



Communications is capacity

Assess strengths, understand gaps, and prioritise your organisation's communications

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Preface

For many non-profit organisations, communications often sits at the edge of the work—something done after programmes are implemented, reports are written, or events are completed. Yet communications is not an add-on. It is a core institutional function that connects programmes, strategy, partnerships, and public understanding of the work. When approached this way, it helps build trust, strengthen relationships with communities and funders, and ensure that efforts reach the people they are meant to serve.

Many grassroots organisations in India are doing significant work but face challenges in communicating their impact—often due to limited budgets, small teams, or the absence of structured communication systems. Developed through a partnership between Axis Bank Foundation and India Development Review (IDR), with IDR serving as the knowledge partner, this playbook is part of a series of seven that aims to provide practical, accessible guidance for organisations regardless of size or resources. Together, the playbooks are designed to walk non-profits through the essential building blocks of organisational communications.

This playbook, titled *Assess strengths, understand gaps, and prioritise your organisation's communications*, helps organisations assess their communications capacity and identify areas of improvement.

These playbooks are not meant to be read only once or followed in a strict order. Organisations can return to them at different stages of their communications journey, using them as references while planning campaigns, documenting programmes, or strengthening internal communication systems.

At the end of each playbook, you will find short exercises and reflective prompts designed for teams to discuss together. These are meant to help organisations pause and reflect on their current practices, and consider how communications can better support their mission and goals.

Used together, these playbooks aim to help organisations treat communications not as a separate activity, but as a system that strengthens the work they already do.

Introduction

In the previous playbook, we explored why communications should not be treated as an afterthought but built into how an organisation works. When communications is embedded in planning, leadership, programmes, and decision-making, it helps build trust, strengthen partnerships, and ensure that the organisation's work is understood.

This raises an important question:

Where does your organisation currently stand?

Most non-profit organisations are already communicating—through donor reports, programme updates, social media, community engagement, or partnerships. However, these activities are not always coordinated or supported by clear systems and processes.

This playbook helps organisations pause and take stock of their communications capacity.

It provides a self-assessment framework to reflect on whether communications functions as a strategic capability within your organisation. Rather than focusing only on outputs—such as posts, reports, or campaigns—the assessment looks at the systems, roles, and practices that enable effective communication.

The playbook examines communications readiness across six dimensions of organisational capacity.

For each dimension you will assess:

- **Input readiness:** the clarity, systems, roles, and skills that enable communications to function effectively
- **Output readiness:** the quality, consistency, and relevance of communication produced by the organisation.

How to use this playbook

This playbook is designed to move you from reflection to action.

- Complete the self-assessment with the core communications team and leadership to reflect on current practices.
- Review each dimension together and discuss where your organisation is strong and where systems may be missing.
- Use the scoring matrix to identify priority areas for improvement.
- Use the 90-day planning sheet at the end to identify a small number of actions to strengthen communications capacity.

By the end of this section, readers should be able to:

- Understand the different dimensions that influence communications readiness.
- Reflect on how systems, leadership, and processes support communication within their organisation.
- Identify strengths and gaps in communications capacity.
- Prioritise practical steps to strengthen communications systems.

I. Assess your communications readiness

The assessment below helps you reflect on six dimensions of communications capacity. Each dimension includes two components:

Input readiness

The systems, structures, and capacities that enable communication.

Output readiness

The quality, consistency, and reach of communication produced by the organisation.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

Does this sound familiar?

- Programme updates are written mainly for donor reports.
- Stories are collected only when needed for proposals or campaigns.
- Different team members describe the organisation's work in different ways.
- Communications depends on one or two individuals rather than shared systems.

If your answer to any of these scenarios is yes, your organisation may already be communicating regularly. The next step is to understand whether the systems behind that communication are strong and sustainable.

DIMENSION #1: Purpose and clarity

Input readiness

Examine how clearly your organisation defines and communicates what it does, why it exists, and how it talks about its work.

- **Can every team member describe what your organisation does?**

- a) No, there are varied versions and unclear descriptions (0 pts)
- b) Some can, but it is not a holistic description; language is inconsistent (1 pt)
- c) Most can, and they do so using similar language (2 pts)
- d) Yes, everyone can, clearly and consistently (3 pts)

- **Do you have a written communications plan or strategy?**

- a) No (0 pts)
- b) We are developing one (1 pt)
- c) Yes, but it's not used regularly (2 pts)
- d) Yes, and it guides our communications efforts (3 pts)

- **Do you have guidelines on the organisational tone/voice that is used externally? This could be for your website, social media, newsletters, or funding decks.**

- a) No (0 pts)
- b) Yes, but only for fundraising (1 pt)
- c) Yes, but not for all platforms (2 pts)
- d) Yes, for every platform (3 pts)

- **Is your messaging aligned with your values and mission? (For example, when you post on social media or write your newsletter, do you consider whether your tone and images are in line with your organisational values?)**

- a) Not always (0 pts)
- b) Usually, but not reviewed often (1 pt)
- c) Mostly consistently (2 pts)
- d) Fully aligned and reviewed regularly (3 pts)

Output readiness

Examine whether your organisation's purpose and narrative are communicated consistently across materials and platforms.

- **Is your messaging consistent across team members, platforms, and materials? (For example, would someone who came across your organisation on LinkedIn have the same understanding of what you do as someone who receives your newsletter or views your pitch deck?)**

a) Not at all (0 pts)

b) Somewhat consistent (1 pt)

c) Mostly consistent (2 pts)

d) Fully consistent (3 pts)

- **Are you happy with the quality of messaging in your communications materials (such as decks and one-pagers)?**

a) No (0 pts)

b) Yes, in some materials (1 pt)

c) Yes, in most materials (2 pts)

d) Yes, in all materials (3 pts)

DIMENSION #2: Leadership and ownership of communications

Input readiness

Examine how leadership actively supports and takes ownership of communications within your organisation.

- **Do you have someone dedicated to communications?**
 - a) No dedicated person (0 pts)
 - b) A staff member handling this part-time (1 pt)
 - c) A dedicated communications lead (2 pts)
 - d) A full communications team or department (3 pts)

- **How involved is the senior management or leadership in communications priorities?**
 - a) Rarely (0 pts)
 - b) Only at the approval stage (1 pt)
 - c) Regularly, but inconsistently due to multiple priorities (2 pts)
 - d) Regularly (for example weekly or monthly), with the intention to share updates on the organisation's strategy, approach, and direction (3 pts)

Output readiness

Assess whether leadership and ownership lead to clarity around audiences, messages, and communication channels.

- **Do team members know which audiences are internal (staff, leadership, board) and which are external (donors, partners, media, communities)?**
 - a) No (0 pts)
 - b) Somewhat (1 pt)
 - c) Mostly (2 pts)
 - d) Yes, very clearly (3 pts)

- **Are team members clear on what types of messages or content are appropriate for internal versus external audiences (for example, strategy discussion, programme updates/challenges, success stories, and funding information)?**
 - a) No (0 pts)
 - b) Slightly (1 pt)
 - c) Mostly (2 pts)
 - d) Yes, very clearly (3 pts)

- **Do team members know which communication channels to use for internal and external communication (for example, email, WhatsApp groups, newsletters, and media releases)?**
 - a) No (0 pts)
 - b) Slightly (1 pt)
 - c) Mostly (2 pts)
 - d) Yes, very clearly (3 pts)

DIMENSION #3: Systems, processes, and governance

Input readiness

Assess whether communications is supported by documented processes, guidelines, and mechanisms for continuity.

- **Do team members have a clear idea of what their roles are within the team?**
 - a) No, roles are not clear and may overlap (0 pts)
 - b) Slightly clear (1 pt)
 - c) Mostly clear (2 pts)
 - d) Yes, roles are well defined and understood (3 pts)

- **Do you have a documented process or a manual outlining how communications tasks are handled (for example, social media posting, approvals, branding use, or content development)?**
 - a) No (0 pts)
 - b) Partially; some processes exist but are not documented (1 pt)
 - c) Yes, documented but not consistently followed (2 pts)
 - d) Yes, clearly documented and consistently used (3 pts)

- **Are best practices in communications (such as tone, design consistency, ethical storytelling, or donor reporting standards) documented and shared with the team?**
 - a) No, they are informal (0 pts)
 - b) Some aspects are shared verbally (1 pt)
 - c) Yes, documented but not regularly updated (2 pts)
 - d) Yes; documented, updated, and accessible to all staff (3 pts)

Output readiness

Assess whether existing systems support regular, coordinated, and predictable internal communication.

- **How often do you communicate internally with the full team about the organisation's work and priorities?**
 - a) Rarely (0 pts)
 - b) Only when something urgent arises (1 pt)
 - c) Regularly but inconsistently; some information is communicated, but there are no clear guidelines on what should be communicated, or when and why (2 pts)

d) Weekly or monthly, with clear updates (3 pts)

- **Do you or your team members communicate with other teams, such as the programmes team or fundraising team, for inputs?**

a) Rarely (0 pts)

b) Only when there is a donor report or programmatic output that needs to be created and published (1 pt)

c) Regularly but inconsistently (2 pts)

d) Weekly or monthly, with the intention to share updates and impact stories (3 pts)

DIMENSION #4: Content and knowledge management

Input readiness

Examine whether the organisation has systems and capacity to capture, store, and share communications-related knowledge.

- **Do you have a centralised system for storing and managing photos, videos, and other communication assets (for example, Google Drive or Dropbox)?**
 - a) No, assets are scattered across devices (0 pts)
 - b) Some shared folders exist, but they are not structured (1 pt)
 - c) Yes, a shared folder exists but without tagging or categorisation (2 pts)
 - d) Yes, a central, well-organised repository with access protocols (3 pts)

- **Do you offer regular training or exposure opportunities for staff to strengthen communications-related skills (for example, writing, digital tools, or media engagement)?**
 - a) No (0 pts)
 - b) Occasionally, when specific needs arise (1 pt)
 - c) Yes, for some staff or projects (2 pts)
 - d) Yes, regular and planned capacity-building opportunities (3 pts)

- **Do you have a process for capturing and transferring communications knowledge when team members leave (for example, shared folders, handover notes, and templates)?**
 - a) No (0 pts)
 - b) Occasionally, on an ad-hoc basis (1 pt)
 - c) Yes, for some roles or functions (2 pts)
 - d) Yes, a formalised handover and documentation process (3 pts)

Output readiness

Examine whether your organisation can translate its knowledge and experiences into clear stories and content that demonstrate impact.

- **Do you regularly collect stories from the field?**
 - a) No (0 pts)
 - b) Occasionally, but when and how we do it is random (1 pt)
 - c) Yes, but only when donors ask us to (2 pts)
 - d) Yes, consistently and systematically (3 pts)

- **Is the communications team involved in collecting stories and data from the field?**
 - a) No (0 pts)
 - b) Yes, but only when support is needed for shooting videos and photos (1 pt)
 - c) Yes, but only when there are issues that need to be resolved (2 pts)
 - d) Yes, regularly and consistently (3 pts)

- **Do you combine qualitative stories with data and evidence of impact?**
 - a) Rarely (0 pts)
 - b) Sometimes (1 pt)
 - c) Often (2 pts)
 - d) Yes, consistently (3 pts)

- **Do you share stories in a way that is ethical and consent-based?**
 - a) Unsure (0 pts)
 - b) Sometimes (1 pt)
 - c) Most of the time (2 pts)
 - d) Always, and clearly documented (3 pts)

DIMENSION#5: Channels and stakeholder engagement

Input readiness

Examine whether your organisation clearly identifies its audiences and chooses communication channels intentionally.

Do you know who your key audience is for communication (for example, community members, donors, partner organisations, or media)?

a) Not clearly (0 pts)

b) Somewhat; we know 'donors' are an audience, but we have not thought about the differences between CSR donors, HNIs, foundations, etc. (1 pt)

c) Yes, but it is not documented, so everyone might have a different understanding (2 pts)

d) Yes, clearly documented and understood by everyone (3 pts)

- **Have you mapped your audiences by behaviour patterns (what information they consume, who they are influenced by, and what their motivations are)?**

a) No (0 pts)

b) Informally, based on assumptions and experience (1 pt)

c) Yes, in some cases (2 pts)

d) Yes, for all major stakeholders (3 pts)

- **Do you adapt your communications for different audiences (for example, by changing the messaging or format for each audience)?**

a) No (0 pts)

b) Occasionally (1 pt)

c) Often, but only for some platforms; for example, we tailor newsletters but do not consider different audiences on social media (2 pts)

d) Yes, consistently across platforms (3 pts)

- **Do you know how each audience prefers to receive information?**

a) No idea (0 pts)

b) Some general assumptions (1 pt)

c) Based on anecdotal feedback (2 pts)

d) Yes, based on feedback and engagement data (3 pts)

- **Do you have a content calendar or schedule?**

a) No (0 pts)

b) Sometimes we put one together for a particular launch (1 pt)

c) Yes, but it is not followed consistently (2 pts)

d) Yes, and it is followed regularly (3 pts)

- **Do you track digital engagement (such as likes, shares, and open rates)?**

a) Not at all (0 pts)

b) Occasionally (1 pt)

c) Yes, but it is not acted on (2 pts)

d) Yes, and it is used to inform strategy (3 pts)

- **Do you intentionally think about the story you are telling across different channels (for example, reports, social media, and events)?**

a) No (0 pts)

b) Occasionally (1 pt)

c) On some platforms (2 pts)

d) Yes, across all channels (3 pts)

Output readiness

Assess activity and consistency in your communications across digital channels and platforms.

- **Does your organisation have an active website?**

a) No website (0 pts)

b) Basic website with outdated content (1 pt)

c) Active website updated once every few years (2 pts)

d) Fully functional website updated monthly or quarterly, as required (3 pts)

- **Is your organisation active on social media?**

a) Not at all (0 pts)

b) Occasional posts (1 pt)

c) Regular posting but with low engagement (2 pts)

d) Consistent, engaging, and aligned content (3 pts)

- **Do you have a newsletter or email update system?**

a) No (0 pts)

b) Yes, sent irregularly (1 pt)

c) Yes, sent regularly (2 pts)

d) Yes, with strong content and consistent engagement (3 pts)

- **Do you have SEO-optimised content on your website (such as blogs, website pages, resources, etc. are easy to find, with up-to-date website pages)?**

a) No (0 pts)

b) Some (1 pt)

c) Yes, with room to grow (2 pts)

d) Yes, strong and growing (3 pts)

DIMENSION #6: Measurement, learning, and adaptation

Input readiness

Assess how feedback and basic engagement data are collected for your communications activities.

- **Do you gather audience feedback on your communications?**

- a) Never (0 pts)
- b) Rarely (1 pt)
- c) Sometimes (2 pts)
- d) Yes, regularly (3 pts)

Output readiness

Examine whether learning strengthens outreach, engagement, and influence.

- **Do you have a plan to reach new audiences (such as funders, partners, or communities)?**

- a) No (0 pts)
- b) Some ideas, but no plan (1 pt)
- c) Basic plan in place (2 pts)
- d) Yes, we have a well-structured plan (3 pts)

- **Are you engaging with the media (through articles, op-eds, or interviews) to share your work and perspectives?**

- a) Not at all (0 pts)
- b) Rarely (1 pt)
- c) Occasionally (2 pts)
- d) Yes, actively and strategically (3 pts)

- **Do you collaborate with other networks and organisations to amplify your messages (for example, partners, coalitions, or industry forums)?**

- a) No (0 pts)
- b) Occasionally (1 pt)
- c) Regularly (2 pts)
- d) Yes, through strategic collaborations (3 pts)

II. Understand your results

Once you have completed all the questions, calculate your total scores for each dimension. Record two scores for every dimension:

- **Input readiness score:** reflecting the systems, roles, and internal enablers that support communications.
- **Output readiness score:** reflecting the quality, consistency, and reach of your communications activities.

Use the matrix below to capture your scores and reflect on where your organisation is strong, where gaps exist, and where efforts may be misaligned.

The goal is not to achieve perfect scores. Instead, the matrix helps you identify areas that may need attention or improvement.

Communications readiness matrix

Dimension	Input readiness score	Output readiness score	Balance check	Priority
Purpose and clarity			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inputs stronger • Balanced • Outputs stronger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High • Medium • Low
Leadership and ownership of communications			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inputs stronger • Balanced • Outputs stronger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High • Medium • Low
Systems, processes and governance			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inputs stronger • Balanced • Outputs stronger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High • Medium • Low
Content and knowledge management			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inputs stronger • Balanced • Outputs stronger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High • Medium • Low

Channels and stakeholder engagement			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inputs stronger • Balanced • Outputs stronger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High • Medium • Low
Measurement, learning and adaptation			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inputs stronger • Balanced • Outputs stronger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High • Medium • Low

III. How to interpret your scores

Use the balance check column to understand how inputs and outputs relate to each other.

Inputs stronger than outputs

Your organisation has foundational systems, roles, or clarity in place, but these are not yet translating into consistent communications outputs.

Outputs stronger than inputs

Your organisation is producing communications activity, but systems and processes may be weak or unsustainable over time.

Balanced scores

Your communications systems and outputs are aligned, suggesting that communications is functioning as a structured organisational capability rather than a set of isolated activities.

IV. Strengthening your communications readiness

If you are looking to improve your readiness scores, here are a few examples of steps you can take at both the input and output levels to strengthen the communications function in your non-profit.

Please note that these steps are not prescriptive, and you can prioritise them as per your requirements and resources available.

Steps to strengthen input readiness

Build clarity

- Develop and agree on a simple, one-line description of the organisation that all team members can confidently use in conversations, emails, and presentations.
- Ensure that the core communications team has a shared understanding of the mission, top priorities, and key audiences so that messages are aligned and consistent across the organisation.

- Drive this clarity internally with other teams with the support of the leadership through weekly/monthly staff meetings.

Ownership

- Assign a clearly named point person responsible for coordinating communications, even if this is a part-time or shared role.
- Allocate dedicated time each week for communications tasks such as collecting stories, drafting content, or updating platforms.

Systems

- Set up and maintain a central story log that captures programme stories along with quotes, photos, sources, and consent.
- Create a simple content calendar that outlines what will be shared, when, on which channel, and by whom.
- Develop basic templates for recurring outputs (such as emails, social media posts, and reports) to save time and ensure consistency.

People and capacity

- Enable multiple staff members (especially programme or field teams) to identify, document, and share stories from their work regularly.
- Set up a cadence to align with teams on how to collect content.
- Build capacities and communications capabilities through internal training, peer learning, or exposure to basic communications tools and storytelling skills.

Tools

- Put accessible, low-cost tools in place to support the work—design, collaboration, storage, and tracking—so that communications is easy to execute, not dependent on individuals.
- Examples of low-cost tools include Canva for design, Mailchimp or Buttondown for email updates, Google Docs to create templates and store stories, and Trello or Notion to track your content ideas.

Steps to build output readiness

Channels

- Select one or two priority channels based on where key audiences already spend time.
- Set a realistic frequency for sharing content on these channels.

Content

- Regularly share authentic stories from programmes and communities that demonstrate impact and organisational values.
- Adapt messages so that different audiences receive information in formats and tones that are relevant to them.

Voice and visibility

- Actively project a leadership or organisational voice through blogs, social media, events, or media engagement.
- Maintain media-ready assets—such as updated bios, photos, and key messages—so that the organisation can respond quickly to opportunities.

Partnerships

- Work with allies, coalitions, and peer organisations to co-create and cross-share content, extending reach and credibility.

Learning and adaptation

- Actively seek feedback from audiences to understand what is useful, engaging, or missing.
- Track basic indicators of reach and engagement and regularly review them with the team using available tools such as Google Analytics, Facebook and Instagram Analytics, UTM tags, and Zoho social.

Quick recap

Assessing communications readiness helps organisations understand how systems, roles, and outputs work together. This clarity allows teams to identify gaps and strengthen communications as an organisational capability.

What can you do next

Get together with your core communication team and conduct this exercise together. Focus on addressing the most critical gaps using the table below and create a 90-day action plan.

Exercise

Choose one, or at most two, high-priority dimensions from the steps above. In addition, select one or two lower-effort activities that your team can take on.

Action	Owner	Input/output	Timeline	Review

Conclusion

This playbook is designed to support continuous improvement of the communications pillar of your organisation. It helps you reflect on your current strengths, understand where gaps exist, and take practical, manageable steps to strengthen communications as an organisational capability. You can return to it at different stages of your journey to review progress and refine your approach.

- See tips and templates in playbook *Write case studies that show your organisation's impact through stories and data* to develop strong case studies

**KNOWLEDGE
PARTNER**

India Development Review (IDR)
