How to communicate research for policy influence

Toolkit Nº1

First approach to research communication

This toolkit is part of a series addressing different aspects and tools on research communication for policy influence.

Good evidence based policy making is not simply about drawing conclusions from a group of statements or a set of data (Shaxson, 2011). Although economic and social development research is largely being conducted with the purpose of helping policymakers understand the challenges in development and hence produce better policies, these objectives have been partially achieved. Weak and poor communication is one of the reasons of this failure.

Research communication is at the heart of evidence based policy making, as it includes **understanding the obstacles preventing the uptake of research** by decision makers and **reflects on the most appropriate strategies, tools and channels** to reach key audiences that can promote policy changes.

> "In development research, to get a new discovery into policy and practice is just as important as the discovery itself."
> Maureen O'Neil, President and CEO of International Development Research Centre

What is "Research Communications"?

Each organisation and individual is going to describe differently what research communication is, depending on their vision, values and objectives. However, there are also some common organisation challenges in terms of communicating research more effectively: there are always several players with different roles, who do not necessarily have the same intentions and information needs. On the other hand, usually there are **multiple different interests involved in the policymaking process**, and various stakeholders interacting simultaneously; thus making communication both a crucial and complex challenge.

To inform policy processes, research needs to be communicated effectively to key target audiences (Von Grember et al, 2005). However, communicating research is not just about disseminating research findings as a *fait accompli* at the end of a project, but rather about **making evidence provided by research bring about change through influential development policies and programs**. This entails reflecting on the ways in which evidence can influence those who decide, as well as those who influence key players and those who can be affected by the decisions made. It is about "shifting" from a unilateral vision of communication (associated mainly with the dissemination of a proposal expressed in the organisation's own language) towards a **bilateral, multi-directional and interactive communication that involves decision-makers and other key actors in a permanent dialogue and exchange process, thus increasing the probabilities of influence**.

There are many definitions of research communications. In this document, we follow the definition provided by DFID (2011), that states research communication is about **"communicating research outputs to a range of intermediate and end users, through and iterative, interactive and multi-directional process involving** a wide range of stakeholders from planning, through implementation, monitoring and evaluation". Additionally, the Institute of Development Studies defines it as "the ability to interpret or translate complex research findings into language, format and context that non experts can understand".

Some recurrent challenges when communicating research to policy makers

We assume that think tanks, **policy research institutes and other civil society organisations produce knowledge in order to have an impact on policies in their countries and bring about change to their realities**. Communication helps you achieve these goals since it allows you to:

- **Move strategically in your political context and decision making process**. Communicating clear and precise policy messages, based on solid research, and a clear understanding of the political context, represents the core of a good evidence-based policy proposal and a powerful means to raise your organisation's profile.
- **Better engage with policymakers**. Therefore, it is important that you communicate effectively your research outputs by engaging early on with policymakers and end users through an interactive and multidirectional process.
- **Expand the audience interested in public policy**. A good research communications can expand the scope of people interested in evidence, and engage the public directly or indirectly affected by public policy.

In a talk on evidence-based policymaking at ODI in 2003, Vincent Cable said that policymakers are practically incapable of using research-based evidence because of the 5 Ss:[1]

- Speed: they have to make decisions fast;
- Superficiality: they cover a wide brief;
- Spin: they have to stick to a decision, at least for a reasonable period of time;
- Secrecy: many policy discussions have to be held in secret; and
- Scientific ignorance: few policymakers are scientists, and don't understand the scientific concept of testing a hypothesis.

The needs of researchers and policy makers differ as much as their professional routines. Therefore, it is key to **consider what policy makers need to know and how**, to successfully influence their decisions.

Last but not least, **researchers' other interests and pressures besides communications are another important challenge**: most researchers are often more interested in researching than communicating (Mendizabal, 2012).

Thus, researchers should learn how to communicate effectively their research outputs by **engaging early on with policymakers and other stakeholders** through an interactive and multidirectional process.

1 Dr. Vincent Cable – MP for Twickenham, in The Political Context, Does Evidence Matter Meeting Series, ODI, May 2003.

Essential tips for Research Communication

- **Identify and describe your target audiences**. Who do you want to reach? Where is your audience? Tailor different messages for different audiences. Investigation findings need to be translated in a language your target audience can understand.
- Before communicating, **consider the context and think about opportunities and risks to communicate**. Who are the key actors involved in the decision making process? Engage early and directly with them.
- **Different audiences need different messages and different channels**. Mass communication is surely massive, but not always effective. Do not underestimate the effectiveness of traditional communication channels to reach key actors: face to face meetings, events and presentations.
- Design a communication plan that briefly identifies your target audiences, characterize them and list the main channels you will use to contact them. Furthermore, establish a communication guide to define who you need to communicate first with, according to the importance of the different audiences. Think about who should communicate first and why depending on the context.
- Identify at least two **successful communication formats** to communicate with different audiences and stick to them, thus making it easy for your target audience to recognize your think tank.

Source: CIPPEC based on IDRC (2011) and European Commission

Planning research communication

Often, **a proposal's efficacy is assessed by its communication value**: it is not about a mere transmission of an idea, or of a policy recommendation, but about ensuring that political and social actors understand the policy proposal, use the proposal as a benchmark for decision-making, and adopt and apply it in practice (IDRC, 2007). Therefore, only communicating at critical moments of the process is not enough: **communication actions must be planned**. A communication plan consists in defining a series of steps which help determine problems, aims, actions and necessary resources to better communicate research findings. In general, the plan visualizes the change we seek to address and helps us effectively organize time, knowledge and other needed resources. There are different ways of planning communication, but everyone should focus on and clearly identify: **objectives, audiences, key messages, strategies, communication tools and channels, schedule, budget and human resources, and monitoring and evaluation**[2].

About the series

To face the communication challenges described above and move strategically in the research communication field, CIPPEC with the support of GDNet, has produced a series of How-to-Guides focused on crucial strategies and tools aimed at helping researchers improve the way they communicate research. These toolkits share the most promising tools in terms of communication and those who are more frequently used by researchers and research organisations. This series includes:

- Toolkit 2. Policy briefs
- Toolkit 3. Engage with media
- Toolkit 4. Online tools
- Toolkit 5. Dynamic formats to communicate research

2 For further information see Weyrauch, Vanesa and Echt, Leandro. (2012): Toolkit N° 8: How to communicate. Define the strategy and key messages, in *How to design a policy influence plan?*, Buenos Aires: CIPPEC. Available at www.vippal.cippec.org

CIPPEC políticas públicas *public policies*

To continue exploring!

Recommendations from CIPPEC

- *Communicating Research. A beginner's guide for researchers in Vietnam,* Ajoy Datta and Arnaldo Pellini, Overseas Development Institute, 2011.
  Available at: www.odi.org.uk

- *An opportunity looking for a home – Research Communications at IDRC,* Wendy Quarry and Ricardo Ramírez, International Development Research Centre, 2011.
  Available at: www.idrc.ca

- *Interview to Laura Zommer,* CIPPEC, 2012.
  Available at: www.onthinktanks.org

- *Developing research communication capacity: lessons from recent experiences,* Enrique Mendizabal, On think tanks, 2012.
  Available at: www.onthinktanks.org

- *Guide to successful communications,* European Commission.
  Available at: www.europa.eu

Next Toolkit:
Policy briefs

If you want to quote this document:
Weyrauch, V.; Echt, L. and Arrieta, D. (2013). How to communicate research for policy influence. *Toolkit No.1: First approach to research communication.* Buenos Aires. CIPPEC

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Other guides from the series:

How to communicate research for policy influence

Toolkit Nº 1	Toolkit Nº 2	Toolkit Nº 3	Toolkit Nº 4	Toolkit Nº 5
First approach to research communication	Policy Briefs	Engage with media	Online tools	Dynamic formats to communicate research

Other series:

How to design a policy influence plan?

How can we monitor and evaluate policy influence?

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How to communicate research for policy influence

Toolkit Nº2 Policy briefs

This toolkit is part of a series addressing different aspects and tools on research communication for policy influence.

What is a policy brief?

This toolkit introduces the definition and features of policy briefs, one of the tools most widely used by policy research institutes (hereinafter, PRI) to influence public policies.

Policy briefs are short documents that refer to a public problem associated with governability. They are addressed to people related to the government who may know little or nothing about the topic, but need to have a general background quickly in order to express an opinion or make decisions. **Policy briefs summarize a large amount of complex detail, so the reader can easily understand the heart of the issue**, its background, the players ("stakeholders") involved and any recommendations or educated guesses about the future of the issue. These briefs can include action proposals (recommendations) or they can summarize what is known about the specific topic or problem, and the possible ways to approach it (analysis)[1].

The policy brief is a kind of report designed to facilitate the use of research or evidence in the public policy process. This tool comes from the premise that policy makers move in restricted contexts for decision making –especially regarding time– and that is why this aims to bring them, in a brief and simple manner, evidence and action recommendations to help them in the decision making process.

Scope of a policy brief

First, it is necessary to stress that a policy brief is usually part of **a longer and more complex influence** process, that is to say, it is one of the many tools that researchers have to promote their research among public policy makers. Usually, it is advisable to combine its preparation with other forms of research communications, such as panels in events or personal meetings with government officials related to the issue. Also, the brief must be accompanied by different communication actions, such as an effective coverage in the press, to give the problem addressed in the brief and the perspectives proposed in it more visibility in the political agenda.

In order to choose the communication actions that accompany the policy brief, and thus increase its influence potential, it is very important that the author be clear about the possible policy influence objectives of such brief[2]:

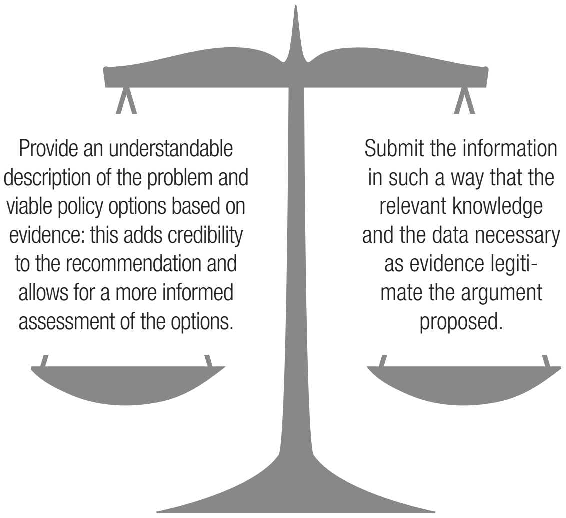
1 Idea inspired by *The Policy Issue Brief 1* (https://www.courses.psu.edu/hpa/hpa301_fre1/IB-Instructions_fa02.PDF)

2 CIPPEC, based on Jones, N.; and Walsh, C. (2008). *Policy briefs as a communication tool for development research*. Consulted on July 16th, 2012, by Overseas Development Institute: http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/docs/594.pdf

1. Define and explain an urgent political issue included in the present discussion.
2. Schematize the largest amount of viable policy options that could address the issue being discussed and its possible consequences.
3. Produce information about the possible outcome of the implementation of certain courses of action by means of a research evidence analysis.
4. Recommend a policy alternative and state the reasons why it is better than other alternatives.

Characteristics of policy briefs

It is a practical rather than academic document (Young and Mc Quinn, 2002; own translation), for this reason it is essential to find the balance between two competing needs before beginning to prepare it:



This tension tends to disappear as the author gains experience. Also, the **collaboration of a communication team that knows the policy players better and the most appropriate way to address them will allow the strengthening of the scope and influence of the brief**.

To reflect on how to contribute to the solution of the problem helps to solve this tension: some channels will be chosen if the brief aims to analyze or state the existing arguments on the topic, and some other channels will be chosen if it aims to influence the decision makers through specific recommendations.

Who is our audience?

There are many tools to contribute to the identification of players that make up the policy arena to which the brief is addressed: the key players' analysis, the social media analysis and the Alignment and Interest Matrix, among others. (More information about this matrix in the Weaving global networks handbook. Weyrauch, 2010:88) The "obvious" audiences are not necessarily the most strategic ones. To have a well-defined influence objective will help to better aim the players' analysis focus and reveal the most relevant players due to their importance, power of influence and interest on the topic.

Analysis or recommendation policy brief?

The type of policy brief will depend on the specific **context** in which the problem to solve develops[3], on the **policy influence objectives** established for the research itself[4], on the **messages** to be spread, on the audiences

3 More information: Weyrauch, V. and Echt, L. (2011) How to design a policy influence plan? *Toolkit No.2: The public policy making process. Analyze the context for an effective influence planning*. Buenos Aires. CIPPEC. Available at www.vippal.cippec.org

4 More information Weyrauch, V.; and Echt, L. (2011) How to design a policy influence plan? *Toolkit No. 4: What we desire. Define influence objectives*. Buenos Aires. CIPPEC. Available at www.vippal.cippec.org

to which they are addressed[5] and on the rest of the **communication activities** planned. For this reason it is important to establish what **type of change**[6] is to be promoted in the short, mid or long term. By answering these questions, we will be able to define the policy influence objective and the type of change sought:

- In which stage/s of the public policy process do we seek to influence through the policy brief?
- What key players are or were entailed in each stage of the process?
- Was a problem to be solved clearly identified? Is it possible to summarize it in a few lines?
- Is there enough evidence to back up the relevance of the problem stated and the possible ways to address it?

The **analysis briefs** are used to provide the decision makers with a summary of the diagnosis and the principal positions on the problem addressed.

The **recommendation briefs** summarize the core of the problem to make a recommendation on public policy, either their own or distinguished.

What is an effective argument?

Once the questions proposed in the previous section have been answered, we will be in the right position to define the policy brief argumentation strategy. This argumentation must be based on practical or theoretical knowledge, and be effective.

An effective argument is one that establishes clearly **what** is meant to say and to whom. In order to be credible, the argument must be consistent and coherent. It can be built on values, metaphors, experiences, narratives or comparisons. It is important that the argumentation be short and easy to understand.

When building the central argument to be conveyed, the following questions may serve as a useful guidance:

- Why is this issue important or urgent? What is the problem?
- What information is necessary to understand the issue? What should the players involved in it know?
- How does the analysis made and/or the proposal submitted influence the different players?
- What stances are they expected to take regarding the analyzed situation and/or the proposal submitted?

With the answers to these questions, the main argument will be clear, and it will be the time to sit down and write the policy brief. In order to do that, the following section suggests the typical characteristics of each of the components of a policy brief.

Which are the components of a policy brief?

The possible components of a policy brief with its corresponding key features are listed below:

5 More information: Weyrauch, V.; and Echt, L. (2011) How to design a policy influence plan? *Toolkit No. 5: Who we should work with. Define players and alliances.* Buenos Aires. CIPPEC. Available at www.vippal.cippec.org

6 More information: Weyrauch, V.; and Echt, L. (2011). How to design a policy influence plan? *Toolkit No.2: The public policy making process. Analyze the context for an effective influence planning.* Buenos Aires. CIPPEC. Available at www.vippal.cippec.org

Attractive title	• **It must describe the content of the brief concisely and attractively (for example, describe the issue in question and its relevance).** • It has to be as clear as possible. • Concise. • Interesting and relevant for potential readers. • For example: *National Electoral Code Reform: comments to the bill passed by the Chamber of Deputies*
Executive summary	• **It is the synthesis of the entire brief.** • It must allow the reader to have a complete and fair understanding of the content of the entire brief. • It is an opportunity to attract the interest of the audience. • It is advisable to make use of executive summaries from other areas and organizations to improve the quality of your own executive summaries. • It is very useful for it to clearly reflect the objectives of the brief, define and describe the problem addressed, and concisely evaluate the alternatives and submit the main conclusions or recommendations.
Introduction	• **It introduces the content of the brief.** • It is the opening of the brief and contributes to enhance the readers' interest. • It can include both the context and nature of the public policy problem and the basic background of the research carried out.
Context	• **It "establishes the political scene" on which the brief is based.** • It can center on the direct context of the problem analyzed, that is, focus on the national, provincial or local levels. • The situation can be described in relation to those affected by the problem being analyzed. • Another approach to the context description can be given by the stage of public policies on which the analysis or the recommendation is centered.
Definition of the problem	• **It is the specific topic on which the brief is based.** • It is essential to convince the reader that there is an urgent problem and that this document will provide possible solutions. • It identifies, defines and explains the nature of the problem. • It is necessary to show that the issue requires government action; so it is important to relate the problem and solutions to the political landscape of the time. • A theoretical framework should be developed consistent with the public policy options that will be introduced later in the brief.
Options and evidence	• **It schematizes, evaluates and compares the possible policy alternatives.** • It provides convincing arguments to the alternative chosen. • It is focused on reporting the decision promoted. • It builds a clear and consistent bond between the conclusions and recommendation elements included subsequently in the brief.

Proposal / Recommendation	• **It reveals the author's position and is in line with the definition of the problem.** • It can adopt the form of conclusions, recommendations and/or implications. • This is a key part of the document because it is what the reader is looking for. • It includes a concise synthesis of the most relevant findings based on evidence. • A set of recommendations can be included to introduce the practical steps necessary to implement a policy option. • The feasibility of the proposal must be shown and it must determine who should promote the initiative. • It clearly describes what should happen afterwards. • It can be presented in a scalable manner (short, mid, and long term).
Implications	• **To what type of change of policy or actions is the recommendation aimed to?** • It is possible to use evidence from other provinces, countries or regions. • They are less direct than recommendations. • They are very useful when the guidance was not requested or is not welcome.

Source: CIPPEC, based on Mendizabal and Weyrauch (2011).

Format and design of policy briefs

Content design is a key factor to attract the readers and improve their access to the information provided in the policy brief: it is desirable that the organization develop an institutional format that allows identification by means of an array of colors and other editorial decisions to provide for the creation of an identity.

- Pictures, first-person statements, diagrams and statistics help to visualize the problem.
- Highlighting the core information or key points of the policy brief and creating clear and concise titles help to the understanding of the brief.
- Graphs and tables are useful to show real data or comparisons, but it is necessary to keep a balance between aesthetics and legibility. Also, it is important to find original ways to present the evidence to strengthen the policy brief content, especially for those who do not have technical knowledge about the topic, so that the information has a high degree of recollection.
- Text boxes are used, for example, to include statements that relate the reader to the central topic of the policy brief. They are very useful when in the main body of the brief there is only space to refer to the topic in general.
- As for bullets, they are useful to emphasize a list of features or elements. They help to organize information and make it easier to remember it.

It is also possible to include information outside the text box (where the content of the publication is included): these side bars, for example, are useful to include contact, legal or formal information –such as the project description, organization or publication– that is not part of the argumentation but is necessary for the institution.

Some criteria to bear in mind

- **Understandable:** use a clear and simple language (avoid academic or technical jargon) and provide well-explained and easy to follow arguments, even for a reader who is not an expert in the field.

- **Concise**: in general, the policy brief audiences have little time and are reluctant to read thoroughly. So, it is very common (and desirable) that information be summarized in an average extension of six to twelve pages (between 5000 and 20000 characters without spaces).
- **Accessible**: the use of the published brief should be made easier, for example, by means of a clear and intuitive arrangement (titles, subtitles, charts, graphs).
- **Practical and viable**: a policy brief is a tool oriented to decision makers in order to encourage action. It must provide arguments about the current situation, what needs to be improved and the possible solutions through viable recommendations.
- **Focused**: every aspect of the brief (from the message to its design) must be strategically aligned to reach the influence objective planned. For example, the public policy proposal must be based on what is known about the problem, provide information unknown to the audience and be written in a language that reveals the author's and/or institution's values.
- **Professional**, but not academic: in general, policy brief readers are not interested in the research or the analysis of the procedures to generate evidence. But in fact they are very interested in knowing the author's perspective on the problem and the possible solutions proposed based on their research.
- **Based on evidence**: it must stand out for providing a reasonable argument based on research that proves the existence of the problem and supports the consequences of adopting one or several solutions.
- **Visual appeal**: it must attract the audience attention and help to develop a favorable image of the organization. Colors, pictures, slogans, illustrative statements, logos, etc., enhance attributes such as dependability, professionalism, innovation, etc.

To continue exploring!

Recommendations from CIPPEC

In Spanish:

- Mendizabal, E., and Correa Aste, N. (2011). *Vínculos entre conocimiento y política: el rol de la investigación en el debate público en América Latina*. Lima, Perú. CIES and Universidad del Pacífico. Available at: http://www.odi.org.uk
- Moro, J. (2000). Problemas de agenda y problemas de investigación. En C. Escolar, *Topografías de la investigación. Métodos, espacios y prácticas profesionales*. Buenos Aires, Argentina. EUDEBA. Available at: http://biblioteca.universia.net

In English:

- Weyrauch, V. and Díaz Langou, G. (2010). *Sanas expectativas: de las evaluaciones de impacto al cambio en las políticas*. Buenos Aires, Argentina. CIPPEC and 3ie. Available at: http://vippal.cippec.org
- Knezovich, J. (2012). *Should think tanks write policy briefs? What an RCT can tell us?* Available at: www.onthinktanks.org
- International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) (2010). *Information Literacy for Policy Makers and Influencers.* Available at: http://www.inasp.info
- Jones, N.; y Walsh, C. (2008). *Policy briefs as a communication tool for development research*. Overseas Development Institute. Available at: http://www.odi.org.uk
- Young, E; and Quinn, L. (2002). *Writing Effective Public Policy Papers: A Guide to Policy Advisers in Central and Eastern Europe*. Open Society Institute. Available at: http://lgi.osi.hu

Next Toolkit:
Engage with media

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Toolkit No.2: Policy briefs. Buenos Aires. CIPPEC

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Toolkit Nº 1	Toolkit Nº 2	Toolkit Nº 3	Toolkit Nº 4	Toolkit Nº 5
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How to communicate research for policy influence

Toolkit Nº3

Engage with media

This toolkit is part of a series addressing different aspects and tools on research communication for policy influence.

The importance of 'being' at the media

Usually, when researchers and practitioners think about communication, what first comes to our mind is the media (in its various types: print press, television, radio and online). Even though a communication strategy encompasses much more than developing a fluid relationship with the press, it is undeniable the **critical role mass media (known as "the fourth power") have in shaping public opinion and raising awareness** on previously ignored public policy issues.

Moreover, media is a key channel to feeding policy debate with research. Analysis, relevant research and policy recommendations are only effective if they can influence decision makers. In this context, **journalism can become an ally of think tanks when it allows making research visible to a massive audience** –including public officers– and reflecting upon the consequences of adopting a particular policy path to address a public problem or generating awareness of an emerging problem that requires policy attention.

However, **the media are not disinterested players**. Media are, above all, political actors, with their own interesta and needs. Moreover, as companies, the media also follow market logic. Therefore, it is necessary to better understand the way media operate and the challenges they set as socializers of research. Notwithstanding, it is also important to acknowledge that **the media provide a unique platform for reaching citizens and decision makers with research findings**, as they are a very powerful, quick and an effective channel to disseminate messages to millions of people worldwide. Thus, **having media skills is increasingly useful in the academic and public policy world**.

Reasons for engaging with media include:

- **Raise awareness**. Media allow to communicate your research findings to a massive audience, thus gaining visibility of your work and/or organisation and the possibility to raise awareness on the issue that you have analysed in depth.
- **Address decision makers indirectly**. Politicians and public officers often pay attention to research once it has been broadcasted by the media. If your research affects them, they may be asked about it or have it quoted against them. Furthermore, media may be the most visible (though not always the better: see the challenges that entail working with media in the table below) route to reach other stakeholders: private sector, non-profits and the general audience.
- **Make your research intelligible to others**. The media are "translators".

Among other functions, journalists inform a mass audience on complex facts, and, at the same time, they may help build an explanation for the causes and consequences of the events they report on. On many occasions journalists can help researchers explain their findings to a lay audience. In short, media and think tanks can provide information and evidence that help people make better decisions.

- **Position your institution**. Media coverage can also help promote the name of your institution, and raise its reputation. Moreover, media coverage is often used by donors as an indicator to partially measure the impact of research.

Challenges and opportunities in communicating research through media

Challenges	Opportunities
• Possible misrepresentation of research by journalists • Journalist may lack skills to interpret and correctly explain research • Editors may not be interested in publishing research • Citizenship may not be interested in research • Risk of being used as a source in an article that you know will be critical of a government or public official (very common in polarized contexts)	• Researchers can link their findings to current affairs– i.e. MDGs • Journalists can produce well-informed quality journalism serving public interest • Editors can support journalistic specialization, build capacity of their staff and credibility of their product • Citizens can get involved by commenting upon findings and recommendations, sharing them and building new content to feed public debate • Research can gain transparency and legitimacy by being scrutinised in the public domain

Source: CIPPEC based on Panos Southern Africa RELAY.

The challenge of polarized contexts

Researchers working in countries with highly polarised political contexts face an extra challenge when working with media. In such contexts, media are usually polarised and journalistic production dealing with political issues may be biased. In these contexts, silence is often seen as the best way to avoid being distorted by one side or another. However, with caution, it is possible to design an intervention strategy to sort out obstacles. When this happens, it is important to reflect on different issues, which involves thinking on the actors included or excluded in polarized communication contexts:

✓ What is the editorial line of the chosen media to communicate research?
✓ What are the media's target audiences?
✓ To what extent will the chosen media reach the think tank's target audience?
✓ What are the risks of communicating research in media that are critical of the government?
✓ What are the risks of communicating research in media that are favorable to the government?
✓ Who is the reporter you will be interacting with? How long has he/she been reporting on the think tank's findings? Is he/she a specialist in you research field? Does he/she have a good reputation amongst other journalists?
✓ Are there any alternatives, such as a young and emerging media you should start relating to?

Polarized contexts often stimulate the creation of independent new media that, though smaller, capture an audience interested in having a different approach than the one prevailing in mainstream media. This is a good opportunity for a researcher to become an ongoing source of valuable and unbiased information.

Invest time on journalists

For young organizations that want to make their work visible, **it is important to invest some time in becoming a regular source for journalists**. In this stage of your organization, it will be very helpful to **answer all of their doubts, provide them with data, search and produce information related to public events** they are reporting on and that might be related to ongoing research in your organization. In other words, at the beginning you'll need to response to journalists' demands and you may have less control over what is published: **overtime, you'll probably become a reliable source and a legitimized voice** on some issues. So this initial investment may be the first step to building a media partnership that in the future will allow you to publish regularly op-ed and other articles focusing on your research findings.

Media or policy makers?

When asked about the most adequate strategy to influence decision makers, Laura Zommer, journalist and CIPPEC's former communications director, said: **"Tell me in what phase your institution is and I'll tell you which audience you should focus on"**. At an early stage, a think tank will probably be unknown to policy makers. Therefore, attracting their attention will be difficult and you'll need to communicate with them via the media, as an endorser of what you have to convey. As political actors begin to notice your institution and your research, you may start addressing them directly. If you're not a known brand, you'll probably need to aim at the press first. **Once the think tank is considered relevant in the public arena, you will be able to target more effectively relevant political actors directly**.

Become a reliable source for journalists

In order to better engage with journalists, your organisation needs to build its own contact database with key media players. Journalists hunt and gather news. Reporters and editors are the decision makers when it comes to picking stories to cover. All of them need need fast and accurate information from reliable sources. Hence, it is important to get to know and develop a relationship with the people that cover your research area in order to contribute with background information, keep them updated on new research findings and act as a reliable source that can check official information.

To keep a fluent but orderly relationship with journalists, it is essential to create and constantly update a journalists' database. You could start by reading newspapers, blogs and social networks to keep track of who is writing about what. Compile a list of journalists that may be interested in your research, and gather as much information as you can about them (email, mobile phone, social networks accounts) because you might later need to deliver information as quickly as possible. You can also make regular calls to the media to keep your contacts updated. Include in the database a field to track your different interactions with each journalist and keep a record on the information they requested. This will help you raise your profile and anticipate journalists' information needs.

To become a reliable source for the media, it is also important for researchers to be aware of recent articles published by reporters they seek to work with. To do so, a good idea is to follow journalists on their social networks, to receive updates of their work and know their comments on current affairs. Besides knowing what information they need, the activity of journalists in social networks often provides much more information about them than their articles do. In many cases, it is possible to know what their interests are, the opinions they have on other issues and public figures, their ideology, and their interaction with other journalists. All this information will provide researchers with important feedback on who the journalist is and what information is valuable to him.

Tips for becoming a reliable source for journalists

- Be available. Give reporters, especially to those who work odd hours, both your home and mobile number and tell them it's OK to call at any time.
- Seek journalists at meetings, events, etc. and give them your business card.
- Be ready to be quoted. Having to be called back once the quote has been cleared will reduce the chance of the quote being used.
- Know the issues. Read and comment intelligently on developments relating to your cause.
- Don't always assume journalists have received the information you have about topical events or relevant news releases.
- Avoid rhetoric and ideological arguments; most journalists have alredy heard this before.
- Know your facts; never pass on information unless you know it's true.
- Know where to find information or contacts fast and therefore gain a reputation as a good source.

Source: Salzmann.

Remember **you don't' have to know everything to be a source of information. But don't speak beyond your expertise** (Whitford). Moreover, today a person might not be a specialist on an issue, but he/her can give a lot of visibility to that issue by sharing ideas or information through his/her networks.

On and off the record

The relationship between journalists and their sources follow a basic contract that designates sources speaking *on and off the record*. When a source speaks **on the record**, it allows the journalist to publish the information it provided, and to quote both its words and its identity. On the other hand, when speaking **off the record**, sources provide information that journalists cannot publish nor attribute to them in the media. In many cases, off the records allow journalists to access other sources and new information.

Therefore, when interacting with a journalist it is essential for the source to clearly indicate whether it is speaking on or off the record. When speaking off the record, it is vital to identify when the off the record statement starts and when it ends. Moreover, to speak off the record with a reporter sources need to ensure they have built a long and solid link with them that guarantees the journalist will not break the covenant of confidentiality. Beyond that, it is best to always speak on the record with reporters: journalists and their audience (as well as think tank's audiences) appreciate the value of the information and the analysis experts do.

Make your research newsworthy!

As Hovland (2005) says, researchers cannot wait and hope friendly journalists find their issues newsworthy. Quite surely, they will have to adapt their findings to make them newsworthy. The **key is timing**, so it is important to connect efficiently your findings and key messages to breaking news. When research adds evidence to breaking news events, journalists will be avid to talk to you. This is easier than convincing them to publish information that is not linked with the current public agenda. One way of taking advantage of current news, is to offer them a story, data or information that illustrates a new or local perspective, dramatizes a point of view or advances the debate somehow.

But news is not an exact science. A newsworthy story that fills the papers today, may not have got any mentions had it appeared previously. It all depends on how national and international events develop. To capture an audience, media often need to create entertainment. Scandal and controversy are virtually guaranteed column inches. Therefore, when presenting a story to the media, remember that **the larger the human interest angle, the larger the news is likely to be**. We are fascinated by things that may impact us, whether it is now, in the future or in the past. By giving practical examples and applying your research to 'everyday life', you can give life into a story that may otherwise be a bit dry (ESRC).

Seven pillars are used by journalists to assess newsworthiness:

1. Timeliness
2. Proximity
3. Rarity
4. Prominence
5. Impact
6. Novelty/Newness
7. Human interest

Source: GDNet-AERC, 2012.

In order to make your research newsworthy, you may want to consider the following advices:

- ✓ **Act fast**. News hooks may include: a public hearing, court decision, passage of a bill, a natural disaster, a major speech, a nomination, a national holiday, a crime, an anniversary, a human catastrophe.
- ✓ **Link messages with breaking news**. Take advantage of opportunities where you can disseminate your message by linking research findings to a recent event (eg. You give journalists statistics and policy recommendations on public transportation when a train accident has taken place). All you have to do is offer a story that adds to what has already been published: make them feel your contribution will feed the debate with quality information.
- ✓ **Identify something unusual of human interest**. For example, regular reporting about a critical issue such as HIV/AIDS in Africa has created a general fatigue. This is where you can step in and help the media by highlighting previously ignored angles.
- ✓ **Use pegs to highlight and plug your work**. Keep a diary of important dates and international days that relate to your research; this will help when making a plan to raise awareness about an issue. For instance, CIPPEC has recently launched an initiative called "CIPPEC Data" (a tool for viewing, analyzing and understanding statistical information on public policy) that was released on the "Journalist Day" in Argentina. Another way of doing this is sharing evidence-based policy recommendations or proposals during electoral campaigns.
- ✓ **Provide as much background information as possible**. Remember that journalists are not as knowledgeable about your field as you do. Background information will provide a context for your story, which ensures a better coverage.
- ✓ **Package information in a way that makes it easy to be used by media**. Use titles and subtitles, graphs, diagrams, storylines, charts and tables. It is very important to rewrite your research findings

as a piece of news, because journalists are then enabled to read it in the format that they are used to.

- **Show willingness to help** journalists to find the information they are looking for, even if you don't have it: you can recommend other researchers, share the contact of another journalist or indicate web sites to get data.

How and when research makes news

- Breakthroughs
- Award winning research
- Research of human interest – the one that links to people's daily lives
- Research that produces negative results
- Counterintuitive findings
- Polls
- New research
- Alternative voices
- Research conducted by or focusing on minority groups
- White papers, audits, commissions
- Government funded to feed into policy

Source: CIPPEC based on GDNet-AERC (2012).

Means to communicate with the media

- Press releases
- Interviews
- Studio discussions
- News conference
- Features
- Packages
- Special occasions – visits, trips, promotion
- Events
- Online tools and communities

Source: CIPPEC based on Danov.

Keep track of your contributions!

Last but not least, **it is important to monitor your appearances in media**. By doing media monitoring, you will have more information on: quantitative and qualitative impact of the organization, the impact of your work on policy issues in the public and media agenda, the plurality of media in which the organization is mentioned, the perception of the reputation of the organization and its political position.

Once you have all of this information (you may keep a daily track or establish a more convenient frequency), you can **elaborate a media report** with information on quantity and quality analytics: issues receiving more mentions, most quoted staff members, most receptive media source. This report will allow you to **track and compare the evolution of the relationship between the organization and the media** [1].

1 For further information on M&E, see Learners, practitioners and teachers. Handbook on monitoring, evaluating and managing knowledge for policy influence (CIPPEC, 2010).

To continue exploring!

Recommendations from CIPPEC

- *Communicating research through the media*, Panos Southern Africa RELAY. Available at: www.researchintouse.com

- *What is the media and how does it work, Writing a Press Release* and *How to prepare an Op-Ed,* GDNet Research Communications: Mombasa Media Workshop, Mombasa, 2010. Available at www.gdnet.org

- *Get media savvy, understanding the press,* Farai Samhungu, GDNet-TrustAfrica Policy Workshop, Uganda, 2011. Available at www.gdnet.org

- *Targeting tools: Media engagement",* ODI Available at: www.odi.org.uk

- *Researchers making news,* Farai Samhungu, GDNet-AERC Policy Brief Training Workshop, Nairobi, 2012.

- *Successful Communication: a toolkit for researchers and civil society organisations",* Ingie Hovland, ODI, 2005. Available at: www.odi.org.uk

- *Working with media, a best practice guide,* ESCR. Available at: www.esrc.ac.uk

Next Toolkit:

Online tools

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How to communicate research for policy influence

Toolkit Nº 1	Toolkit Nº 2	Toolkit Nº 3	Toolkit Nº 4	Toolkit Nº 5
First approach to research communication	Policy Briefs	Engage with media	Online tools	Dynamic formats to communicate research

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How to communicate research for policy influence

Toolkit Nº4

Online tools

This toolkit is part of a series addressing different aspects and tools on research communication for policy influence.

Why should you think about digital tools for research communication?

Digital tools (mainly online tools and mobile apps) have shaken the communications field, as they are indeed a powerful way to communicate information. It is in the **capability to produce, coproduce, transmit and receive information that the power of the 'digital revolution' lies** (Scott, 2012). This revolution does not refer exclusively to a specific change in internet technology, but rather to a change in how the internet is used: online tools facilitate participatory information sharing and collaboration on the Web.

Today, **not only are individuals using digital tools for self-expression, but organisations, think tanks, universities and governments are doing so as well**. The speed and scope of recent changes in technologies have become cardinal to researchers:

- A good digital strategy can do three things for research organisations: **(1) improve agility, (2) buy time for under-resourced staff, and (3) provide additional opportunities for collaboration** (Scott, 2012)
- **Digital tools amplify the voice of researchers and make research easily accessible to people** when it comes to disseminating research findings. They facilitate what Scott (2012) called 'being there' approach: instead of expecting people to come to your sites, you can push information to them, through online channels.
- Social networking spaces and blogospheres provide spaces where internet users are already interacting.
- Social media open an opportunity for organisations to **communicate their research directly to stakeholders** and keep them informed on the progress of their work, as they allow reaching people in their daily lives.
- The existing social networks allow **segmenting the audience based on their interests** –language, age or place of residence, among other criteria–, thus they provide prominent circumstances for research organisations to identify effectively how and when to communicate their research.
- Social media, compared to traditional communication tools, not only enable you to share the research and the work you do to a wider audience, but also to **receive feedback and seize a two-way communication flow** too.
- Digital tools also create favourable conditions to **promote an interactive debate** about your research. By creating specific communities around a particularly issue, digital tools enable you to feed ongoing

debates with evidence. So it's not just about the possibility of starting a conversation, but also about the challenge of keeping track of ongoing conversations you could add value to.

- Online tools allow you to better understand what others are thinking about issues related to your research, how they talk about them, what are their major interests and concerns, and so on. Thus, online tools' contribution to **refine what, when, how and to whom you communicate** is undeniable.
- A lot of research is being completed with the help of digital tools and the collection of evidence via the Web. Moreover, you can work online with peers and stakeholders to gather and produce new information.
- Governments are no longer limited to streamlined operations and information provision about decisions and services. They are increasingly employing digital tools to foster citizen participation in the public decision-making processes.

Thus, if you want to produce robust and far-reaching research, you may start by seriously considering incorporating online tools to your research and communication strategies. You may need to use such tools into all research phases: online tools "have much broader potential supporting all research phases, from issue mapping, through communication with research stakeholders, to dissemination of research results. (Cinco and Novotný, 2011)"

Don't overestimate the influence of digital tools!

Producing viral content is not easy. Moreover, the impact that can be achieved in the virtual world does not necessarily guarantee of the same effect on decision makers. Therefore, it is key not to overestimate the power of social networks, and, at the same time, understand how the organisation can bring and take value from the discussion online. An online strategy is a great opportunity to support your discussions and your credibility.

Challenges of digital communication

It is true that communication and information sharing and producing have become much easier with Web 2.0 tools and social media. However, it must be noted that, like any communication channel and manner, digital tools also present some challenges in terms of helping research inform policy:

- Lack of the needed **skills and knowledge** of most researchers to make the best of digital tools.
- Persuading research-oriented staff of the effectiveness of communicating about their work in different formats
- **Digital tools change so fast** that it is difficult to keep track of the latest releases when most of your time is devoted to producing good research.
- These media imply **losing a certain degree of control over messaging and branding** (for example, staff may tweet freely about their work), which can have potential consequences for organisational and personal reputations.
- Communication without barriers creates some sort of **'information abundance'**,

making it hard for users to pick up the most relevant, robust and best quality research; which in turn stiffens competition, not only among individuals, but also among organisations and policy research institutes.

- Useful and effective, online tools are not enough to design an advocacy strategy that involves all decision makers. There is a need to **complement them with varied traditional communication tools**.

Encourage the use of online tools in your organisation: ODI's experience

Many researchers are suspicious of new technology. ODI's solution to empowering its staff in digital tools was making online activities central to research, from start to finish. This bolstered the reputation of individual researchers and that of ODI as well. They created a good argument that they called **'cradle to grey'**, explained by Nick Scott at onthinktanks.org: the "cradle" is the time when research ideas are developed and researchers work together. In the next stage, "life," research is complete, and researchers can publish their work quickly and in multiple formats – a podcast, a video, a blog, an infographic, and so on. Finally, "the grey is the lifespan of the research once it's published. It is immortal. It never goes to the grave." If researchers want their long tail to grow, they can post their research to Wikipedia, they can upload their publications to "archiving" sites, or they can release it all under a creative commons license.

Source: Nick Scott at onthinktanks.org (2012)

Creating an online identity for your organisation

Before delving into the different online tools that you may use to further communicate your research and ideas, you should be aware that **all online activity should be coherent with your organisation's identity**.

Thinking about the organisation's online identity entails asking some of the following issues:

- What type of content will the organisation disseminate to create value in a network (research findings, information about research-related events, debates on certain policy issues, etc.)?
- What is the purpose of the material that will be broadcasted? (Inform, promote, call to action, raise awareness, etc.)
- What is the appropriate tone for each type of content?

Also, since in general social networks promote a more informal and human language, it is important that the person managing social networks knows how to effectively manage the tone of his organisation in its communications. **Over time, the consistency in the activity and tone of the organisation in the digital world will build a solid and recognizable profile for those interested in its work**.

The following tips can be considered when trying to forge an online identity for your organisation:

✓ **Be clear on what action you want your community to take beyond discussions** – specify what your goals are in using online tools and guide your audience towards them.

✓ **Integrate face-to-face activities with online activities**– organize networking events if possible. Think about ways and opportunities to shift the online linkage, once established with policy makers, to offline.

✓ **Shift the offline to online**– think about offline materials such as brochures, leaflets, campaigning activities that will encourage people to browse what is going on online.

- ✓ **Repackage information to fit online environments**– remember that research reports will not satisfy all your online audience. You need to present your information differently (i.e. use interactive tools, audio and video content, visualize information, chunk your content by presenting it in portions rather than as one large page). It is easier for your audience to comment on a few pages focused on a specific issue rather than on a full research report.
- ✓ **Combine tools**. It is important to select and **use a variety of online tools and spaces that complement each other**. Tools reach their maximum potential when they are used together. For example, Twitter can be used to find (research) and disseminate (communication) information, and keep team members connected and informed of a project's activities (management). DropBox or Google Drive (the new version of Google Docs) can be used to collaborate in the drafting of a study (research), to store the public versions of key documents (communication), and as an intranet for an organisation (management).

Source: CIPPEC based on Cinco and Novotný and onthinktanks.org (2012).

Online communication channels and tools for policy research institutes

Below we share some online tools and channels recommended by Mendizabal at onthinktanks.org[1] (and add others). **Not all the tools are appropriate for all organisations; each must choose the most appropriate mix according to its communication objectives**. Similarly, not all tools will be useful for all projects or initiatives of your institution. **The preference for one tool or another will be based on the message you need to convey, the audience you want to target, and the content you want to broadcast**. Take into account that many digital media are also differentiated by the comparative advantages of each format (pictures, text, videos, data visualizations, etc.).

1 For further information see: http://onthinktanks.org/2012/08/20/communication-options-for-think-tanks-channels-and-tools/

Tool/Channel	What is it?	To inspire
Emailed Newsletter	Announces the organisation's past, current, and future activities (including publications and events). It is simply informative and should direct the reader to other materials.	European Policy Centre: http://www.epc.eu/pub.php?cat_id=8
Organisation's Website	Provides information about the organisation and brings together all the organisation's communication efforts. While it is an important point of reference, the website should not be considered as the main online communication vehicle for the institution.	Centre for Poverty Analysis: www.cepa.lk Rimisp – Latin American Center for Rural Development: http://www.rimisp.org/en/ Overseas Development Institute: www.odi.org.uk
Blog	Acts as a channel to announce and introduce new research outputs and events. A blog can be the main channel to publish opinions and reading lists, as well as highlighting new videos, podcasts, and other multimedia produced by an organisation.	GDNet Blog: www.gdnetblog.org On think tanks: www.onthinktanks.org Politics & Ideas: www.politicsandideas.org Goran's musings: www.goranspolicy.com Africa Research Institute: www.africaresearchinstitute.org/category/blog/ Wildlife Research in South Africa: www.gvisouthafrica.blogspot.com.ar Envision Asia: www.researchpanelasia.blogspot.com.ar Nexos : www.nexos.cippec.org
Twitter Account	Can be used for several objectives, such as: announcing new publications or events, filtering information on a given policy or research issue, encouraging discussion with other Twitter users, and so on.	Center for European Policy Analysis: @cepa Institute of Economic Affairs: @IEAKenya CIPPEC: @cippec
Facebook Page	Offers the organisation the opportunity to engage with a general audience in a more informal manner. The page can feature recent publications and events by the organisation and third parties.	Politics & Ideas: a new think net: https://www.facebook.com/politicsandideasathinknet
LinkedIn	Provides the organisation with up to date information of its staff that can be featured in the 'about us' page of the website.	European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM): http://www.linkedin.com/company/ecdpm
Google Plus Page, Google Hangouts and G+ Communities	Messaging and video chat platforms	Grupo FARO: https://plus.google.com/+grupofaro/posts CIPPEC: https://plus.google.com/+CIPPEC/posts
Youtube channel for videos and MOOCs	Can be used to present a summary or key findings of a study or project. They can offer the researchers the opportunity to explain their research methods, emphasise key findings and recommendations, illustrate their arguments, and add subtitles in a simple way.	CIPPEC: http://www.youtube.com/user/fcippec
Ustream for 'webstreaming'	Provides video streaming services	

Flickr or Picassa	Help organize, edit, and share photos.	
ITunes for podcasts	Can present information and ideas in a different format. In most cases it will be possible to produce videos and podcasts at the same time (using the audio of the video).	
Scribd for documents	Allow the organisation to upload its publications to the web in an easy format and service.	Overseas Development Institute: http://es.scribd.com/odi_development
Google Drive or Dropbox for intranet and sharing documents	Allow an institution to organise common folders and documents and share them with its staff and external collaborators.	
Survey Monkey	Allows creating and publishing online surveys, and viewing and analysing their results	
Wikipedia	Global and open repository of knowledge	
RSS feeds	Is a computer code that Website owners can add to their sites to make them easier to scan by users.	
E-learning platforms	Platforms that use electronic media and information and communication technologies for educational purposes. Allow broad inclusion of trainees.	VIPPAL: http://www.vippal.org/cursos/index.php?version=v15

Source: CIPPEC based on onthinktanks.org.

Among these tools, you may first consider using blogs and Twitter due to their advantages and opportunities in terms of enhancing the way you communicate your ideas, that we describe next.

Communicating research through blogging

Blogging represents a modern way of announcing and introducing new research outputs; in other words, **it makes your work more visible**. Blogging can also be your main channel to publish your own opinions, the policy actions that you would like others to consider, or to share talking heads, videos and audios you find relevant for a specific topic.

Blogs present an easy tool that can help you set up a website (personal, research group or research project site). If you manage a blog effectively, you can **build a community of readers**, to whom you can spread your work to. Additionally, this following can bring new ideas and perspectives to your research throughout its different phases.

One significant advantage of blogging is that you can learn and practice communicating your work to **an audience that goes beyond the academic community**: it may include other bloggers and opinion-leaders that can provide you with input through their comments and discussions. Another good practice to make your blog post more popular is to tweet about it, as we will explain below.

Don't overload your audiences!

Very often, organisations tend to overload their communities with too much information, thereby making their communication efforts futile because followers are unable to process all of the information. Rather, **think of questions and issues you would like to raise** because the more discussion you can generate, the more attention you will draw to your key findings (and the more valuable feedback you will get).

Some tips to encourage debate in a blog

- ✓ **Language**. Because of its wide readership, your blog should have a universal in tone; your layout and language must be accessible and informal to encourage comments and debate. Avoid the 'authoritative' writing style.
- ✓ **Length**. Blog posts must be short (not more than one page in length) and include hyperlinks and multimedia such as videos, audios, documents and presentations.
- ✓ **Content spinning**. Link your blog to your profile on other digital tools, such as Facebook or Twitter, so that a new post automatically appears on other platforms.
- ✓ **Use blogs smartly**. Do not limit the use of your blog to announcements on events or new publications.
- ✓ **Repackaging**. Repackage your content in a way that makes sense to readers who are unfamiliar with the topic.
- ✓ **Writing style**. Remember that development is about people, so keep your writing human – use the active voice.
- ✓ **Correction**. Acknowledge mistakes you may have made. Post an apology or a correction – it shows you are transparent. Remember that those who point out your mistakes are your readers, so acknowledge them when correcting mistakes.
- ✓ **Share new thoughts**. Never assume that your readers have already read what you have written earlier –if you have new thoughts after the original post was posted, do not hesitate to write a new post, simply make sure you link it to the original one.
- ✓ **Be organized**. Make sure you organize your content using categories and tags.
- ✓ **Tagging** is about relevance rather than quantity – tag every post with all the relevant tags to make it easier for your readers to find what they are looking for.
- ✓ **Linking**. Link to other relevant blog posts and sites when possible and make sure the links open in new windows so that your reader does not get lost.
- ✓ **Update your blog**. Set up a blog only when you are sure of your ability to provide regular content to update. Outdated blogs lose their readers!
- ✓ **Quotes**. Use speech marks or italics if you are quoting someone directly, make sure you are getting the quote correctly. If you don't have the complete quotes then paraphrase it. Cite your sources!
- ✓ **Management**. The communications leader or the online communications manager should manage the blog, but members of the staff should have access to post.

For examples of blogs addressing policy research issues, see the chapter of online tools and channels above.

Connecting and networking online through Twitter

Twitter is often referred to as the **text messaging service of the internet**. As a form of free micro-blogging that allows users to send and receive short public messages called 'tweets', it has become an invaluable tool for researchers communicating progress on their work, research findings, or just expressing themselves. Twitter can be used as a professional networking tool, to create awareness about yourself as a researcher and disseminate your latest findings to a targeted audience. Tweets are typically quite short, only 140 characters long, including links. By following other people and sources you are able to build up an instant, personalized news feed that meets your full range of interests, both academic and personal.

Tweets are used to convey meaning in a short, concise way, to arouse the curiosity of our followers and prompt them to read your tweet and click on the link you've attached. Via Twitter, you can **notify** others about new publications and new developments on research projects, **comment** on and **share** relevant government policy changes, reports, articles, as well as **directing** your followers to your content posted on other digital tools (i.e. a new blog post on your blog or your organisation's website). Moreover, Twitter can be your ally in reaching out to external audiences and making links with practitioners in government, media and public policy domain.

To maximize the opportunities offered by this tool, follow Twitter best practices: **write short and direct tweets, provide links for further reading, use hash-tags to link your tweet to all tweets written on a specific issue, signal other users directly, retweet other people's contents, and build lists to group the contacts you follow and keep better track of their activity** (Mendizabal, 2012)[2].

Some tips for tweeting effectively

- ✓ Keep it **short and simple**! Make it easy for your followers to retweet your tweets.
- ✓ Use programs such as Bitly.com to shrink links so you can include them in your tweets.
- ✓ Hashtags are the # sign used before a specific word that you would like to highlight. They allow tagging tweets, thus grouping them with millions of other tweets submitted by others. Using hashtags allows you to make your tweets visible to millions of Twitter users who are addressing the same topics as you are (e.g. #development, #publicpolicy, & #sustainabledevelopment).
- ✓ **Mentions** are another powerful way of bringing your tweets to a wider audience. Mention other relevant organisations or individuals when tweeting about a specific topic.
- ✓ Decide the **time** to tweet with the region and the audience you are tweeting to in mind. Take into consideration the time difference.
- ✓ Vary the time – don't always tweet at the same time.
- ✓ **Do not overwhelm** your followers with your tweets–select your tweets and prioritize!
- ✓ Take into consideration how hot the topic is and how frequent people are tweeting about it (i.e. in some cases, sending a tweet every 15 min rather than every hour is more effective).
- ✓ Do a screening exercise of the relevant organisations tweeting about a specific topic.
- ✓ When tweeting about a blog post, **mention** other organisations, **direct** them to the post and **encourage** them to comment on it.
- ✓ The communications leader or the online communications manager should manage the Twitter account, but members of the staff with their own account should seek to engage with it too.

Source: CIPPEC based On think tanks and Mollett, Moran and Dunleavy (2011).

The two tools addressed above are basic functions available in the online world; digital tools can do much more for you! Hence, if you are interested in navigating the different Web 2.0 tools, **think digital and be digital**. Digital tools in research are not about adding extra work to what you are already working on; they are about **easing the way you communicate your research, making it more accessible and influential for a broader audience**.

2 For further information see: http://onthinktanks.org/2011/07/28/in-praise-of-twitter-5-ways-in-which-it-can-help-think-tanks-filter-announce-search-network-and-argue/

If your budget is tight...

Designing and implementing a good digital strategy is very intense in terms of human resources, since you must have a member on call at all times. If an organisation doesn't have the resources, it is recommended to allocate its staff time to writing in the press or appearing in television rather than to writing on the internet, as the former can be reproduced on the web. To make good use of digital communication, Laura Zommer (2012) recommends **reproducing discussions** all the time on social media and on the internet. However, this entails a significant **change in an organisation's culture**, since you'd need the whole organisation to respond immediately to potential interactions in the web. If you are not convinced of making that effort, a good choice is to map how the internet works in your country, and later associate yourself with those institutions, mediums or individuals that can make your research visible at the right moment (Zommer, 2012).
On the other hand, you **don't need to create new online spaces every time**. There are many tools that you could get for free (i.e.: Word Press, Twitter, Facebook, Google plus). And you don't need to reinvent the wheel: you can reuse what you have wherever and whenever you want.

Source: VIPPAL (www.vippal.cippec.org).

Avoid new communication channels that are not linked to your core business

Organisations, think tanks and research institutes often adapt their agendas to funding possibilities. Thus, sometimes, organisations investigate topics and implement projects that are not necessarily related to their mission. In such cases, Laura Zommer (2013) recommends the following: **avoid generating new communication channels and developing regular dissemination tools, which, if they happen to be successful, will create demand for content that will only be available while the funding lasts**. Discontinued newsletters, web sites that are no longer updated, but still appear in search engines, databases with information from two or more years ago, blogs with old entries without comments and social network accounts without followers or friends or rich exchanges are all terrible windows to the organisation.

Source: Politics & Ideas (www.politicsandideas.org).

Monitoring and evaluating research communications using digital tools

Finally, online tools also **facilitate M&E communication efforts**. For instance, Google Analytics not only gives you fresh insights on how visitors use your site, how they arrive, how often people visit each page, how long they stay, how you can keep them coming back. Moreover, to track media and blog mentions you can also use Google Alerts; these are email updates of the latest relevant Google results (web, news, etc.) based on your queries.

However, like in any M&E effort, the important issue is to use the information collected effectively. In that sense, it is worth taking a look at ODI's M&E dashboard[3] (Scott, 2012), created to track how ODI outputs are disseminated through their main communications channels fare. This brings together **qualitative and quantitative data collected digitally**. ODI has included data that could give insights into the quality and management of research, which can sometimes determine the success or failure of communications. ODI's aim was to create a set of benchmarks for the organisation, to assess the success in reaching and influencing audiences, to identify what factors led to that success, and **act upon these findings**.

3 See http://onthinktanks.org/2012/01/06/monitoring-evaluating-research-communications-digital-tools/

To continue exploring!

Recommendations from CIPPEC

- *Using social media: research communications and the development dialogue,* Overseas Development Institute, 2013. Available at: www.odi.org.uk

- *Digital strategy can support communications in think tanks. But can it also improve their research and management too?,* Nick Scott, On think tanks, 2012. Available at: www.onthinktanks.org

- *Digital think tanks,* Enrique Mendizabal, On think tanks, 2012. Available at: www.onthinktanks.org

- *An introduction to digital research communications,* Nick Scott, Overseas Development Institute, 2013. Available at: www.odi.org.uk

- *Say no to developing new communication channels that are not linked to your core business,* Laura Zommer, Politics & Ideas, 2013. Available at: www.politicsandideas.org

- *The decline of the corporate website (and rise of a social internet),* Nick Scott, On think tanks, 2012 Available at: www.onthinktanks.org

- *Using Twitter in university research, teaching and impact activities. A guide for academics and researchers,* Amy Mollett, Danielle Moran and Patrick Dunleavy, 2011. Available at: www.lse.ac.uk

- *In praise of Twitter: 5 ways in which it can help think tanks (filter, announce, search, network and argue),* Enrique Mendizabal, On think tanks, 2012. Available at: www.onthinktanks.org

- *A pragmatic guide to monitoring and evaluating research communications using digital tools,* Nick Scott, On think tanks, 2012. Available at: www.onthinktanks.org

- *ODI's award-winning online strategy explained, Nick Scott,* On think tanks, 2012. Available at: www.onthinktanks.org

- Impact 2.0 iGuide - New mechanisms for linking research and policy, Cheekay Cinco and Karel Novotný, Association for Progressive Communications APC.

- *Communication options for think tanks: channels and tools,* Enrique Mendizabal, On think tanks, 2012. Available at: www.onthinktanks.org

Next Toolkit:

Dynamic formats to communicate research.

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Other guides from the series:

How to communicate research for policy influence

Toolkit Nº 1	Toolkit Nº 2	Toolkit Nº 3	Toolkit Nº 4	Toolkit Nº 5
First approach to research communication	Policy Briefs	Engage with media	Online tools	Dynamic formats to communicate research

Other series:

How to design a policy influence plan?

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VIPPAL Vinculando la investigación y las políticas públicas en América Latina

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How to communicate research for policy influence

Toolkit Nº5

Dynamic formats for research communication

This toolkit is part of a series addressing different aspects and tools on research communication for policy influence.

Besides more traditional academic tools like books or policy briefs (see Toolkit 2: Policy briefs) and recent online tools innovation (see Toolkit 4: Online tools), there are other non-traditional formats that can help you enhance the way you communicate research: visualization, presentation and video tools enable a more dynamic and attractive communication of evidence, and can contribute to make findings easily accessible to decision makers and society.

The importance of data visualization

Data represents the building blocks of information. In the modern world, we have much more data than what we can actually process, and, many times, it becomes meaningless to most people. Moreover, when audiences are presented with too much information, they end up losing interest on it, which is often translated as lack of understanding of the available information (McCandless).

Giving this abundance –even saturation– of data in our societies, the practice of data visualization is becoming increasingly important; moreover it is changing the way people receive and consume information. **Data visualization** is a transversal discipline that **uses images' immense power of communication to explain great abstract masses of information generated by scientific and social processes** (MediaLab PRado). The main goal of data visualization is to **communicate information clearly and effectively through graphical means**, enabling a more intuitive approach to key aspects of complex data. Data visualization **allows simplifying, measuring, comparing, exploring, and discovering data**; it transforms data into information and information into knowledge (Alcalde, 2013). In short, it is all about processing and presenting data as a multimedia experience.

The visualization challenge is very sensitive to researchers who seek policy influence. **Policy researchers collect and process vast amounts of data**. However, their outputs often remain in technical language, in mountains of visual static texts and knowledge products, accessible to only a handful of experts. Moreover, the technical formulation often prevents collaboration and usage of the publicly available data and analysis. As such, **unprocessed data misses many opportunities to create essential knowledge for society, and add the necessary depth and evidence backup for policy discourse** (Buldiosky, 2011).

New media have further exacerbated the challenges research organizations face. Today, organizations' knowledge products are forced to compete on the same market of ideas as that of blogs, news outlets, magazines and electronic media in general. Consequently, **in addition to analyzing, studying, interpreting and comparing the data with other data, organizations must know how to communicate it**. As Buldiosky (2011) says, "they have yet to master the art of using the new media and interactive information technology both to **communicate their results and bring their work to their existing audiences and promote it among new, wider audiences by utilizing user-friendly formats and thus increase the impact of their ideas**. Not only would organizations benefit from higher visibility and impact of their ideas, but also their products could be of more value for their societies."

Data visualization tips

- Even though there is a vast amount of tools, they do not work automatically: it is necessary to **dedicate time to display effectively** the information you have.
- The **aesthetic** and the **functional** dimensions must go hand in hand.
- Facilitating the understanding does not mean distorting data: do not fall for fashion or "eye candy" traps.
- **Visualization is not analysis**. It is important to remember that visualization is neither a tool to help the analysis, nor a substitute for analytical ability. Moreover, is it not a substitute for statistics. Do not expect data visualization to do all the work automatically (Alcalde, 2013).
- Remember that, **the quality of data visualization lies on the information that it is based on**, not on its aesthetics. It's all about the facts (The art of data visualization).

Tools for data visualization

There is a variety of conventional ways to visualize data: tables, maps, histograms, pie charts, bar graphs, and so on. However, to effectively convey a message to your audiences, sometimes **you need more than just a simple pie chart of your results**. In fact, there are much better, profound and creative ways to visualize data. Many of them are free so that your main investment is time (Machlis, 2011).

Among the vast amount of tools available, you may consider using the following ones due to their advantages. For further options and information on data visualization tools, see: www.computerworld.com/s/article/9214755/Chart_and_image_gallery_30_free_tools_for_data_visualization_and_analysis and www.selection.datavisualization.ch/

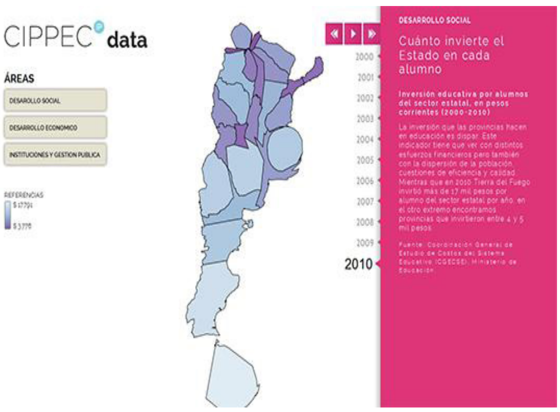
Tool		What is it?	Web	To inspire
Charts	Google Motion Chart	It's a dynamic chart that allows you to explore several indicators over time. Some features are: shows more dimensions of data simultaneously, therefore revealing more interesting stories in the data, and shows high level patterns as well as the individual elements that make up the pattern.	https://developers.google.com/chart/interactive/docs/gallery/motionchart	Housing price Index: http://www.socr.ucla.edu/test.dir/GoogleMotionChart.html
	Tableau Public	Enables creating interactive graphs, dash-boards, maps and tables from virtually any data and embedding them on your website or blog in minutes. From a simple Excel spread-sheet, you can have a high impact interactive visualizations graph.	www.tableausoft-ware.com	Tale of 100: http://www.tableausoft-ware.com/public/ga-llery/taleof100
	Google Fusion Tables	Turns data into a chart or map. You can upload a file in several different formats and then choo-se how to display it: table, map, heatmap, line chart, bar graph, pie chart, scatter plot, time-line, storyline or motion (animation over time). It is somewhat customizable, allowing you to change map icons and style info windows.	http://www.google.com/drive/apps.html#fusiontables	Mapping the riots with poverty (The Guardian): http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/inte-ractive/2011/aug/10/poverty-riots-mapped
Timelines	Dipity	Dipity is a free digital timeline website. It helps organize a web's content by date and time. Users can create, share, embed and collabo-rate on interactive, visually engaging timelines that integrate video, audio, images, text, links, social media, location and timestamps.	www.dipity.com	Deaf International Community: http://www.dipity.com/terpprof/Deaf-International-Community/
	Timeline JS	With Google Spreadsheet, you can tell a story using multiple formats for its content. It accepts formats such as Twitter, Flickr, Google Maps, Youtube, Vimeo, Wikipedia and Soundcloud. It also facilitates the configuration of font and set of the interface language.	www.timeline.veri-te.co	The Vancouver Sun (Canada): http://www.vancouversun.com/news/montreal-murder.html
	Tiki-toki	Registers texts, images and videos within a chronological line, with the possibility to display the details in a popup window without impairing the aesthetics of the line created.	www.tiki-toki.com	Group Edit Memo: http://www.tiki-toki.com/time-line/entry/2300/Group-Edit-Demo/#vars!date=2011-01-01_00:00:00!
Maps	Google maps	Offers several map views that you can switch between depending on your needs. You can also create a custom map for any location, adding place marks, lines and shapes to it. You can load the saved map at any time, print it out for your reference and share it with others.	www.maps.google.com.ar	
	D3.js	D3.js (or just D3 for Data-Driven Documents) is a JavaScript library that displays digital data in dynamic graphical forms. It allows great control over the final visual result.	www.d3js.org	CIPPEC data: www.cippec.org/data

Source: CIPPEC based on www.computerworld.com, www.selection.datavisualization.ch/ and the official websites of the described tools.

An inspiring experience of data visualization: CIPPEC data

CIPPEC data (www.cippec.org/data) enables you to see, analyze and understand statistic information on 20 social, economic and institutional indicators in Argentina through an interactive cartogram, a map that is distorted to represent an indicator proportionally. The cartogram is useful to analyze the situation of provinces regarding several topics in relation to others, and it also depicts the individual performance of each province over time.

The cartogram was built with JavaScript D3.js of the algorithm to construct continuous area cartograms. It was developed by James A. Dougenik, Nicholas R. Chrisman and Duane R. Niemeyer



Other inspiring experiences are:

- Climatescope (Inter American Development Bank): http://www5.iadb.org/mif/climatescope/2012/tool.html
- The microscope of votes in Spain (rtve.es): http://datos.rtve.es/elecciones/autonomicas-municipales/
- An urban world (UNICEF): http://www.unicef.org/sowc2012/urbanmap/

Presenting information: Prezi and Storify

Not only is an attractive visualization of data important to engage audiences. Many times research organizations do not realize **how important it is to present well their work or research findings**. Beyond the traditional power point, other ways of presenting information are increasingly being used at different workshops, seminars, conferences and other spaces where research organizations show their work. Two of those new ways of presenting information are Prezi and Storify.

Prezi (www.prezi.com) has replaced Power Point as the best tool for presentations. A Prezi presentation has a great visual impact and is generally more useful than PowerPoint for **non-linear presentations**, as it jumps from one page to another, goes back and forward, and zooms in and zooms out. However, other design features such as inserting videos, using different fonts and colors, trying typos, etc. are quite the same for both PowerPoint and Prezi. So, the biggest difference is probably the much-hailed non-linear nature of Prezi against the linear structure of PowerPoint.

So, when deciding which tool to use, think how Prezi's non-linearity could be harnessed. For example, Prezi would be useful for presenting a stakeholder map which focuses in different nodes. It is also an ideal option for creating mind maps around a chosen topic.

A Prezi can be shared on Facebook, Twitter and websites, and can be accessed by anyone unless you upgrade your account.

Some tips for using Prezi:

- Close up and sort first the most important content.
- Use Movement to establish the relationship between elements and the story-telling.
- Use Grouping and Frames to avoid motion sickness.
- Add 3D backgrounds to your Prezi.
- Use Prezi as a whole website.
- Choose wisely the title of your Prezi for search engine optimization.

Source: Seattle Pacific University.

Storify (www.storify.com) is a platform that **enables users to tell a story using social web material**. The tool allows you to organize text, documents, video, images and social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) in an orderly and linear presentation. The pieces of the story retain all original links and functions, and can be integrated into any site.

With Storify you can **create new narratives** about events of major importance. The stories can be generated in a **chronological order** so that users have an idea of how different events raised and developed.

You can access Storify through your personal Twitter account. Two columns will appear: the left one presents a variety of social services such as Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube or SlideShare. The right column is where you enter the title of the story and the description. Then the left side content is dragged to the right side of the screen to recreate the story.

The stories are published under a URL that can be shared to make it viral or it can be embedded on a blog or website. Storify provides visitor with statistics of history to show content popularity.

Storify also gives you the option of publishing a story on Wordpress platforms or Twitter, among others. Every time you publish a story it will appear in either of these sites automatically.

Here is an example of Stotify with material of the Tsunami in Japan: http://storify.com/torontostar/videos-japan-tsunami

You can visit www.storify.com for further examples.

Videos: a tool for communicating complex ideas

Videos are powerful and efficient tools to disseminate research results. **Audiovisual language allows explaining research in a dynamic and attractive way**, thus engaging many people with the content. Though videos can't replace a policy brief in its depth and detail, they can make that document **more popular**. Today, many donors explicitly ask research organizations to use video or other audiovisual formats to **make their work more influential and easily accessible**.

Planning or preproduction

Like any communication initiative, when making a video it is important to plan:

- **The main idea** the video needs to convey. What is your **key message**? Why do you want people to watch your video? (To inform, to raise awareness, to call them to action, etc.).
- **The target audience**. Think about the people you want to watch your video.

These questions will help you **define the content of the video and organize a plan for later dissemination**.

It is often useful to think about the content of a video in terms of ideas: **define one or two central arguments**. This approach has two advantages: it forces you to **synthesize your work** and to **create a narrative** for the video.

Once the main content is defined, the next step should be determining the audiovisual resources. This means thinking about **how your video will look like**: you can think about interviews, researchers' comments, graphs, images, videos related to the research, and so on. For instance, if you were working in a rural area where the landscape is important to explain your work, using images of it would be the best. If, instead, you have a lot of statistical information, interactive graphs would be an ideal option. In other instances, resources can be combined; all depends on the requirements of the video.

One of the best investments that your organization can do as part of its communication plan is to **define a format for its video production**, as the Council on Foreign Relations (www.cfr.org) or CIPPEC (www.cippec.org) did. This entails **agreeing on a narrative manner and a set of aesthetic guidelines and contents**, which can be used whenever the institution makes a video. It is helpful to have the advice of a media professional who can help your organization think about creative and flexible solutions that can be adapted to the institution's resources and audiences. Having an own format offers many advantages:

- Contributes to **strengthening the institution's identity** and enables viewers to recognize the author of the video.
- **Links the video to other products of the organization**, such as policy briefs or blog entries that use the same aesthetic standards.
- **Enhances the skills of the staff** in producing, screenwriting and exposing videos, as they constantly work with the same format. A more experienced staff facilitates many production tasks.
- **Saves time, money and effort**, as many tasks are only done once, such as creating a graphic pack, or producing a set of illustrations or of templates for graphic elements.

Script and production

The script is perhaps the most important component of the video. It describes **how the video will be when finished**, and organizes the work of producing the video. The script is not only the speech of the researcher(s) who presents his/their ideas, but it is also a detailed description of all the elements that will be included in the scene. These two aspects of the video are written down in different columns or areas describing sound and image, which make it easy to understand how they can be combined.

Once the script is finished, you can write down a work schedule and a list of all the production requirements, including film permits, speakers to convene, graphics, specific illustrations, and so on. The production process typically follows these steps: ”script approval, first-cut editing, which organizes the main elements of the video; and, finally, the final cut with all the superimposed graphic elements, audio postproduction and music.

Dissemination and circulation

A **large amount of communication work** needs to be done after an audiovisual product is ready. It makes no sense to invest resources in producing a video, and later let it languish on your website or, worse, just use it at one conference. One of the great advantages of these products is that you can take them where **your audience is** (read about the "being there approach" at Toolkit 4: Online tools): you can disseminate your products in social networks, recommend them on sites or blogs focused on the same topic as yours, e-mail them to all of your contacts, and send personalized messages to those who can help you spread them and make important decisions based on them. The other important element is to **anticipate how you are going to respond to the interests of the viewers**. If a person liked your product, you must give him/her more tools so that he/she can continue reading about your work (i.e., putting a url at the end of a video, or a link on a data visualization).

Similarly, you must be ready to receive interested visitors: if you put a link to a policy document, you must make sure that the document is ready and that the link works; if you link to your website, it should be easy for a person to find his desired topic.

Tips to make viral videos

- ✓ Produce **attractive and informative videos** on issues people are already talking about. Add value to online conversations.
- ✓ **Keep it short**. Videos should not last longer than two or three minutes. If you need a longer video, make sure you can keep user's attention long enough.
- ✓ Include a **clear call to action**. What do you want people to do with your video? Ask them to share it with their friends.
- ✓ Make research and data **more human by telling stories** people can identify with.

Some interesting and varied examples from colleagues:

- ✓ A promotional video from the Council on Foreign Relations: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ccuDffnPZPI
- ✓ An animated video from the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA): http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=playerembedded&v=qOP2V_np2c0
- ✓ Politics & ideas' promotional video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LW06Vn41ec&feature=youtu.be
- ✓ Government's advantages in Argentine provinces (English subtitles): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RURQpRJ5sFE
- ✓ Take a tour through our "Knowledge Garden" - Ecologic Institute in five minutes: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=hZtiK04A9Yo

CIPPEC políticas públicas public policies

To continue exploring!

Recommendations from CIPPEC

In English:

- *Information, data visualization, and think tanks,* Goran Buldiosky, 2011.
  Available at: www.goranspolicy.com

- *Data visualization: Modern approaches,* Vitaly Friedman, 2007.
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- *7 things you should know about... Data Visualization,* EDUCAUSE, 2007.
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- *Chart and image gallery: 30+ free tools for data visualization and analysis,* Sharon Machlis, 2013.
  Available at: www.computerworld.com

- *Digital tools for think tanks: videos,* Andrea Moncada, Onthinktanks, 2012.
  Available at: www.onthinktanks.org

- *The Power of film Do it yourself: The Talking Head,* Caroline Cassidy, Onthinktanks, 2012.
  Available at: www.onthinktanks.org

- *Prezi vs. Power Point. Learn how to use Prezi and when you might use it instead of Power Point,* Seattle Pacific University.
  Available at: www.spu.edu

In Spanish:

- *Infographics and visualization: the alchemy of information,* Ignasi Alcalde, 2013.
  Available at: www.ignasialcalde.es

- *Data visualization: challenges and myths,* Ignasi Alcalde, 2013.
  Available at: www.ignasialcalde.es

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Other guides from the series:

How to communicate research for policy influence

Toolkit Nº 1 First approach to research communication	Toolkit Nº 2 Policy Briefs	Toolkit Nº 3 Engage with media	Toolkit Nº 4 Online tools	Toolkit Nº 5 Dynamic formats to communicate research

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