

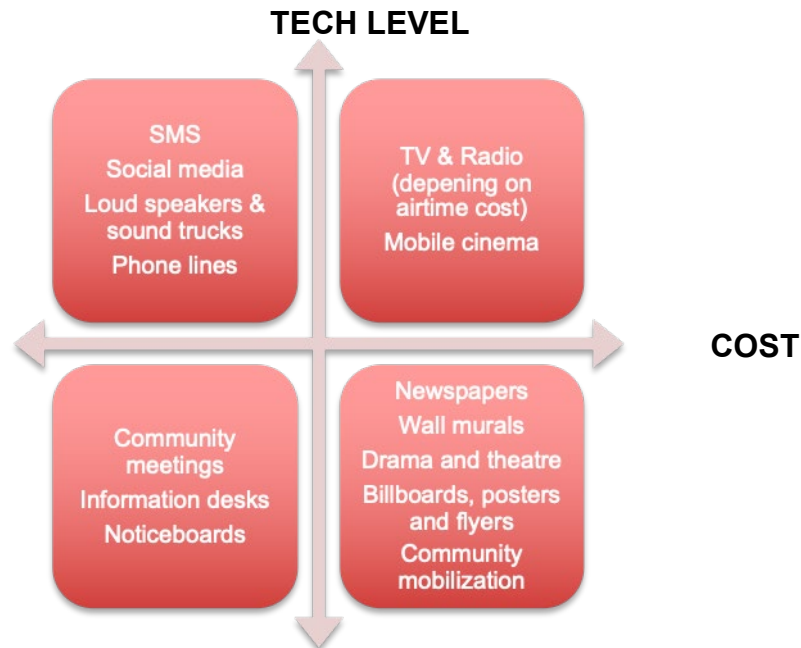
# [HANDOUT 5] Communication channels: Guidance & considerations

Source: IFRC, ICRC (2016) CEA community engagement manual  
<https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/document/tool-8-communication-channels/>

## PURPOSE

This tool will help you pick the best communication channel for your needs by outlining how each channel works and its advantages and disadvantages.

## OVERVIEW OF COMMUNICATION CHANNELS



### Considerations when choosing a communication channel:

- Should be based on assessment data
  - What channels are used by the community?
  - Cultural and literacy considerations
  - What is the organisation's capacity – people, time and funding
- Based on the programme needs
  - 1 or 2-way communication
  - To change behaviour or improve accountability?
  - Geographical spread of the people that need to be reached
  - How much time do you have to get activities up and running?
- Which channels are the Government or agencies using?
- How could the choice of channel affect neutrality and impartiality?

## DETAILED COMMUNICATION CHANNEL MATRIX

Channel		Advantages	Disadvantages	Works best for
<b>Lower tech</b> →	<b>Community mobilization (door-to-door visits)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2-way communication</li> <li>• Face-to-face is usually peoples' preferred form of communication</li> <li>• Persuasive</li> <li>• Allows for conversation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be expensive and time-consuming</li> <li>• Labour-intensive</li> <li>• Limited reach</li> <li>• Relies on physical access to population</li> <li>• Mobilizers need to be properly trained to communicate well and accurately</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing behaviours</li> <li>• Sharing programme information</li> <li>• Collecting feedback</li> <li>• Information as aid</li> </ul>
	<b>Community meetings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2-way communication</li> <li>• Face-to-face is usually peoples' preferred form of communication</li> <li>• Share information simultaneously with community members (stops rumours)</li> <li>• Supports community discussion</li> <li>• Inexpensive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited reach</li> <li>• Can exclude some community members, for example the elderly, disabled or women</li> <li>• Risk of anger/frustration if issues being discussed are contentious</li> <li>• Relies on physical access</li> <li>• Needs good communication skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing programme information</li> <li>• Collecting feedback</li> <li>• Discussing advocacy needs and issues</li> </ul>
	<b>Information desks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2-way communication</li> <li>• Face-to-face is usually peoples' preferred form of communication</li> <li>• Sensitive issues are handled privately</li> <li>• Can be offered at set times/locations</li> <li>• Inexpensive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited reach</li> <li>• Relies on physical access</li> <li>• Needs good communication skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing feedback and complaints</li> <li>• Sharing programme info</li> <li>• Collecting information on advocacy needs or issues</li> </ul>
	<b>Notice boards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good for sharing information relevant to a specific community</li> <li>• Adding a suggestion box supports 2-way communication</li> <li>• Inexpensive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited geographic coverage</li> <li>• Labour-intensive to keep information updated, accurate and relevant</li> <li>• Best suited to communities where the majority are able to read (communicating effectively with pictures alone is very difficult)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing programme info</li> <li>• Behaviour change posters</li> <li>• Collecting written feedback</li> </ul>

<b>Medium Tech →</b>	<b>Posters &amp; flyers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good for sharing information relevant to a specific community</li> <li>• Can use images and text to explain information</li> <li>• Can reach many people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-way communication only</li> <li>• Relies on physical access to distribute</li> <li>• Limited impact in low literacy communities</li> <li>• Print costs can be expensive</li> <li>• Found to have limited impact on behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing programme info</li> <li>• Behaviour change information</li> <li>• Information as aid</li> </ul>
	<b>Billboards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertising behaviour change messages</li> <li>• Can reach many people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-way communication only</li> <li>• Can be expensive</li> <li>• Usually requires some literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour change communication</li> <li>• Information as aid</li> </ul>
	<b>Loud speakers and sounds trucks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good for short simple messages</li> <li>• Can reach many people at one time in areas of high density, like camps</li> <li>• Can be static or mobile (car or person)</li> <li>• Good for populations without access to media like TV or radio or with low literacy</li> <li>• Can be inexpensive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-way communication only</li> <li>• Relies on physical access</li> <li>• Only works for simple, clear messages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour change communication</li> <li>• Sharing programme info</li> <li>• Information as aid</li> </ul>
	<b>Wall murals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good for simple messages – that don't change frequently (eg hand washing)</li> <li>• Can be engaging if done well</li> <li>• Permanent reminder of good behaviours and more durable than posters/leaflets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-way communication only</li> <li>• Reaches limited number of people</li> <li>• Requires a good artist, which can be difficult to find and expensive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour change communication</li> </ul>
	<b>Phone lines</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2-way communication channel</li> <li>• A simple system can be cheap and easy</li> <li>• Allows for sensitive issues to be dealt with privately</li> <li>• Good for addressing rumours and answering questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People must have a phone</li> <li>• A system for analysing and responding to complaints must be in place to support the phone line, which requires some work (less a disadvantage and more a consideration)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing programme info</li> <li>• Collecting community feedback</li> <li>• Addressing complaints</li> <li>• Identifying potential advocacy needs</li> </ul>

	<b>Newspapers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can cover large geographical areas</li> <li>• Use text and pictures</li> <li>• Possible to produce your own newspaper or newsletter</li> <li>• Same newspaper can reach multiple people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-way communication channel</li> <li>• Usually only reaches literate population</li> <li>• Newspaper advertising can be expensive</li> <li>• Producing your own can be expensive, time consuming and challenging to distribute (best suited for smaller areas)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour change</li> <li>• Key programme info (when newspaper matches programme area)</li> <li>• Advocacy messages</li> <li>• Information as aid</li> </ul>
	<b>Theatre and drama</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2-way communication channel</li> <li>• Can engage the population in complex or sensitive issues through entertainment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need a well-trained team to do it well</li> <li>• Can be time consuming and expensive</li> <li>• Limited geographical reach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour change communication</li> </ul>
<b>Higher Tech →</b>	<b>Mobile cinema</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2-way communication channel</li> <li>• Using video imagery can simplify complex behavioural information, like the transfer of germs</li> <li>• Can engage the population in complex or sensitive issues through entertainment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need a well-trained team to do it well</li> <li>• Equipment can be expensive depending on how much you want / need</li> <li>• Can be difficult to transport equipment and team – need at least one vehicle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour change communication</li> </ul>
	<b>Radio adverts / spots</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can reach large numbers of people from different segments of the community</li> <li>• Can reach people who are hard to access in person</li> <li>• Doesn't rely on literacy</li> <li>• Radios are cheap and inexpensive</li> <li>• Radio a popular form of communication</li> <li>• Spots can be quick, easy and cheap to produce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-way communication channel</li> <li>• Airtime can be expensive</li> <li>• Spots require some recording and editing skills to produce – although this can be carried out by a professional company for you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour change communication</li> <li>• Key programme information</li> <li>• Advocacy messages</li> <li>• Information as aid</li> </ul>

<p><b>Radio chat shows</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2-way communication channel</li> <li>• Can reach large numbers of people from different segments of the community</li> <li>• Can reach people who are hard to access in person</li> <li>• Doesn't rely on literacy</li> <li>• Radios are cheap and inexpensive</li> <li>• Radio a popular form of communication</li> <li>• Chat shows are flexible and can meet a wide range of CEA needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Airtime can be expensive</li> <li>• A regular chat show requires significant investment of time and resources</li> <li>• Care needed to protect against callers using the platform to air discriminatory or stigmatising content.</li> <li>• Needs a well-trained team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour change communication</li> <li>• Sharing key programme information</li> <li>• Collecting feedback</li> <li>• Advocacy messages</li> <li>• Information as aid</li> </ul>
<p><b>Radio dramas</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can reach large numbers of people from different segments of the community</li> <li>• Can reach people who are hard to access in person</li> <li>• Doesn't rely on literacy</li> <li>• Radios are cheap and inexpensive</li> <li>• Radio a popular form of communication</li> <li>• Can engage the population in complex or sensitive issues through entertainment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-way communication channel</li> <li>• Airtime can be expensive</li> <li>• Dramas can be time consuming or expensive to produce and air</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour change communication</li> </ul>
<p><b>TV adverts</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doesn't rely on literacy</li> <li>• Can reach large numbers of people</li> <li>• Can reach people who are hard to access in person</li> <li>• TV can have a significant impact on beliefs and behaviours (if done well)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-way communication channel</li> <li>• Airtime can be expensive</li> <li>• Adverts can be time-consuming and expensive</li> <li>• In some countries TV ownership is low and limited to richer segments of society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour change communication</li> <li>• Advocacy messages</li> <li>• Information as aid (if the advert can be produced quickly)</li> </ul>
<p><b>TV shows</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be 2-way (studio audience or call-in)</li> <li>• Can reach large numbers of people</li> <li>• Can reach people who are hard to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Airtime can be expensive</li> <li>• TV shows require a significant investment of time and resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour change communication</li> <li>• Collecting feedback</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>access in person</li> <li>Doesn't rely on literacy</li> <li>TV can have a significant impact on beliefs and behaviours (if done well)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In some countries TV ownership is low and limited to richer segments of society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocacy messages</li> <li>Information as aid</li> </ul>
	<b>Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2-way communication</li> <li>Can reach large numbers of people</li> <li>Very interactive and supports discussion</li> <li>Cheap and easy to manage</li> <li>Can share text, images, video and audio</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requires people to have internet access</li> <li>Can be time consuming to keep information updated and respond to comments</li> <li>Internet users tend to come from more educated, richer sections of society</li> <li>Internet access more common in urban areas so can exclude rural residents</li> <li>Hard to control what information is shared publicly. Care needed to protect against posters using the platform to share discriminatory or stigmatising content.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information as aid</li> <li>Collecting feedback</li> <li>Behaviour change communication</li> </ul>
	<b>SMS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can reach large numbers of people, very quickly and directly</li> <li>Can reach people who are hard to access in person</li> <li>Mobile phone ownership is growing rapidly</li> <li>Can be 2-way with the right system</li> <li>Can be cheap and easy (with support from phone company or using a bulk SMS system)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Usually only 1-way communication</li> <li>Requires network coverage and good level of mobile phone ownership</li> <li>Relies on literacy</li> <li>SMS network can be disrupted by disasters or in conflict</li> <li>Messages must be very short and simple (160 characters each)</li> <li>May require negotiation with a phone company or to have list of telephone numbers in advance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information as aid</li> <li>Sharing key programme information</li> <li>Collecting feedback</li> </ul>

## GUIDANCE ON USING SELECTED COMMUNICATION OPTIONS

Below are a few examples of communications channels that have been previously used by National Societies (normally to complement more traditional communications methods such as face-to-face communication). All type of messages must be first tested with NS volunteers to ensure correct understanding, and approved by the NS and relevant ministries (for example health messages must be in line with Ministry of Health messages).

### SMS messaging

SMS messaging can be used to quickly share key messages with a large number of people. For example:

- Deliver messages to support the work of hygiene promoters.
- Announce new facilities or the time and location of key activities including committee or community meetings.
- Provide disaster preparedness advice and warnings of impending weather related emergencies
- Communicate key RCRC working values, for example that all aid is free.
- SMS can also be used to hear feedback (for example by sending a question about satisfaction to beneficiaries and community members), and to encourage participation (for example asking committee members to SMS the number of new diarrheal cases in children under 5 years daily).

#### How to send:

1. Messages may be sent to known mobile numbers via the local phone network or via the internet:
  - a. Using the local phone network to send messages – requires a modem or mobile phone with a local sim card to connect a computer to the local mobile phone network. The software commonly used for this type of messaging is Frontline SMS ([www.frontlinesms.com](http://www.frontlinesms.com)).
  - b. Using the internet to send messages – requires internet access. For example: Clickatell ([www.clickatell.co.uk](http://www.clickatell.co.uk)), BulkSMS ([www.bulksms.com](http://www.bulksms.com)).
2. Alternatively messages may be sent to all people in a geographical area. This does not require a database of phone numbers but does require an agreement with the local phone provider, and will also prior discussions with the Ministry of health.



## Radio

Radio can be used in a number of ways, for example:

Format	Benefits	Disadvantages
<b>Creating your own Radio or TV Show</b>	<p>You only pay for 'air time' so it is cheaper.</p> <p>You have ownership over the content of the show and can involve community members and local staff in, enabling them to have a voice and ownership in the process.</p> <p>Can include pre-recorded vox pop interviews with the public, interviews with expert guests on specific topics, such as health and a 2 way communication function can be included through a call-in.</p>	<p>You have to do a lot of the work yourself and so need to have the time and resources available.</p> <p>Usually requires training on planning, producing and editing.</p> <p>Interviewees can sometimes digress and talk about something not relevant to the questions being asked.</p>
<p><b>Public Service Announcement (PSA)</b></p> <p>Messages are usually short, ranging from 15 seconds to 3 minutes.</p>	<p>Information is short and quick. This format could be used for health education or general information for the community. This format uses the shortest amount of airtime and is the cheapest broadcast option.</p>	<p>It doesn't always give enough information.</p>
<p><b>Daily five-minute news updates</b></p> <p>Staff members write and record the news so that it is ready to broadcast every afternoon or morning. Topics can cover a variety of issues related to the programme. Staff can record short comments from communities or programme staff to include in the news update.</p>	<p>It gives short updates on current affairs and breaking news. If broadcast at a regular time each day, people will make a point of tuning in. An established and widely used format. It can also be done weekly, depending on your capacity, resources and broadcast capacity.</p>	<p>The disadvantages are minimal, but it does require regular commitment, otherwise you will lose your audience.</p>



<p><b>Drama series</b>                  The team works on a storyline that includes issues relevant to the community and programme. The episodes can range from 5 minutes to 30 minutes. This is a format where you can include a number of different participants.</p>	<p>It can be used to engage the audience in a range of topics in a fun and entertaining way – for example on health issues or disaster risk reduction.</p> <p>It is possible to hire a specialist company to create a drama for you, but it can also be carried out by staff and volunteers.</p>	<p>It is a long process to complete depending on how many episodes are planned. Will require some production skills if the drama is being produced by the NS.</p>
<p><b>Outside broadcast</b></p>	<p>By taking the medium outside the studio to the people, you allow them to participate but in an environment they are familiar with.</p>	<p>It has few disadvantages, but it can be more unpredictable than a studio environment.</p>

## Mobile Cinema

Short films can be used in towns and camps to deliver relevant hygiene promotion messages, and generate discussion about the topic. At the same time information about the programme can be shared. The cinema event could include:

- A short-animated film about the impact of cholera on a village and how the community tackles it.
- Hygiene propmotion demonstrations (e.g. hand washing and making oral rehydration salts).
- Questions and answers discussion session for the audience.
- For example films see [www.iheedcrowd.org](http://www.iheedcrowd.org)

## Social media

Social media is an effective, instantaneous avenue for two-way communication, which can be critical before, during and after a disaster or crisis, as well as in non-crisis situations. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter can be used to share early warning messages to communities in disaster-

prone areas, or practical information on where aid can be accessed after a disaster or crisis strikes. In non-emergencies, they can receive requests, comments and feedback, encourage community action, as well as to understand people's perception of health and social issues.

Entering the social media sphere, however, does not come without risks and challenges. The IFRC [Social Media Guidelines](#) for National Society staff and volunteers is a basic guidance document, which outlines best practices for online engagement via social media.

Best practice for communicating with communities on social media includes:

- Identify designated staff or volunteer(s) to manage the social media system
- Listen to the online community and the issues that are important to them. Pay attention to what they say about the National Society and Red Cross Red Crescent Movement
- Post information at the times people are most likely to see it
- Respond to direct comments and questions within 24 hours – even just a simple thank-you shows you are listening or, if you don't have an answer to a question, tell the commenter you will follow it up (and then actually follow up)
- You don't need to respond to every general comment, so consider whether responding is needed and will be of benefit
- Your response should be clear, fair, and accurate – get help from other departments if you don't have the answer
- Occasionally comments might be inflammatory or provocative. In this case, avoid getting involved in an online argument and decide whether it might be better not to respond. However it is good practice to always respond to criticism and correct statements that are inaccurate
- Have a comments policy in place and advertised so you can remove comments that are abusive, threatening, offensive or selling goods or services
- In an emergency you may receive more comments than you can reply to – in this case filter through and pull out the common themes people need information or help on and respond to these with information/statements
- Develop a document listing standard responses to help reply to frequently asked questions and comments easily and quickly

## Loudspeakers / Sound trucks

Using sound trucks or loudspeakers is a good way to target high-density population groups concentrated in large villages, urban areas or camps, taking messages right to the heart of the community and reaching illiterate populations in local languages. Loudspeakers can either be static (e.g. market, camp or mosque) or mobile (e.g. hand-held megaphone or loudspeaker van/sound-truck). This can be as simple as attaching a speaker and PA system to a pick up truck.

Consider the following:

- Mix messages with music to attract more people.
- When using a sound-truck, consider ending the route at a location where further activities can take place, for example food security messages can be acted out through drama when people register for food distributions or livelihoods support.
- Hire local clowns (if this is culturally appropriate) or actors to act out health or disaster preparedness messages.
- Run singing/dancing/acting competitions for children with soap/toilet paper as prizes (again, if culturally appropriate).

## Theatre and drama

Using creative methods to deliver messages helps the absorption of messages, and provides affected populations with entertainment and distraction.

Consider the following:

- What is the most popular local form of theatre/drama?
- How can this be integrated into programme or emergency messaging?
- Integrate with use of loudspeakers, sound trucks, and radio (see above).

## Poster, leaflets, and billboards

As a general rule, billboards work best for sharing simple information with large numbers of people. Posters work best for sharing programme information with a selected community. Leaflets work best as part of a programme activity – for example you might hand out cholera information after a theatre show so people can take the information home, share it with others, and keep it for reference.

Remember that leaflets may continue to circulate for some time. Use them for information that will not change, or clearly date them and indicate that information may change (and include info on how people can seek out up-to-date information on the topic).

## A note on negotiating with commercial media providers

Although some commercial media providers will provide a service for free – others will not. However, you should always begin by trying to negotiate for free or reduced-cost media services by explaining that what you are aiming to do is of benefit to the population and not for profit. It is a good idea to do some research first so that you understand what a fair price is before you start any negotiation.

After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, local radio stations – knowing that vast amounts of money were being donated for earthquake relief – greatly inflated their fees for airtime. One hour of radio cost USD \$1,250. In contrast in Sierra Leone, where the National Society negotiated with the National Broadcaster on the grounds the radio show was for the public good, the cost was just \$50 per hour.