

Guidelines on partner communication

Table of content

[Objective](#)

[Why partner communication matters](#)

[Principles of partner communication](#)

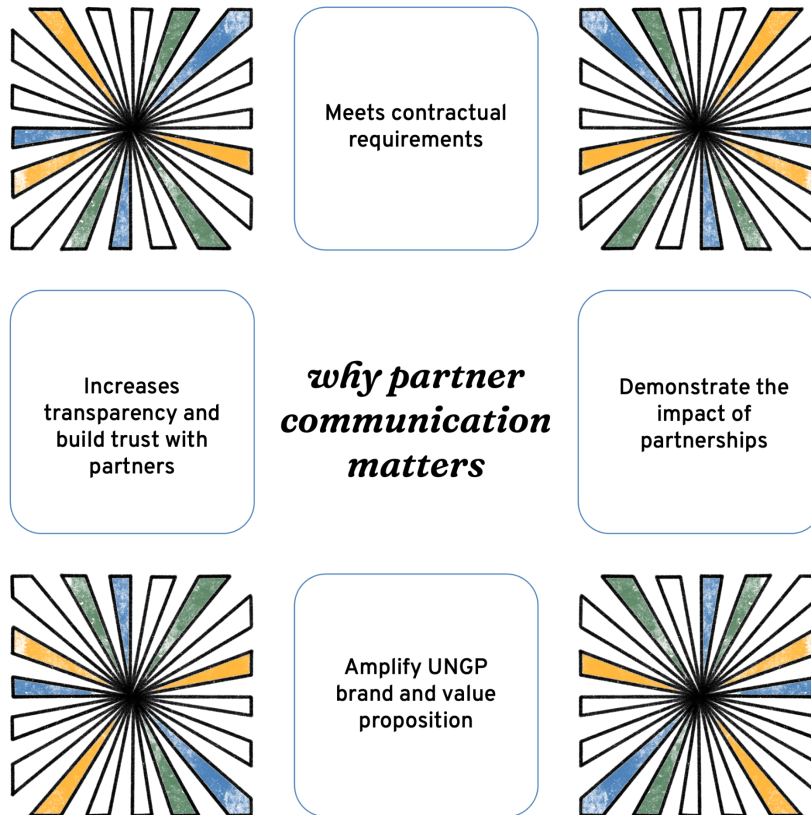
[Who contributes to partner communication](#)

[Who do we give visibility to](#)

[Understanding, planning and keeping track](#)

[Negotiating communication clauses](#)

[Communicating about partners \(partner visibility\)](#)



1. Objective

The objective of these guidelines is to support Partnerships teams when communicating with and providing other visibility to their partners. The guidelines are drafted to apply to all types of partners, including donors, therefore they are general. Some partners may have quite specific visibility needs which will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

2. Why partner communication matters

Partner communication strengthens the relationship with a partner and leads to a better understanding of the partner. Partners may face an increasing number of requirements from their constituencies leading to calls for increased transparency. In practice, depending on the level of complexity of the partnership, communication and reporting clauses may be integrated in partnership agreements, representing de-facto contractual requirements.

3. Principles of partner communication

Although partners may have different requirements, UN entities should always seek to achieve a balanced approach when communicating with and about partners with the objective to reinforce its branding and value proposition. Partner visibility should be inspired by the following principles:

- **Proportionality:** Communicating about partners (partner visibility) should be proportional to their contribution and overall engagement to the partnership. This often requires managing expectations of partners.
- **Importance:** Partners are all important, but communication requirements can vary significantly. Communication clauses must be carefully managed. Special requests for visibility from partners should be always shared with the Partnerships team or Communications team for guidance as applicable.
- **Consistency:** Ensure that partner communication shows a clear and consistent representation.
- **Reputation:** Consider political sensitivities and reputational issues when agreeing on partner communication.

4. Who contributes to partner communication

Partner communication falls under the remit of responsibilities of the Partnership Lead, namely the person who is in charge of the overall relations with a partner. If applicable, the Partnerships team can advise and support on overall partner communication matters, while the Communications team may support with the visual identity and provide overall brand guidelines.

5. Who do we give visibility to

Partners express their visibility requirements in agreements, project proposals, and also verbally during bilateral meetings or exchanges. Contractual obligations must be always fulfilled and therefore should be given full consideration before commitments are made.

Some UN entities have set clear visibility thresholds, namely minimum contributions (both in terms of financial resources or in-kind) that partners need to commit to get visibility. However, depending on the size of the UN entity and the number of partnerships managed, it is advisable to consider visibility issues on an ad-hoc basis. As a consequence, it is recommended to develop a partner visibility plan as part of the partnership proposal and/or integrating visibility clauses as part of the partnership agreement.

6. Understanding, planning and keeping track

Partners have diverse preferences, interests, and requirements when it comes to communication. For some communication may be one of the driving factors of partnering with the UN, while for others communication may represent a minor area of interest. As a matter of transparency and accountability, the UN system should always be in the position to at least disclose to the general public the names and the purpose of the partnerships.

Creating a plan around partner communication is a good practice, especially for complex and multi-stakeholder partnerships. Planning can also ensure that resource partners of flexible funding are not forgotten. Planning helps us manage expectations of partners and create predictable pathways to communication, such as through reporting. Reporting back to our partners helps us cultivate and strengthen relationships. Partners, especially donors, frequently request information for communication purposes by asking for photos, success stories and other communication products.

Having a consistent approach to communication can make reporting much easier to manage, especially when it comes to complex multi-stakeholder partnerships. Tracking communication efforts can help UN entities also become more balanced on how it communicates with and about partners.

7. Negotiating communication clauses

Agreements usually include either a standard communication or a more tailored clause which goes through a process of negotiation with the partner. Tailored clauses can embrace several aspects including reporting, visibility and external communication. Communication agreements and clauses can set precedents and expectations with partners. Therefore it is essential that clauses are coordinated with all the relevant internal stakeholders (e.g. Partnerships team, Communication team, Legal team) to ensure that commitments are made if they are balanced and resources are available to deliver these.

Some partners will advance specific types of communication requirements. In some cases, partners will make requests which are not feasible to commit to or too costly in terms of time and resources. During this negotiation, the Partnership Lead jointly consults the Partnerships Team and the Communications team to ensure that communication requests are:

- Reasonable and balanced with other partners
- Deliverable (in terms of adequate resources that will need to be allocated)

A good practice is to integrate a communication plan as part of the partnership agreement. The below template can help you in building a communication plan with your partner. It can help in identifying the key messages of your communication plan, define related activities, deliverables, reporting, timeframe and budget.

Communication plan template

| Activity | Objective | Deliverables | Reporting | Timeframe | Estimated budget (currency) |
|--|--|---|--|-----------|-----------------------------|
| E.g. Official launch of a partnership Achievement of a partnership milestone Partnership completion | E.g. UN X and PARTNER to start giving visibility to... Highlight the importance of PARTNER's work on... Increase awareness/celebrate/advocate/fundraising/amplifying the impact | E.g. Press releases targeting media and other specialised press agencies Social media pack Videos Meetings Senior level interactions on social media | E.g. Media coverage and engagement summary Surveys/questionnaires/feedback forms Number of communication products produces Number of meetings Number of social media interactions | | |

Managing risks in partnership communication plans

There are a variety of risks related to communicating with and about partners. The common risks associated with the implementation of communication plans are mostly related to reputational issues and impact on the relationship with the partner. However, any risk management exercise on communication plans should be done in coordination with a broader partnership risk assessment. This is also to ensure that communication plans do not exacerbate any other specific risk that could potentially arise from a partnership.

8. Communicating about partners (partner visibility)

Partner communication is a form of external communication about the relationship between partners and must be conducted with care. Content should primarily help the UN amplify its work and should not look like public relations or advertisements for partners. It is imperative that the UN is seen as neutral, impartial and independent.

Providing partner recognition using both printed and online communication materials is an important aspect of partner communication. There is an expectation from our partner that their logo will appear correctly and care should be taken to create communication materials which protect the UN visual identity.

As with any UN external communications, communication about partners on social media should be strategic and thoughtful, conscious of trending news stories, crisis communications, narratives, national and political sensitivities, and the potential for communications to be misused or subject to disinformation or misinformation. It is fundamental to consider how partner communication posts might be perceived.

Videos created to provide visibility for our partners can be highly impactful, allowing us to show how partners enable the UN to make a difference. However, creating strong video content takes time and effort, as well as editorial and technical skills and financial resources. In terms of cost benefit, it may be advisable to opt for photos.