective use of different sources of information	➢ Partner participation in programme ➢ Partner awareness levels of key aspects of programme

8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Publicity and communication is an area of Structural Fund management activity which is receiving increased attention, with much discussion of how best to reach two target audiences in particular: the public and potential applicants. Stepping back from this specific trend, a central argument of this paper is that communication is pivotal to the successful design and delivery of all Structural Fund programmes, given the partnership basis on which they are undertaken. They rely on the contributions of a community of partners with a reservoir of theoretical understanding and practical skills, and on the flows of information between them. This being the case, it is arguably beneficial not only to take a strategic view of communications activities, but to define this as broadly as possible. It should encompass all the major communications flows and needs which are within the programme's scope – addressing not only the public and programme applicants, but also all those involved in steering, managing and delivering the programme.

Informed by this argument, this concluding section revisits the preceding sections of the briefing paper to highlight the key messages arising from the research. First it summarises the paper, then, drawing on IQ-Net partner good practice, it goes on to highlight what appear to be some principles governing effective approaches to publicity and communication. Finally, a series of issues is raised for discussion.

8.1 Summary

Greater emphasis has been placed on publicity and communication in the current round of Structural Fund programmes than before. This is reflected most prominently in a dedicated EC regulation to govern this area – albeit that it enshrines fundamentally similar obligations to those in place previously. There is clear evidence that programmes have responded to these more prominent obligations. They are pursuing more integrated, strategic approaches to information activities, embodied in: the elaboration of communication plans as required by the regulation; the dedication of more resources to these activities, both in personnel and financial terms; the development of further communication skills; and the mobilisation of diverse communication tools. In carrying out a largely EU-driven agenda, however, many programmes have found themselves introducing more strategic approaches to publicity and communication driven by their own operational demands.

Following the introduction, **Section 2** of the paper explored the scope of publicity and communication activities. It found that the EC regulation defines the scope of publicity and communication relatively narrowly, focusing on increasing the visibility of programmes to the public and the transparency of programmes for actual and potential applicants. Structural Fund programme communication plans of course reflect these aims. Indeed, they are often broader in scope. In particular, many go beyond ensuring visibility to potential applicants by committing themselves to facilitating the effective participation of applicants in the programme. Even the broadest communication plans examined here, however, do not embrace the full gamut of communications activities undertaken in reality by any programme, and which also encompass, for example, all those activities associated with managing and steering the programme.

To varying degrees, all programmes have to address three audiences: the general public; applicants and grant-holders; and those involved in the management and delivery of the programme. These audiences, their needs and

particularities, and the modes of addressing them were explored in turn in the next three sections of the paper.

Section 3 addressed those activities focused on **informing the public** about the Structural Funds. The 'public' is a diverse group, consisting of the population at large, potential programme applicants and beneficiaries and programme stakeholders, but all are served by similar activities. The focus here is on 'announcing', passing on key messages to the public without necessarily requiring responses. Rather than seeing these activities as supplementary 'public relations' tasks for the programme, it can be useful to see them as operationally beneficial activities. They help to generate a positive public environment which can facilitate the programme's implementation, and they promote opportunities to potential applicants and ensure that all relevant economic development bodies are aware of the opportunities and direction of the relevant Structural Fund programme.

Publicity takes place through a number of channels. The programmes themselves produce a variety of publicity material directly, including publications, webpages and advertising. Extensive use is made of the mass media, and programmes have relied on regional TV, radio and newspaper coverage to raise awareness of particular projects and of the programme as a whole. Projects also play an important role in publicity through their obligation to acknowledge the EU assistance received. In all cases, publicity can be optimised by understanding the benefits and limitations of using each communication channel and adapting the messages being sent to fit the medium and the audience.

Second, programmes **inform and engage applicants and grant-holders** to ensure that they have all the information required to decide whether an application is appropriate, to make a good-quality application and to implement their project in line with regulatory obligations and good-practice principles. The key is being able to move potential grant-holders from knowing *what to do* – in terms of requirements, deadlines, etc – to knowing *how to do* it. Here, the aim is to help the target group to gain a deeper understanding of the processes of project application and implementation and the practical skills to do this.

Two-way communication is a stronger priority with this group than with the general public. Tools which support interactive, personal communication are particularly important, such as events, workshops and one-on-one meetings, used in conjunction with documentary sources of information such as programming documents, guidance, toolkits, newsletters and websites. The important point here is to understand that the information required by applicants and grant-holders is complex, in flux and often uncodified. To ensure its effectiveness, communication must be centred on the needs of target groups, taking into account their familiarity with the Structural Funds and their ability to digest information.

Lastly, facilitating **discussion about programme management** is an important – although not always explicit – goal of programme publicity and communication. Administering and directing a programme involves a range of partner organisations whose information needs also have to be addressed if the programmes are to run smoothly. This entails several tasks: providing relevant information to the different committees and bodies involved in directing the programme; reporting on programme progress to national authorities and the Commission; and informing all those involved in programme delivery of their operational obligations, particularly intermediary bodies who are responsible for taking forward parts of the Structural Fund programme in a decentralised way. The tools used here are rooted in the importance of encouraging dialogue and

ensuring open and accessible communication between programme management and other groups.

Achieving these multiple aims requires programmes to develop the skills and structures to co-ordinate and carry out the various tasks. Programmes have responded actively to the challenge. Communication action plans have been drafted laying out their principle objectives, main target audiences and important information activities. In many cases, these plans have been updated as programme circumstances change. To have the ability to perform these activities, extensive capacity building has been undertaken, with the recruitment of experts, the provision of specialised training and the organisation of exchange of experience networks. At the same time, there is a growing need for more sophisticated approaches to evaluating the effectiveness of different communication tools and their impacts on the different target groups, with the aim of using the results to inform future publicity and communication.

8.2 Principles of an effective approach to publicity and communication

While programmes have responded to common EU obligations and undertake some of the same activities, the unique character of every programme is reflected in its communication-related initiatives. Programmes have different institutional and organisational circumstances and, consequently, different communication needs. Drawing from the diverse experience of IQ-Net partner regions, a range of good practices can be identified. The design principles for effective communication are straightforward yet valuable in enabling effective information activities to be actively pursued without becoming too costly or time-consuming. The following sections bring together the key points of the preceding paper, summarising the main principles to emerge.

8.2.1 Identifying target audiences

Specifying the target audiences. This paper has discussed three broad target audiences for Structural Funds publicity and communication activities: the public; applicants and grant-holders; and those involved in the management and steering of the programme. All three audiences exist for every Structural Fund programme. However, the relative importance and exact composition of each group differs from programme to programme. Knowing who needs to receive information, when they need to receive it and why are critical first steps in developing a publicity and communications strategy.

Defining the responses required from target groups. In order to decide what message to send and how best to send it, there has to be a clear idea of what the target groups are meant to do with the messages. Why are the messages being sent? What responses are desired from each audience? How can programmes measure whether audiences are responding sufficiently to their publicity and communication efforts? Different responses are associated with different groups.

- For the **public**, the aim of publicity and communication is to raise awareness of the role of Structural Funds in regional development and foster more positive attitudes to the Community as a result.
- Successful communication with **applicants and grant-holders**, in turn, would be reflected in increasing numbers of eligible, good-quality applications and well-run projects.
- For **programme partners**, the publicity and communication strategy can be deemed successful if decision-making within programmes is operating smoothly, and is well-informed and timely, and if intermediary organisations

are able to fulfil their roles as an extended community of Structural Fund managers and administrators.

8.2.2 Choosing the right tools

Ensuring tools are used with a clear purpose. When deciding which communication tools should be used for conveying information to different audiences, it is important that their use is directly linked to specific, measurable objectives. For example, however well-designed, a newsletter is only useful if it delivers the right messages to its intended audience, and has the intended effects. If an information activity is not contributing to the programme's publicity and communication objectives, it is questionable whether that activity is worthwhile continuing.

Designing tools with audience needs in mind. Communication tools are only effective when they take into account the audience's capacity to use them. Audiences may be unable (or unwilling) to use particular tools: in selecting tools, it is important to understand how they are likely to be used. This can be shaped by a range of considerations, including:

- **technical capacities**: for example, if large sections of the audience do not have web access, a publicity and communication strategy based predominantly on website use will be diminished;
- **time constraints**: how much time audiences have to receive programme information will partly determine what tools are appropriate; and
- **contexts**: tools for audiences that are willing to seek out programme information (eg. websites, conferences) will differ from tools needed to secure new audiences. Here, media that the target audience can 'stumble across' become important (eg. adverts, distributed leaflets).

Making sure tools reinforce each other. Communication tools are not used in isolation. Their impact is reinforced when they are used in combination. For example, communication with potential applicants will typically entail leaflets or articles in the specialist press (where an applicant may first come across news of funding opportunities), websites (where the applicant may investigate these opportunities in more detail), direct contacts (where the applicant may want to discuss the specific features of a potential project idea) and newsletters (where the applicant will see examples of good projects and stay up to date with important recent changes). Consistency should be ensured in the messages being given out across all communication tools.

Favouring clarity and brevity. An effective publicity and communication strategy is not measured by the amount of information it puts out, but the amount *received*, *comprehended* and then *acted upon*. The content of publicity and communication should be informed by the need to present information as clearly and succinctly as possible, avoiding the use of jargon and – depending on the particular audience – any unnecessary detail.

Building in scope to change. Structural Funds information is constantly changing over a programme life-cycle. All partners need to know which routes will be used to disseminate changes. Relevant changes should be notified as rapidly and clearly as possible, and checks should be undertaken consistently to ensure that no resources which might be relied on by an intermediary or applicant become out of date without their knowledge.

8.2.3 Developing an appropriate overarching framework

Understanding the institutional context. As well as deciding on the tools and messages to be used in publicity and communication, a clear allocation of responsibility for different tasks is important. How responsibilities are distributed will depend greatly on the institutional context of the programme. For example, publicity and communication efforts may be more centralised in a differentiated system of programme delivery than a subsumed one, given the role of intermediary funding bodies in the latter.

Ensuring the capacity of programmes to communicate. Programmes can usefully appraise their ability to carry out their information tasks, considering organisational structures, individual skills and technical capacities. Several approaches to capacity building have been outlined in the paper, including undertaking training and contracting in specialist skills. Capacity building should be targeted where there are identified weaknesses in aspects of publicity and communication.

Providing a strategic framework to co-ordinate communication. Co-ordinating the myriad of different information activities is an extremely challenging publicity and communication task. Are all audiences receiving the information they need in the format they need it? Is information consistent? Is it communicated in ways which enable the target audiences to use it as intended? Communication plans provide a straightforward mechanism to describe the range of communication activities to be undertaken by a programme, to communicate them to others and to verify their coherence. The value of the communication plan can be further enhanced by establishing a mechanism to periodically review progress against it and to make revisions as appropriate.

Setting up a system for assessing the effectiveness of publicity and communication. Lastly, given the pivotal importance of communication, it is strongly recommended that programmes take a critical approach to their communication activities, establishing mechanisms to monitor and evaluate their activities in this area. This activity might address individual tools or the whole strategy, as appropriate. As with other aspects of the Structural Funds, it is only by appraising the effectiveness of past activities that future publicity and communication initiatives can be optimised.