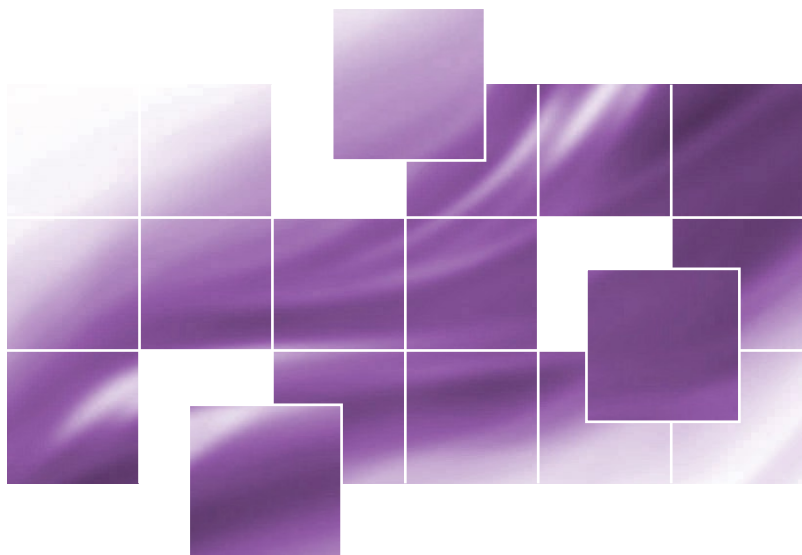# The art of information sharing

Building your institution's reputation as a research hub

Notes for researchers and research managers

Contents

Introduction

Few research managers see themselves as playing a crucial role in representing, or even marketing, their institution to the public, yet you play unique and important roles in conveying information about your institutions, such as:

• Announcing new research grants that your institution has been awarded.
• Informing donors, policymakers and other important stakeholders about the impact of specific research projects.
• Monitoring researchers' output in journals, in books, at seminars, etc. and setting up electronic systems to track how often researchers at your institution are being cited by other scholars.

To ensure that consistent and coherent messages reach the public, you will almost certainly need to co-ordinate your efforts with those of your colleagues who look after other aspects of your institution's communication programme.

Communicating about science and research can be challenging. Anything overly theoretical, or filled with jargon, risks putting your audience to sleep. Conversely, oversimplifying research findings can skew the facts, and lead to important information being lost. But communicating effectively is a skill you can acquire, and one that improves if you are willing to learn from your experiences.

In this notebook, we aim to provide some pointers on:

• Making the most of different channels of communication.
• Managing interviews with journalists.
• Using social media to get your messages out.
• Finding your place in the open access debate.
• Assembling a communication strategy.
• Monitoring the impact of your communication efforts.

Journalists who specialise in reporting about science, as well as communication officers and research managers from several African and Caribbean institutions, have shared their expertise in the pages that follow. Read on to sharpen your communication skills. Please also consider sharing your own communication successes and failures with us at info@research-africa.net, so that we can make these available via the relevant regional research and innovation management networks.

> In a nutshell, the distinctive role that research managers (or communications specialists who work in research-management teams) play is to highlight important and innovative research being conducted in their institutions.

Research management: the skills in brief

Shape institutional research strategies
Understand the global research environment and develop systems to nurture the next generation of researchers (Part 1)

Project development
Scout for funding opportunities and appropriate networks

Be aware of funding do's and don'ts

Assist with funding applications, budgets and progress reports (Part 2)

Public engagement
Highlight the extent and nature of your institution's research work

Ensure the effective dissemination of research findings (Part 6)

A research manager's job profile

Project management
Manage the legalities of contracts

Set up systems that support and streamline grant management

Monitor progress of projects, financial expenditure and reporting (Part 3)

Protect intellectual property rights (Part 5)

Policy and governance
Drive policies on research (Part 1) and processes around ethics (Part 3)

Enhance research collaborations
Be a hub of expertise on sound partnership practices (Part 4)

Facilitate intellectual property management and appropriate technology transfer (Part 5)

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Enhancing your institution's reputation by telling the relevant audiences about your research is just one aspect of a research manager's job. This diagram illustrates the core skills that research managers need, and shows which books in the series contain more information on each skill. (In designing this diagram, we drew on the core-competency framework developed by the Association of Research Managers in the UK and the US Society for Research Administrators.)

What is science communication and why is it important?

There is a common perception that most people don't understand science, and to some extent, this is true. However, scientists are increasingly called on to appear on television or radio to explain occurrences such as flash floods and hurricanes, or to describe how a medical breakthrough came about. If researchers are able to offer clear insights in such situations, they usually feel good about enlightening others. The public benefits from 'expert' explanations, and some listeners may even be inspired to seek more information or study further in a particular field.

Mark Solms, a professor in neuropsychology at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, offers a more fundamental reason why communication about science is so important. He argues that doing research is one of the of the human brain's primary functions.

> We are hard-wired to seek, to think and to make up stories… We cannot help our curiosity, and we take great joy and satisfaction in making discoveries and thinking about them. The public deserve to share this thinking pleasure and this thinking space, because it nurtures our individual identity, our social cohesion, and it integrates scientific ways of thinking into society.
>
> – Mark Solms, Professor of Neuropsychology, University of Cape Town, South Africa

Here are three other reasons why it is important for research managers to communicate with the public:

Marketing – while attempting to enhance your organisation's reputation should motivate all your communication efforts, there are times when your main reason for communicating is to tell the world how wonderful your institution is and what excellent research it is doing. This includes announcing research grants your institution has secured, awards that your researchers have won, research results that have had a positive impact on a policymaking process or helped to empower a community in some way, etc.

Informing – researchers, donors and other stakeholders appreciate being kept informed of changes in the research environment that may affect them, research policies that have been developed, or projects that have been completed.

Networking – connect with relevant organisations and networks to make sure you are aware of developments in your research field. This involves interacting with stakeholders and the wider public, interacting with people to find out if your marketing strategy is working, inviting people to research-related events etc.

> Knowing <u>why</u> you are communicating helps you work out <u>what</u> to say and <u>how</u> to say it.

Focusing on your audience

Most people naturally change their way of speaking when communicating with different individuals. But few of us allow this natural tendency to prevail when we communicate professionally, or to a group; we often become overly formal when we write or give a talk. A good way to communicate appropriately is to imagine you are talking or writing to someone specific as you prepare your talk or write your article. Decide if your primary audience is a donor, a researcher, a journalist or a student, for example.

Then, if you are writing for a donor, you may focus on the impact of a research project, and how this was measured. If you are writing for researchers, you might highlight the methodologies used and how the analysis was derived from the data. If writing a press release, you might explain how a journalist's readers or audiences are likely to be affected by the research findings.

As noted, being clear about your aims or goals helps. Another useful distinction to consider is <u>whether you want to your audience to know something or do something.</u>

> <u>Enhancing understanding</u> is about trying to spread knowledge and awareness about research, innovations or discoveries.
> <u>Encouraging engagement</u> is about inviting the public to participate in a dialogue or action related to certain research findings.

Working out which part of 'the public' you want to reach

John Parkington, a professor at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, points out that depending on what field you are in, and what you wish to achieve, you will have several 'publics', each of which are best reached in different ways. Using the example of his own discipline, archaeology, Parkington gives examples of just three of the groups that he regards as important parts of 'the public':

- People who have a deep and abiding interest in the results of archaeological research often belong to archaeological societies or organisations such as Friends of the Museum or the University of the Third Age. A good tactic is to offer public lectures to these kinds of organisations, and to similar forums that attract ready-made audiences, such as university summer schools or adult-education centres.

- Archaeology has another natural outlet through the heritage and tourism sector. Offering tourism training gives us opportunities to work with national, provincial and local tourism departments. This, in turn, helps us to raise funds, and to use our research results in training and employment creation projects. The _Clanwilliam Living Landscape Project_ is an example of a community-based project in which the results of several decades of research work are being used as the basis for training local residents in a range of scientific and artistic skills that should equip them for careers in crafting, guiding, accommodation, catering, etc.

- According to an old saying, 'research is not finished until it reaches the school syllabus', and we see school learners as the most significant potential public consumers of our research. We use open days at schools, and at the university, to develop relationships with learners and teachers. We have also made some formal interventions in school syllabuses via our National Heritage Council and other government-funded education institutions.

This could be you...reaching local networks and gearing up for wider exposure

Professor John Gyapong is Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research, Innovation and Development) at the University of Ghana. Here he answers some queries we put to him on how his institution communicates about its research.

Professor John Gyapong
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research, Innovation & Development), University of Ghana

Is information about research at your university disseminated through a central communications office or via faculty offices?

Findings that we hope will inform policy development at a national level are communicated directly to the relevant bodies. For example, the university's _Institute of Social, Statistical and Economic Research_ produces policy briefs based on its research findings; these are published on the institute's website.

For now, other publications and research findings are made available on the university's intranet. This allows the university community to access publications and research findings. We hope to move this onto the university website in future, but in the meantime, findings are communicated to the general public and interested parties in industry via workshops, conferences, and public lectures.

From 2014, the University of Ghana plans to produce an annual research report to convey the essence of our research activities and showcase research. And the university also has its own radio station, _Radio Universe_, which we use for teaching and entertainment. Researchers are regularly interviewed, and share their findings with the community on air.

We have also joined a project to improve research uptake in 24 universities in sub-Saharan Africa. Known as Development Research Uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa (_DRUSSA_), the programme is assisting universities to develop and strengthen their in-house expertise.

> DRUSSA's website contains lots of useful tools and tips about enhancing your public profile.
> See http://www.drussa.net/

What do you see as the main challenges of communicating research?

Getting researchers to upload their publications and findings onto our intranet has been a challenge, and so far, no mechanisms have been set up to monitor whether having this information online is useful for other researchers. Another challenge is transforming technical, science-based research into language that ordinary people can understand.

How are you dealing with these challenges?

We are busy developing a policy on our institutional repository. The policy will provide guidelines, standards and requirements for uploading research information for public viewing. Then, the university's research office tries to engage with the researchers from the start of their research projects so as to gain insight into their research, and to provide strategic guidance and support to them when it comes to communicating their findings. The university regularly invites journalists to its workshops and other lectures.

What tips do you have for research managers about communicating more effectively?

It is important to consider the diversity of disciplines involved in doing research, and to take into account their individual contributions as well as the collective impact that they make. Also, it is important to

engage researchers in the communication process, and work out which communication channels are best able to reach the target audience. The focus for the University of Ghana is on findings or outcomes that have the potential to contribute to dialogue and policies on national development. For us, this audience is not limited and so we share research findings with the entire community. However, depending on the nature of the research, the information is also sent to specific stakeholders and to other lecturers.

Does knowing the audience that consumes science help in disseminating research?

Yes, knowing your audience helps determine the level of information to be communicated, and how to reach them. For instance, ways of informing an illiterate community about the findings of a study on malaria prevention might be different from how we would inform a literate community.

"I think you should be more explicit here in Step Two."

Cartoon after S. Harris

Making the most of different communication channels

A range of communication channels exist, each tailored to specific audiences. One of the keys to communicating effectively is to consider which channels are likely to work best for you, and then regularly supply those channels with information that they will find interesting. Four channels that research managers can use are shown in the table.

Publications	Publish (or contribute to) a regular institutional newsletter or annual research report, highlighting the research being done and listing journal articles and books written by researchers from your institution.
Events	Help organise lectures, workshops and seminars where researchers from your institution can tell invited guests about their work. Consider running weekly talks at museums, civic centres, and schools as a way of reaching the wider public.
Mainstream media	Getting your institution's research work featured positively by the mainstream media (that is, newspapers, magazines, radio, television and online media) requires that you establish relationships with journalists and alert them to interesting research data that you have access to. Institutional intranet and internet sites are useful ways of informing interested parties about who you are and what you do.
The internet and social media	Social media sites such as LinkedIn and/or ResearchGate allow you to upload information about research being done, and find like-minded people to network with. Use Twitter and Facebook to advertise events, and YouTube to share the highlights of events you organise.

Did you know? Many tertiary education institutions in Africa use campus radio stations to educate and engage with their local communities. In Nigeria, for example, the government issued 27 radio broadcasting licences to tertiary institutions in 2009.

This could be you: part of a team and clear about where you fit in

In 2013, the Division for Research Development at Stellenbosch University in South Africa employed over twenty people in various roles. One of those people, Maryke Hunter-Hüsselmann is Manager for Research Information and Strategy, and she manages a small department of five other staff. Here she answers our questions about the work done by her unit and how it fits into the university as a whole.

Maryke Hunter-Hüsselmann
Manager for Research Information & Strategy
Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Is information about research done at your institution made public through a central communications office or at faculty level?

We have different ways of disseminating research depending on the target audience and the purpose. Our central communications office, our research development office and the different faculties all play a role, but we all do things in different ways since our mandates are different. However, we all talk to one another regularly.

Most faculties have a media officer who deals with day-to-day media queries, writes press releases, etc. Our unit, the Division for Research Development, publishes an annual research report called *Research at Stellenbosch University*. This report is presented so that it talks to fellow researchers, possible future collaborators, funding agencies, and the media; it is also available on our website for anyone else who may wish to read it. The aim of the report is to make visible our research activities and to show how relevant our research is to the betterment of society.

We host public lunch-hour lectures, where researchers present their work in an accessible way. And we also look for ways to get our research results out to communities and high-school learners (future researchers). We regularly keep track of the latest developments on the research front, and communicate interesting stories via our website, and through our newsletters. We also try to enhance our researchers' profiles by nominating them for awards and prizes, and we are working on a knowledge directory that will be accessible on the web, which users will be able to search for experts in a particular field.

What challenges have you faced?

When we started our annual research report, *Research at Stellenbosch University*, it was sometimes difficult to get enough material for the publication. Researchers needed to know what was in it for them. But now, the publication has earned some credibility; researchers can see that it makes their work more visible, that it helps create an overall impression of the university as a research-driven, research-focused institution and that it creates a platform for showcasing their work. These days, we can't keep up with all the contributions we receive.

What tips do you have for communication officers who want tell the public about research?

Know your aims, objectives and your target audience.

How does knowing the audience help?

You have to know who you want to target when preparing any publication, whether it is a pamphlet for a local community or information for a specific web page.

When publicising research that your institution is involved in, do the researchers determine what the audience should know, or do you send out generic press releases?

We don't do any press releases – the faculty offices or the central communications office do those. We do sometimes notify the communications office of an interesting development that we think they should alert the press to, but it is not our mandate to write press releases. For our annual research report, we know who our audience is, and we inform our researchers of the tone, as well as the look and feel, of the publication. We tell them what we expect from them and this helps them to write their contributions.

Cultivating relationships with professional journalists

If you want to enhance the reputation of your institution in the mainstream media (that is, via newspapers, magazines, radio and television), then cultivating relationships with professional journalists is essential. However, researchers and journalists have very different approaches to stories, facts and deadlines. Acknowledging and understanding these differences can help you to frame stories about your institution's research in ways that journalists understand and might therefore decide to use.

The differences between researchers and journalists

Researchers	Journalists
Have often spent years conducting their research, and are not in a hurry – they tend to be slow and careful to ensure that nothing is misconstrued, and they prefer to present the context of their research before anything else	Always work to tight deadlines, think fast, and have little time for pleasantries – they have no interest in understanding backgrounds or contexts, and don't want too much detail; they prefer to focus on the main points and the punch line
Present the facts, and then reach a conclusion	Present the conclusion to grab your attention, and then present the facts
Are expert in their field	Have a basic grasp of science
Tend to assume that their audiences are highly educated and fascinated by their research	Have a good grasp of what their audience understands and is interested in
Use many complex terms that may alienate their audience	Use sensationalism and everyday language to seduce and retain distracted audiences
Are very careful with facts	May be loose with facts, especially if they get in the way of a good story
Understand statistics and have a great fondness for graphs	Might not be entirely comfortable with numbers or graphs

An expert's tips on communicating with the media

Jerry E Bishop was deputy news editor for the *Wall Street Journal* in the 1990s, and offered the following insights about how science is communicated in the media...

① When scientists try to enlist the mass media as partners in achieving a 'public understanding of science', they seem to assume that the scientific process is so fascinating that all the reporters have to do is describe an experiment or a scientific finding in lay terms, and readers immediately will be so engrossed they will read the story down to the last word...The reality is that the vast majority of the public cares very little about science, will spend little or no time trying to learn about science, and will be bored reading or hearing about it.

② Scientists can define what they believe the public should know about science. Those in the mass media, however, are faced with the problem of trying to fathom what the public want to know about science.

③ To most science reporters and news editors, the headline and the first sentence of the story – the 'lead' – are the most crucial elements, for these must quickly seduce readers into reading further...The reporter must tell the readers almost immediately why they should be interested in a development and why they should read further.

Understanding journalists

Well-known science journalist, Christina Scott, explained how she would approach an interview, and offered some rules for researchers to remember when being interviewed.

Christina Scott
Science Journalist

How a typical science journalist approaches an interview

* I often draft a rough outline of a story while I track down the relevant sources.

* I don't allow researchers to insist on a face-to-face interview... especially if they live in another country.

* I don't allow publicly funded scientists to say no to an interview... unless they are giving birth.

* I seldom spend more than five minutes doing the actual interview.

* I often spend five minutes *before* the interview explaining who I am, what I want, by when, and why.

* I often spend five minutes *after* the interview, repeating the information back to the scientist to see if we are on the same planet, and getting every single contact number.

* I write the story and then I read it back to the researcher. Then we fight. Then we publish.

* I always, *always* ask dumb questions! Science is too big for anyone to be able to know everything!

So, before you agree to being interviewed by a journalist, find out:

* Who they work for.
* What audiences they reach.
* What story they are trying to tell.
* What sort of data, figures, etc. they need.
* What deadline they are working to.

Then, tailor your responses to their questions accordingly, and be as clear as you possibly can.

Christina Scott's rules for being interviewed by journalists

Rule ① Don't be boring.

Rule ② Ditch the expectation that you will be able to prepare. In the real world, most reporters won't know who you are or where you come from before they interview you. They bump into you at a conference or at the end of a phone when they're in pursuit of a deadline.

Rule ③ Don't be boring.

Rule ④ Answer the questions.

Rule ⑤ Don't be boring. ☺

Rules 1, 3 and 5 apply to press releases too!!

Accept that everything in life has rules – even press releases and interviews.
– Christina Scott, science journalist

Harnessing the power of social media

The internet offers research institutions a vast range of new communication channels. Working out which ones to use and how to use them effectively can be challenging especially where bandwidth and internet access are limited.

However, if used well, institutional websites and social media tools can dramatically increase public awareness and understanding. Making information more readily accessible almost always improves the uptake of research results. Armed with information, communities can encourage policy makers and politicians to introduce positive changes.

In this section, we consider how research managers can use social media to effectively promote the profiles of their institutions.

Let's start with some of the language that has evolved to describe different aspects and capabilities of the internet and its various sites.

Decoding some of the lingo

Bandwidth – determines how much data can be sent over a specific internet connection in a given amount of time.

Blog – a personal webpage that interested people can subscribe to, and receive notifications via email when it is updated or added to. Blogspot and Wordpress are free sites on which anyone can set up a blog.

Crowdsourcing – a useful way to outsource tasks to people in your social network.

Profile – a section of a social networking site customised by an individual user or an organisation to contain information about themselves that they wish to share with others.

Tags – these are keywords added to a blog post, photo or video to make your entry more findable to search engines, and to help users find related topics or

media. A hashtag is a word or phrase prefixed with the hash symbol (#) and is used on social networking services such as Twitter to help users search for tweets on a certain topic. And a geotag is location-based metadata added to media such as photos, video or online maps to help users find a wide variety of location-specific information.

Traffic – the flow of users and data on the internet. It usually refers to the number of visits to your website, and tells you how many people are interested in what you are doing, and where they are located.

Twitter handle – the name you use to log into Twitter; this doesn't have to be your real name.

URL – another term for a web address, this acronym stands for 'uniform resource locator'.

Using social media

Twitter, *YouTube*, *LinkedIn*, *Facebook*, *Google+*, *Knode*, and a plethora of similar sites are innovative, trendy, and smart. Many of us use social media in some form, and research managers in Africa and the Caribbean are already using social media to make their work more effective.

So what is social media, exactly?

Social media is a group of internet-based websites that use the internet to enable users to communicate and exchange content online. The world's four biggest social media sites so far are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Social media sites usually allow users to create sub-groups, invite others to events, set up discussion forums and share photos, videos and other files. Blog sites, on the other hand, are like mini websites, hosted via sites such as *Wordpress* and *Blogspot*. Blogs offer users a more personalised presence online, and users can even earn an income from advertising if they attract a large audience.

Three reasons why research managers should use social media

① Staff shortages and increased competition for grant money means that research managers are overstretched. Social media can help research administrators and researchers to keep one another informed on an up-to-the-minute basis, and can greatly contribute to a faster-adapting and responsive institutional research culture.

② Interaction through social media can foster a culture of collaboration that extends beyond time, institutional, national and regional boundaries. This provides richer and more diverse conversations across disciplines and fields.

③ Mobile phones are at the centre of social media in low- to middle-income countries. Mobile internet usage in Africa, for example, is already among the highest in the world. Social media is accessible on many mobile phones, so research administrators can use social media to keep in touch with relevant funding opportunities, webinars and seminars the moment they are advertised, and at the same time build professional networks.

Social media can make research management communication more efficient, effective and accessible.

Choosing a social media forum

Deciding which social media forum to join or to use can be confusing.

- _Facebook_ is generally used for more sociable, chatty interactions.
- _Twitter_ is for quick-thinking, fast-moving 'micro-blogs' of 140 characters or less, and for sending links to longer documents or other websites.
- _LinkedIn_ is the vehicle of choice for a professional look, finding collaboration opportunities, as well as participating in group forums around common points of interest.
- _YouTube_ can be used to showcase research via video clips.
- _Blogs_ are essentially free websites and are an excellent option for smaller institutions that have information to share but may not be able to afford to design their own websites.

Looking at how other institutions are using these kinds of sites might help you to work out which one/s suit you best.

Social media can't stand alone as a marketing or communications tool, but can support other efforts exceptionally well.

This could be you…an accomplished social media guru

Daniel Nordquist, Director in the Office of Research and Office of Grant and Research Development at Washington State University, uses social media very successfully. He argues that research managers can use social media to establish relationships and broaden collaboration in ways that were impossible before.

He points out that social media provides faster access to news, and allows research managers to increase their responsiveness, as well as gather the necessary feedback at a quicker pace. Nordquist believes that this increased speed might be social media's biggest advantage, especially where bureaucracies sometimes slow down communication.

Ten steps to creating a social media profile

1 Decide if you want to provide information or seek interactions with your followers. This will help you choose which medium/s are appropriate, and help to set the tone of your messages.

2 Set tangible goals. Decide how many messages you will aim to send out and how many followers you aim to reach.

3 Choose your audience and select a social media site accordingly. Do you need to reach academics who see LinkedIn as respectable, or vocal young researchers who love Twitter? Yes, you can join several social media sites.

4 Create your institution's profile/s and make it/them as complete as possible.

5 Identify a staff member to act as your social media expert, and ensure that they update your site/s regularly. This person should be well informed about your institution. Responses to queries need to be quick and accurate. Failure to achieve this will affect your reputation.

6 Social media users are hungry for fresh content, news and updates – feed them regularly and you'll maintain their interest. Your social media communicator should spend at least an hour a day updating your social media profile/s.

7 Grow your audience quickly. Publicise your social media account and invite colleagues, donors and others interested in your institution's research activities to join you. Link your institution's social media profile/s to its website and vice versa. Look in the help section of social media sites for information on creating links to your social media accounts.

8 Join groups within your chosen social media site/s that share your goals and interests so that you benefit from an increased flow of information. The more accounts you follow, the more information you will receive, and be able to pass on to others.

9 If your institution has a small marketing budget, consider using social media sites as a means of advertising, and to generate interest in your institution's work.

10 Be professional. The tone of your communications should fit your choice of platform. Come across well-informed. Offer links to articles and websites that are of interest to your followers.

Negotiating your institution's policy on open access

Research environments globally are in an interesting state of change and flux, and the open access movement is just one of the elements involved in that transformation. Open access is the practice of providing unrestricted access to peer-reviewed scholarly research via the internet. Open access is generally applied to scholarly journal articles, books and other media.

Since 2010, several of the world's large multilateral organisations have declared themselves supporters of open access. Two examples include:

• The European Commission, which plans to allow open access to all research findings arising from projects funded by Horizon 2020 – an enormous, €80 billion (US$98 billion) funding programme it is running from 2014 to 2020. The Commission is also urging European Union member states to follow suit.
• The World Bank, which has adopted an open access policy for all its research outputs and knowledge products.

Many prominent research institutions are following suit, and similar organisations all over the world are grappling with whether or not to follow this trend. It is clear that those institutions that have opted for open access are doing so in an effort to enhance their reputations and the uptake of their research.

However, while such transformations often give rise to innovation, they often also make space for opportunism. The phenomenon that is open access is no exception. For example, many donors now include a line item for 'publishing fees' in their research grants, so a number of new journals have sprung to life promising fancy forms of access which are anything but open. Similarly, some researchers endlessly recycle work that they have already published just to access these publishing fees.

Adding complexity to the situation is the fact that every discipline has its own ways of engaging with research and education, so humanities scholars, social

scientists and mathematicians may respond very differently to the notion of making their work freely available online.

Research managers must consider the specific needs of researchers they work with, as no perfect, one-size-fits-all solution to information sharing exists. Your institution's policy on open access has to evolve, based on the specific aims and strategic imperatives developed by your management team.

Managing the balance between openness and disclosure requires you to think carefully about what you are trying to achieve, to consult widely with your research colleagues and your management team and to consider the benefits as well as possible drawbacks. Whatever decision you reach, be sure to revisit it in a year or so, to reconsider and decide on the next steps.

> For further information about the open access movement, see Part 5.

Getting through to policymakers

Policymakers are one of the more influential components of society that research institutions communicate with. If tackled wisely, all of the key communication channels discussed so far (publications, events, mainstream media and social media) can be used to work together to engage and guide the policymakers that are important to you.

> The word 'policymaker' refers not just to government advisers, ministers and members of parliament, but also to people who develop policies for the private sector, unions, the donor community, etc.

However, although policymakers are expected to draw on research data when developing policies and policy frameworks, most have far too little time to wade through all the relevant information. Communicating wisely is crucial to being heard. Let's look at how each communication channel can be used to reach policymakers.

Publications – policy briefs have become a fashionable way of summarising research data and setting out its policy implications clearly and succinctly. A policy brief is usually not longer than four to eight pages and should contain a short introduction, an explanation of which policies it links to, an outline of key research evidence, the policy implications of those findings, and, finally, a short list of recommendations. Policy briefs must always be written in plain language and be free of technical jargon.

Events – public debates, expert round-table and panel discussions all help to create a buzz around a particular topic, so that even if policymakers don't attend, the chances are that someone they know will, or someone who attends will feel inspired to write to the media or phone into a radio talk show, and talk about the issues.

Mainstream media – press releases, background briefings for journalists, feature articles by research experts, radio and television interviews all

contribute to a general public awareness around an issue. This helps to put pressure on policymakers to pay attention to relevant research data.

The internet, and social media – first make sure that contact details for all the relevant research experts are easily accessible on your institution's website. All staff directories should be searchable by department and field of study, as well as by name, and all departments and faculties should have their own home page, with clear information about staff areas of expertise, so that should anyone, including policymakers, require information, your website will reliably give them an expert to talk to. Use social media to publicise your events and to provide links to your policy briefs, as well as relevant articles in the mainstream media.

This could be you: successfully lobbying policymakers

Information about children's ability to recognise cigarette brands was used by South Africa's health ministry in 1999, to push for legislation preventing public advertising of tobacco products and the sale of cigarettes to minors.

How did this come about?

According to Professor Linda Richter (Distinguished Research Fellow at the Human Sciences Research Council and principal investigator on the Birth-to-Twenty Study, it was found that seven-year-old South Africans who participated in the Birth-to-Twenty Study recognised branding used by cigarette manufacturers such as Peter Stuyvesant more easily than they recognised the South African flag. Parliamentarians were made aware of this, and quickly became more receptive to proposed legislation around tobacco advertising.

This example is taken from the Policy Action Network's newsletter *From Evidence to Action* 3, 2011.

Aim to orchestrate your input into the various media channels so that you create a consistent, interesting and authoritative image of your institution's research.

Assembling a successful media strategy

As shown in the section on communicating with policymakers, and in the case studies of staff at the University of Ghana and Stellenbosch University, communicating the research efforts of an institution in an interesting and effective way requires a co-ordinated strategy. This involves working out which audiences need to be informed about your research, and then working out how to reach those audiences reliably and regularly, using some or all of the different channels of communication covered in this booklet.

The questions below raise some of the important points you will need to address to develop an effective communication strategy.

- **What is your institution's business strategy?** Your communications plan must align with your institution's overall strategy. Is your institution looking to grow its research base or does it need to concentrate more on attracting external funding? The answer to this question will help you decide on the direction that your communication strategy needs to take with regard to identifying your audience and deciding which channels will reach them best.

- **What is your institution's research strategy?** Although this may be similar to the overall business strategy, considering this question will allow you to focus your communication plan on supporting the broader needs of your institution. Although you will probably use a number of communication channels, having a dominant message will subtly reassure your audiences that you are who they think you are. Remember that audiences love consistency.

- **Which communication channels do you want to focus on?** This requires a realistic assessment of the skills and resources you can deploy; whether you need and can afford to bring in some outside experts, or if you need to start small and build up slowly.

- **How will you measure your success?** Create some measurable targets, and set yourself some deadlines. For instance, you may want to get started with two social media sites, and aim to attract 500 followers in the first year; and you may want to develop relationships with science journalists and have one research project profiled each month for a year. Every few months, make some time to assess what you have achieved against the targets you set. Look at what is working and what is not; be willing to learn from your mistakes, and your strategies will steadily improve year by year.

A crucial aspect of building your institution's profile is taking the time to monitor and analyse the impact of your efforts. For research managers, two issues are important here; the first is citation monitoring and the second is media monitoring.

Citation monitoring

The number of times academics at your institution are cited by other academics in journal articles and books is one important indicator of the impact of research conducted at your institution. Generally, the journals that matter as far as citation indices are concerned, are peer-reviewed. This means that the articles have been through an editorial process during which other academics in the field review the articles and state whether the text is relevant, innovative, and thus fit for publication. In North America and Europe, an academic's reputation and status is based on their publication record, and on the number times they are cited. Most universities have electronic software for monitoring citations. Christina Pather at the University of Cape Town notes that they use the _Web of Knowledge_ and _Scopus_ for measuring research impact and productivity.

We work closely with our librarians because they have the expertise to monitor impact factors, analyse co-citations, identify our areas of strength, etc. The data they collect plays an important role in motivating for staff promotions and awards, and is submitted to our National Research Foundation for institutional evaluations and ratings as well. We are mindful about using such data carefully, keeping the disciplinary differences in mind.

– Christina Pather, Communications Officer, Research Management Office, University of Cape Town

Media monitoring

One way for research institutions to monitor their public profile is to collate a file of all the mainstream media coverage they get. Analysing this, alongside communication initiatives such as press releases, publications, newsletters, reports, etc., helps you to see which communication methods are working well, and what sort of public image and reputation your institution is developing.

For this kind of monitoring to be effective, research managers and other communication staff have to work together to systematically monitor coverage, and analyse the results.

Useful resources

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Acknowledgements

Several people agreed to be interviewed for this booklet and we thank the following for their valuable insights and input: Christina Pather, Communications Officer from the Research Management Office at the University of Cape Town, South Africa; John Gyapong, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research, Innovation and Development) at the University of Ghana; John Parkington, Professor of Archaeology at the University of Cape Town, South Africa; Mark Solms, Professor of Neuropsychology at the University of Cape Town, South Africa; and Maryke Hunter-Hüsselmann, Manager for Research Information and Strategy at Stellenbosch University, South Africa.

Some of the content of this booklet was adapted from the many resources available on the website of the American Association for the Advancement of Science at *http://communicatingscience.aaas.org/*

Core Competency Framework diagram adapted from resources developed by the Association of Research Managers -UK Professional Development Framework and the US Society for Research Administrators.

Claire Maasch, Sandra Prosalendis and Munyaradzi Makoni for pulling together all the interviews and several slide presentations into a cohesive whole, and Alison Bullen for her contribution to the section on briefing policymakers.

Cartoon on page 11 adapted from Sidney Harris's work. Available online at *http://tinyurl.com/odkswob*

Finally, thanks to freelancers, Tracey Watson for design, and Mary Ralphs for editing.