

## **Increase the impact of your research with these science communications essentials**

Being a successful scholar today requires scientists to deliver their insights beyond the academic community and show that their research has a real-world value. But how can scientists better communicate their research, data and analysis? We ask this question in the first part of the 2022 CLIFF-GRADS Science Collaboration series and seek answers together with science communications experts.

The online event series kicked off with speaker [Jonathan Schwabish, an economist and science communications expert at the Urban Institute, who](#) shared his insights about the fundamentals of an effective science communication strategy. The topics he covered include content hierarchy, strategic planning, and audience analysis. He recently published [the book](#) “Elevate the debate: A multi-layered approach to communicating your research”, which served as the basis for discussions at the first session of our event series. This blog provides an overview of the main points from the event.

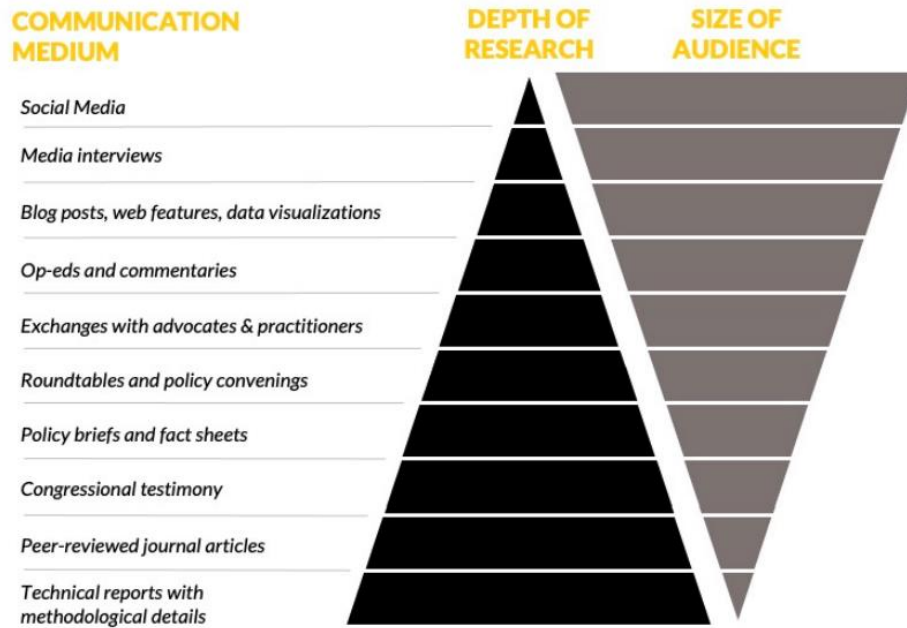
### **Meet people where they are**

So many researchers think that if they put up their report or paper online it will be read and acted upon. Unfortunately, that is not the case. The truth is, it is almost always scientists who read scientific articles and technical reports - most people around the world would not care for the structure of an error term in a certain statistical model. Instead, non-scientific audiences would be interested to know how research findings can help them do their job better or improve their way of life.

One key point to consider is the depth of a research message and how to match it with the communications medium. For instance, a research paper or a technical report will have all the data complexity and will most likely be read by a small number of experts in the field, while a policy or a press briefing will contain only the key messages and provide the most important data points, relevant to practitioners and experts working on a certain policy and its implementation. Social media content will have even less nuance, and only include the most interesting points that would grab the attention of the public.

It is important to remember that not everyone is an expert in your field, and you are more likely to show the real-world value of your research if you can appeal to wider audiences. This increases the chances of your research and insights being read and, more importantly, understood by more people.

The “two pyramid” diagram below illustrates how to match the depth of content in communications products with different mediums.



Schwabish J.A. (2020) *Elevate the debate: A multi-layered approach to communicating your research* p. 175

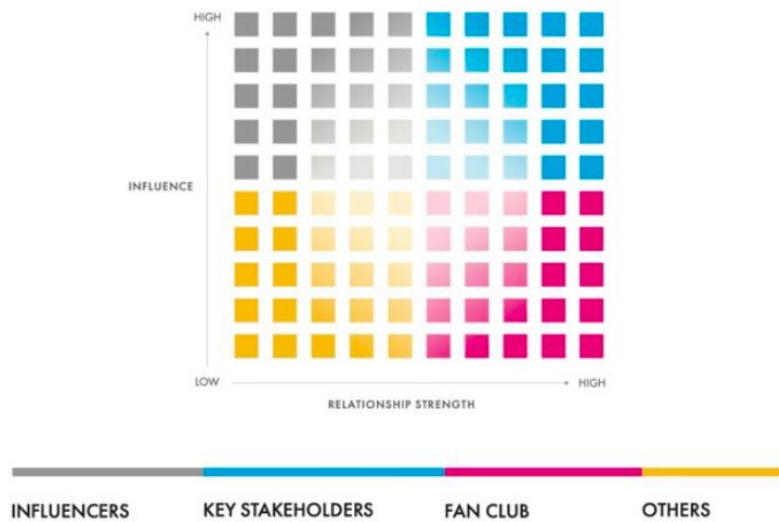
### Work with your audiences

Policymakers are often named as target audience for scientific outputs. It is important to have in mind that most policy and politics happens at a local level. While many scientists would like their president or prime minister to take their research and implement it, a chief of staff and their team at a local or regional office is much more likely to put your scientific insights into use. In other words, it is important to consider policymakers at every level of government structures to achieve real change.

In a broader sense, it's helpful to conceptualize your audience in terms of your relationships with them. For example, some of your audience can be close contacts, others would be people you met at a conference and occasionally exchange messages with via email, and others are merely stranger icons on Twitter and LinkedIn. These audiences have different levels of influence on the power and delivery of your science communications. For instance, your parents would be your close contact, but they would be unlikely to have a great influence. Therefore, an effective way to increase your outreach and message uptake, is to aim for people who have high influence and to build close relationships with them.

The "Conceptualize your audience" diagram below illustrates this approach to audience segmentation.

## CONCEPTUALIZING YOUR AUDIENCE



Schwabish J.A. (2020) *Elevate the debate: A multi-layered approach to communicating your research* p. 185

### You gotta have a plan

Another common mistake in research communication is to focus on glossy reports and gorgeous infographics without spending resources on planning the outreach. Every product we produce needs to be made with the user in mind: How will your audience access it? How are they likely to consume the information? What would make it easier for them to understand it? These questions are worth answering, otherwise, your research is unlikely to be noticed and you may miss the opportunity to engage with the actors who could use your insights, while the resources spent on production will essentially go to waste.

### In summary

Taking the time to do strategic planning, audience analysis and thinking of various content forms and ways to deliver them will help you set clear goals for communicating your research, using your resources efficiently, evaluating success and adjusting for better results.

Go through the step-by-step “Policy Impact Plan” [worksheet](#) to learn more about strategic planning.

[Watch the video of the session](#) and get more tips and insights on effective science communications.

