

Communications Guidelines for Standard Setting Processes

Executive Summary

Communication is a human act that is influenced by the way people live, the way people work, and the way they perceive the world around them. Culture and ideologies influence the way people communicate.

Communication is a lot more than the mere transmission of messages and the evocation of meanings – the sharing of thoughts and actions through communications builds networks of meanings that span the differences in cultural points-of-view.

To be effective, communication processes must generate community, and, in doing so, must contribute to the cultural processes that are part of social structures.

The brief introduction above defines the importance of the communication in human life and culture. Based on this approach, we can understand why effective communication is so valuable in the standard setting process, an environment in which a diverse range of stakeholders with different cultural values and interest participate to achieve the goal of defining the meaning of responsible forest management.

The following guidelines describe basic tools in communication that FSC National Initiatives (NIs) and evolving working groups (WG) can use to inform stakeholders about their activities, achievements and results during the process of setting an FSC standard.

You are creating a standard, how to communicate it?

When a working group starts a standard setting process, two considerations need to be kept in mind:

- How we will interact within the working group? (Internal audience)
- How we will interact with stakeholders outside the working group? (External audience)

In the FSC system, it is very important to have processes that are open, transparent, participatory and assure a very comprehensive consultative process. This will lead to a standard that not only assures a very professional level of technical quality, but comes with broad level of support of the stakeholders related to the forest sector.

How can we get that kind of support and how can we really involve stakeholders? To a large extent, it will depend on the ability to communicate our messages effectively and precisely. We will have to exercise that ability when:

- Communicating to stakeholders that a standards-setting process has “begun” (or is about to begin)
- Communicating the context of the standard
- Involving stakeholders outside the working group
- Informing about the progress in our effort; and
- Marketing the standard

Is very important to realize that your standard setting strategy will be greatly improved and efficient if it includes a communication component.

We will review some basic concepts on how to develop and deliver our messages. It is important to realize that communication and messaging is related to culture and, therefore,

there is no universal or general recipe to communicate. Please keep in mind that every country has its own characteristics, which are sometimes very different from country to country and from region to region. No one better than you knows how to adequately address your audiences. This section aims at providing basic references to help improve your work's efficiency and impact, but of course they need to be adapted to your local public.

This material has been prepared based on a training course for FSC National Initiatives, developed by Carolina Hoyos and Peter Nowack, from the FSC Communications and Marketing Unit. We quite often will be referring to FSC National Initiatives and we hope that any group using this toolkit aims to become part of the network of FSC National Initiatives.

Our hope is that these materials can help your work, wherever you are, and can contribute to our mission of support an environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests.

FSC will provide support to all groups committed to forming National Initiatives, as well as to those that are accredited. FSC is a network and wants to foster partnerships with all of you! Keep in mind the importance of building this relationship as early as possible, to mutually improve our work. If we want a stronger FSC and powerful FSC National Initiatives, we have to start working with you almost since the beginning!

Always remember that you can get in contact with the FSC Regional Offices and the FSC Communications Team for any support!

Content

Part 1. Message Development

Explains the basics for message development, the importance of knowing your audience, and how to prepare effective and consistent messages

Part 2. Writing A Business Letter

Contains the basic instructions to write a business letter, which can be used to officially interact with all the stakeholders involved directly or indirectly in the standard setting process.

Part 3. Publicity & Press Releases

Is a brief glance to the press releases you would like to prepare and send to market your work. Also contains some tips to avoid problems when dealing with the media. Remember that these processes will be always subject to critics and controversies, so be prepared!

Part 4. Web Site DOs & DON'Ts

Provides an introduction to Web Site DOs & DON'Ts.