

Analysis of Arctic Council Communications and Outreach.

2010

Arctic Council

Arctic Council Secretariat

<http://hdl.handle.net/11374/981>

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Analysis of Arctic Council Communications and Outreach

Background

Global interest in the Arctic has increased dramatically. Governments, multilateral and non-governmental organizations, media and the general public are concerned about the changes affecting the region, and want to learn more. The Arctic Council (AC) is the premier intergovernmental forum for circumpolar issues affecting the Arctic. The additional interest in the Arctic is in part due to the work of the AC, and yet this body has a limited international profile. The AC is actively addressing the challenges and opportunities facing the Arctic, but there is a sense among the AC communication and outreach contact group participants that information concerning initiatives and successes is not reaching a wider audience, and that the AC is not as well known as it should be.

At the 2009 Tromsø Declaration Arctic Council, Ministers: “Decide[d] to develop guidelines for engagement in outreach activities and an Arctic Council communication and outreach plan based on common priorities.” At the November 2009 Senior Arctic Officials (SAO) Meeting, the Danish Chairmanship raised the need to respond to the increasing demand for streamlined messaging by the Arctic Council, to be present at international meetings and other important events where the Arctic is being discussed, and to further develop the AC website. The Chair proposed that a contact group of representatives from interested Member States, Permanent Participants (PPs), Working Groups and the AC Secretariat. The contact group would work virtually to develop communication guidelines and make recommendations for an AC communications and outreach plan. SAOs agreed to start an intercessional process and to create a contact group for communications and outreach. Canada was asked to lead this contact group.

Goal of the Communications and Outreach Contact Group

Provide SAOs and PPs with a review of Arctic Council communications and outreach efforts and recommendations to improve their effectiveness and to increase awareness of the Arctic Council.

Objectives

- To describe and analyze current outreach activities in order to learn from successes, identify challenges and frame the issues to be addressed – April 2010.
- To propose draft communications guidelines to SAOs - October 2010.
- To propose recommendations on elements of a strategic communications plan to SAOs - October 2010.

Methodology

The AC communications and outreach contact group is made up of interested Member States, Permanent Participants and representatives from Working Groups, as well as the AC Secretariat and the Chair. Participants were asked to complete two questionnaires. Their responses form the basis of this report and the recommendations to be provided to SAOs in October. One questionnaire focused on existing guidelines and communications processes. The other requested information on the strengths and weaknesses of AC communications efforts, and recommendations for future action. In some cases, additional information or clarification was sought from participants or was found on AC and Working Group websites. Participants were encouraged to send comments or any additional

suggestions to improve AC communications, and were asked to think creatively to propose workable solutions. This report was circulated to contact group participants for comment before being submitted for consideration by SAOs and considerable input was received.

This report to SAOs is an analysis of the current state of Arctic Council outreach and communications efforts. The report will describe the manner in which communications activities currently take place, and discuss particular issues and challenges that have emerged through consultations with the communications and outreach contact group. It also suggests a path towards the presentation of recommendations on an Arctic Council strategic communications plan, and of communications guidelines to SAOs at their meeting in October 2010.

Arctic Council communications and outreach activities are governed by Part II, § 11 of the Rules of Procedure that states:

“The Host Country, an Arctic State, or any subsidiary bodies may undertake communications on Arctic Council matters with other international fora as may be agreed to in advance by the Arctic States.”

This mandate is quite broad, and has allowed many AC Members and Working Groups to develop different approaches to communications activities and products. Its lack of limitations has fostered creativity and shared responsibility for communications across the Arctic Council. However, it has also led to a variety of approaches to communications, some of which are uncoordinated. One contact group participant noted that the requirement “as may be agreed to in advance by Arctic States” seems to not always have been observed.

The question of improved internal communications amongst Arctic Council actors was raised by some Contact Group participants. While this is an area perhaps meriting discussion in the future, the contact group focussed on the question of the Arctic Council’s outreach and communications to external audiences.

KEY ISSUE 1 - Roles and responsibilities are not defined

Many communications contact group participants noted that all members and levels of the AC have the responsibility to promote the AC’s work. The communications roles and responsibilities of AC actors are barely mentioned in the Rules of Procedure, and have not been clearly defined in other AC documents, which has led to two outcomes:

1. Individual actors (Member States, PPs, WGs, and Arctic Council Chairs) have taken a variety of approaches with respect to communications. There is no consistency across the AC, or over time as chairmanships rotate.
2. In the midst of uncertainty concerning roles and in order to avoid highlighting a potential lack of consensus, the default approach has been to not communicate on behalf of the AC, but rather for individual actors to speak on their own behalf. This is especially true on contentious topics. As a result the AC’s “voice” is not clearly articulated.

The way that key AC actors currently carry out their communications and outreach roles is described below.

- **Arctic Council Chair:**

The Rules of Procedure do not address the external communications responsibilities of the Chair, except with respect to the proceedings of Arctic Council meetings:

“The Host Country may release minutes, if any, communications and documents of the meeting after obtaining approval from the relevant officials of each Arctic State. The Host Country is responsible for preparing a report of the meeting which will be formally released after it has been approved by the relevant officials of each Arctic State.”

A dual role has emerged for the Arctic Council Chair over time:

1. The Chair is responsible for engaging in outreach activities on behalf of the Arctic Council. The Chair has undertaken outreach activities and has performed a media relations function. In the past, outreach has been largely focussed on providing factual information on the creation, make-up and role of the Arctic Council. The Chair has referred to the content of Ministerial Declarations, and to the assessments and activities of the Working Groups in general terms without getting into specifics. There has been an unwritten rule that when speaking on behalf of the AC the Chair should draw from approved AC documents (i.e. Ministerial Declarations) and/or seek SAO approval of the messages to be delivered.
2. The Chair can also speak on behalf of the chairmanship, i.e. the position of the country holding the chairmanship. Contact Group participants suggested that in this case, the Chair must make the target audience aware that the opinions are those of the Chairmanship, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the AC. When it has not been possible to achieve consensus on a topic, the Chair has often chosen to speak on behalf of the Chairmanship instead of the AC.

On two recent occasions the Chair received questions from journalists asking for the “Arctic Council position” on current events and political developments. Proposed responses were circulated to all SAOs, Permanent Participant Head of Delegations and Working Group Chairs for review. The process proved to be time consuming, unwieldy and an impractical way of responding to media enquiries. Responses providing factual information about the AC are often inadequate to address the majority of requests from media, including the requests just referenced. The Chair is then faced with a difficult dilemma – either to:

- seek consensus on responses which is practically difficult and too slow for journalists’ timelines; or
- speak in his/her own capacity. In this case, the Arctic Council is not communicating, and an opportunity has been missed to deliver an AC position or view.

Participants in the Communications and Outreach contact group were clear that to strengthen the credibility of the AC, the Chair should not shy away from controversial or political topics, as journalists, multilateral organizations and others may draw a negative inference and conclude that the Arctic Council is not capable of dealing with the challenges facing the Arctic. The more frequently the Chair speaks using defined messages on areas of consensus, the more the cooperation that exists in the region will be highlighted. There are many areas of consensus among AC members, and various questions and topics of interest to journalists and others could be anticipated. It is possible that advance planning could allow the Arctic Council to be more responsive and nimble. In particular, the drafting of 2-3 talking points on a variety of commonly asked questions approved in advance by SAOs and PP Heads would provide the Chair with the opportunity to respond quickly to many media requests with these pre-approved points.

- **Secretariat**

The Secretariat works under the direction of the rotating Chair. The Secretariat function is described in § 32 of the Rules of Procedure, but communications and outreach are not addressed:

“The Host Country shall be responsible for facilitating preparations for forthcoming Ministerial and SAO meetings, liaison and coordination, providing secretariat support functions, and carrying out such other tasks as the Arctic Council may require or direct.”

The current Secretariat is in place for the duration of the Norwegian, Danish and Swedish Chairs. The Secretariat manages the daily enquiries addressed to the AC by providing factual information on the work, make-up and history of the AC. The Secretariat has also undertaken outreach. This involves mostly responding to inquiries of different kinds, but also, when agreed with the Chair, for example giving lectures at school classes using standardized presentations that provide general information about the AC. The Secretariat has created communications products based on approved content such as posters and brochures and is responsible for the ongoing management of the Arctic Council website.

Contact group participants felt that the management of the AC website was deemed to be a core function of the Secretariat, and beneficial to the AC. They noted the utility of the coordination function of the Secretariat, and suggested that the website, including the calendar, needed to be improved in order to capitalize on communications opportunities. The contact group also recommended that the outreach and products created by Secretariat remain strictly factual and provide general information. One suggestion was for the Secretariat to prepare an information brochure on the Arctic Council that could be included in the website and also be available in PDF and written format. Another suggestion was for the Secretariat to prepare a newsletter on Arctic Council activities, upcoming events and stories of interest that could be circulated electronically.

- **Working Groups**

Each Working Group has developed its own processes for communications and outreach. Some have communication plans, while others include communications activities in their project workplans. It is not clear that Working Groups include communications and outreach planning on a systematic basis in their project development processes. The SAO Report endorsed by Ministers in Tromsø requested WGs to “include a communication and information dissemination strategy, including outreach to indigenous peoples and other Arctic residents, as an integral part of Working Group project proposals. “

Significant outreach has been done to promote the release of some significant Working Group assessments and reports. This includes products such as multilingual brochures, maps, graphics, both layman and scientific reports, press releases, photographs and video-clips, as well as media relations activities and speaking engagements by WG representatives or report authors. In particular, the activities and materials associated with the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, the Arctic Human Development Report, the Greenland Ice Sheet Report, the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment Report and the Arctic Tern Migration Project were cited by contact group participants to be examples that gained media attention and influenced decision-makers. These products are often held up as the most successful Arctic Council communications products; however, the relationship of the WG product/report to the Arctic Council is often not made clear- see Key Issue #2 below.) Many of the communication products associated with large-scale assessments have been extremely successful, and there are many lessons to learn from these products.

Some contact group participants noted that as the Working Groups are the source of scientifically-based information, they should be responsible for speaking on their areas of

focus to a scientific audience, and with the scientific experts associated with other multilateral and regional bodies. Many contact group participants were clear in stating that WGs do not want other AC actors to speak on the details of their scientific reports and assessments. This implies that Working Groups should be responsible for developing their own communications products and protocols. However, others pointed out that this could lead to inconsistency in the look and content of the tools that are produced and that Working Group communications strategies should be developed so as to complement an overall Arctic Council strategic communications plan.

Working Groups rely heavily on the web to promote and communicate on their work, and each has their own website. Websites will be discussed in more detail later in this report.

- **Members – Member States and Permanent Participants**

Member States and Permanent Participants have promoted the work of the Arctic Council both within their own constituencies and abroad. This has often taken place through speeches, policy documents (such as Arctic or Northern Strategies) and through Members' websites. Contact group participants felt strongly that it is the responsibility of Members to communicate on an ongoing basis to audiences within their constituencies, as they are aware of the interests of their local stakeholders and can target the information appropriately. Members can explore opportunities at other multilateral and regional bodies to raise the profile of the Arctic Council. By relying on approved decisions or documents and on areas of consensus, the contact group participants concluded that there is room for additional outreach by Members, including through conferences, seminars, workshops, web links to AC and WG sites, and continued references to the AC in speeches and policies. Member SAOs have a particular role to play in communications and outreach given they must approve the placing of the AC logo on WG products as well as any communications materials that will be disseminated as or presented as "Arctic Council" materials or positions. It should be noted that this adds to the already considerable burden on already-busy individuals.

The Permanent Participants have played an important role in the past in advancing Arctic Council views, conclusions and perspectives in international fora. PPs have been effective communicators to international agencies such as UNEP and UNDP on key Arctic Council issues including climate change and transboundary contaminants. An Arctic Council Strategic Communications Plan should include ways in which the PPs could contribute in a more systematic and consistent way to outreach activities of the Arctic Council.

The Communications and Outreach Contact Group will endeavour to present recommendations on how roles and responsibilities of various actors could be made clearer. Suggestions from contact group participants on related issues included: a set of pre-approved lines and talking points to common questions that could be used by the Chair to respond in a timely manner to media requests, that there be greater coordination and coherence of messaging between the Arctic Council and the Working Groups and that AC members states and PPs report on their efforts regarding outreach amongst their communities highlighting the Arctic Council.

KEY ISSUE 2 - Logos

The issue of when to use the Arctic Council and Working Group logos has arisen regularly in the context of communication discussions. Logos are an important symbol to promote the work of the AC. It is in the interest of all AC actors that the high-quality scientific assessments produced by the Working Groups are associated with the brand of the AC

through the application of the AC logo. In the past, there have been different AC logos though this seems to be not the case recently. It is important that one AC logo be agreed on and used consistently.

The implications and significance of the presence of the AC logo have not been defined. At least one contact group participant noted that the AC logo could be copied quite easily and placed on a publication or document. The AC logo also appears on other products produced and maintained by bodies other than Working Groups such as: SAON, the Arctic Portal, IPY and others and it is not clear if these products have been endorsed or approved by SAOs.

Through an informal review of the presence of AC and WG logos on recent large-scale assessments and reports, it appears that the practices of each WG vary significantly. Some WGs have chosen to put both the AC and WG logos or their names prominently on most publications. Some include only the WG logo on the front, but refer to the Arctic Council in the preface of the document. Others have taken different approaches depending on the publication.¹ Further review of Working Group decision-making processes concerning the use of logos would be helpful to inform the October report to SAOs. There are two overarching preoccupations that represent different perspectives on the issue of what it means to have an AC logo on a working group report, assessment, document or other product and what the logo means to an outside audience. On the one hand, some policymakers are reluctant to place the AC logo on a product because to do so imply they endorse the contents and conclusions of that product which may be at odds with a Member's policy or policies. On the other, concerns have been voiced that if policymakers have an opportunity to amend or alter a product in order to place the AC logo on it, this could compromise scientific independence and the integrity of the product. WGs want their recommendations to be released to Ministers and to the public without modification or influence of the SAOs. There was a difference of opinion regarding this latter point. Some contact group participants pointed out that this interpretation disregards the fact that WG meetings, like the SAO meetings, include government representatives thus policymakers are part of the process. Others disagreed, pointing out that WGs are made up of representatives from both governments and non-governmental actors and that even those governmental representatives present in the WGs will be concerned with scientifically accurate findings rather than be preoccupied with national policy implications.

As Members seek to strengthen the policy capacity of the AC, this issue will continue to be important and could have broader implications. The contact group has some ideas for a way forward that draw on the experiences of other international environmental organizations. These could increase the usage of the AC logo on WG products in way that could assuage some of the legitimate concerns regarding the use of the AC logo.

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- ¹ ACAP – No docs with logos. The website has no AC logo.
 - AMAP: “The Greenland Ice Sheet in a Changing Climate” – AMAP only, no AC logo but mentioned in the preface, “2009 Human Health in the Arctic” – AMAP logo only, no AC logo but AC mentioned in preface. “Arctic Pollution Report 2009” – AMAP logo only, no AC logo but mentioned in the preface. AC logo not on website.
 - CAFF: “Framework for a Circumpolar Arctic Seabird Monitoring Network” – CAFF logo only, AC mentioned in preface, “A Strategy for Facilitating and Developing Community-Based Monitoring” – CAFF logo only, “International Ivory Gull Conservation Strategy and Action Plan” – CAFF logo only. AC logo on CAFF website.
 - AMAP & CAFF: “Arctic Climate Impact Assessment” – AMAP and CAFF logos, no AC logo but AC highlighted in the preface
 - EPPR – AC logo on EPPR Brochure and Report to Tromso Ministerial but not on reports. AC logo not on website
 - PAME – “Arctic Council Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment 2009 Report” – both logos prominent, “Arctic Oceans Review Project” – both logos, “Arctic Council Arctic Offshore Oil and Gas Guidelines” – no logos but AC and PAME words prominent, PAME SUMMARY REPORT 2006-2009 ACTIVITIES – both logos. AC logo on the website.
 - SDWG: “Arctic Human Development Report” - has no logos. “SDWG Report on Arctic Energy” – no logos but AC words prominent, “Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change in the Arctic” – both logos, “Arctic Social Indicators” – AC logo on website, “Arctic Indigenous Languages Symposium” – no AC logo. AC logo prominent on website.

The Arctic Council is not the only international forum facing this dilemma. The contact group began an initial assessment of the way this issue is handled by other international fora but will need to go further before October. Institutions such as the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) seek to base policy action on independent scientific findings and have processes that govern the use of their logos. The IPCC has a tiered system where different words (e.g. accepted, approved, adopted) signify defined levels of approval of the report. UNEP has a series of standard disclaimers that it includes in its publications. Both UNEP and IPCC operate on the assumption that the presence of their logos does not imply the endorsement or commitment to implementation of the recommendations found within the document by Members.

Currently, Member States and Permanent Participants determine if a report or a product from the Working Groups can bear the logo of the AC, and hence be regarded as an AC product. To do this SAOs and PPs evaluate whether they consider the content to be in line with the guidelines and framework provided at the outset of the project.

Two primary factors that have limited the use of an AC logo on working group reports, assessments, or other products have been identified:

- factor 1: Some WGs science and technical reports, as well as WG outreach material on project activities, are published with only a WG logo without or before being considered by SAOs, which results in a lost opportunity to brand the AC.
- factor 2: When a WG report or assessment delivered to SAOs contains science-based policy recommendations, some AC Members are reluctant to place the AC logo on a product because of concerns that an AC logo could be perceived as implying that the Member State endorses the contents and conclusions of that product and, if recommendations are made, that the Member State will implement all of the recommendations, some of which may not be relevant to the Arctic Council, to all of its Member States, or which may be at odds with a Member's policy or policies.

In the past, factor 2 has been addressed for the most part in two ways:

- SAOs approve the release of reports and assessments with only the WG logos - which results in a lost opportunity to brand the AC.
- An SAO review process through which the WG recommendations are either been: 1) approved by consensus as delivered and for release with the AC logo, or 2) amended or altered in order to reach consensus and to place the AC logo on it. However, Working Groups have based their recommendations on scientific data which has undergone scientific scrutiny (e.g. Peer review processes). WGs are concerned that if policymakers have an opportunity to amend or alter a product in order to place the AC logo on it, this could compromise scientific independence and the integrity of the product. WGs want their recommendations to be released to Ministers and to the public without modification or influence of others.

In cases where the WG product is of a strictly scientific, technical or general outreach nature and will be published before or without being delivered for SAO consideration, WG assessments or reports could be published in the following way:

1. Disclaimer: The WG and AC logos and an appropriate disclaimer including text noting that the material *has neither been reviewed nor*

endorsed by the Arctic Council Member States and, therefore, represent only the views of the WG/experts/ authors that produced them. ”

2. **No AC Logo:** Only the WG logos could be used, but an opportunity to communicate a position of the AC is lost.

In the case of major WG assessments or reports delivered to SAOs for their review, if it is possible to achieve consensus in a timely manner, major WG assessments or reports could be published with both the WG and AC logos (and no disclaimer).

In cases where it is not possible to achieve consensus in a timely manner, WG assessments or reports could be published in one of the following ways:

1. **Disclaimer and AC Response:** The WG and AC logos with an appropriate disclaimer text that explains that the document/findings/recommendations are independent and are not endorsed by the AC Members. SAOs could then develop their own recommendations to Ministers for an appropriate AC response to the findings/recommendations that outlines what policy measures they intend to undertake and/or promote at other international bodies.
2. **No AC Logo:** Only the WG logos could be used, but an opportunity to communicate a position of the AC is lost.

Next Steps - The Communications and Outreach Contact Group will engage in further research and analysis into the practice of other international fora and endeavour to present options regarding a process and guidelines governing the use of the AC logo that are not too heavy or time-consuming, and that attempt to reconcile the variety of AC interests in October 2010.

KEY ISSUE 3: Websites

The Arctic Council and Working Group websites are the primary means of communication on the work of the Arctic Council, and therefore merit particular attention in this report. The Arctic Council website is maintained by the AC Secretariat. The website has two functions. One is an external communication function via a site open to the public and is the primary method of conveying information on the Arctic Council and its activities to a variety of audiences. The website is the “public face” of the Arctic Council. The website serves a second function as a vehicle for internal communication amongst Arctic Council actors and consists of a password protected area used for the distribution of internal documents especially related to SAO/Ministerial meetings. This second internal communication function is important but has not been the focus of the contact group’s work which is concentrating on the modalities of how the Arctic Council interacts with a wider, external audience.

There were 50 174 unique visitors to the Arctic Council website site in 2009, with the largest number of visits occurring around the Arctic Council Ministerial meeting in April 2009. Nearly half the visitors are located in English-speaking countries (US – 22%, Canada – 21%, UK – 5%), and visitors from AC Member States made up 70% of 2009 visits. Significant numbers of visits came from the following states outside of the Arctic Region: the United Kingdom, Germany, and France.²

² Analysis provided by the Secretariat.

No guidelines or approval processes exist concerning the content placed on the website. The public portion of the AC site contains content on the history, membership, processes and role of the AC. It has a calendar of Arctic-related events, and the documents associated with SAO and Ministerial meetings such as agendas, declarations and reports. The site also contains selected Arctic-related news items that are updated frequently, but the link between these stories and the work of the Arctic Council is unclear. For example, an article may be posted on recent climate change developments but no content is included on the work of the Arctic Council to monitor, address and adapt to climate change. There is also a “Press Room” that provides contact information for the spokespersons of AC Members and a search function. A pre-approved FAQ section providing the answers to simple questions about the AC, its mandate and other factual questions could be useful and assist the Chair and Secretariat by serving as a place to refer basic inquiries.

The site links to the AC Working Group, Member States, and Permanent Participant websites. It must be noted that the Working Groups are referred to primarily using their acronyms, and the content of the site is largely organized according to the structure of the Arctic Council, so a visitor unfamiliar with the AC may have difficulty finding the information they require. Often the AC website will profile the recent work of the Working Groups, but there does not appear to be a systematic process in place where WGs would provide content or inform the Secretariat ahead of time of news-worthy events/releases. Content is being provided on an ad hoc basis, or at times has been developed by the Secretariat. Opportunities to promote the efforts of Working Groups have sometimes therefore been lost.

Each Working Group has a website. While the content, look and format vary, the Working Group websites are likely to contain an overview of previous and current projects, strategies or workplans, WG assessments and reports, a calendar of events and contact information. The WG websites seem to be focussed on a scientific audience, though some contain content (reports, videos, graphics) that is destined for a non-scientific audience. Some WG sites include “news” content on recent WG events or reports, while others have news feeds that display media articles loosely linked to the mandate of the WG. The relationship between each Working Group and the Arctic Council is not always clear. For example, some Working Groups have the AC logo or the words, “a Working Group of the Arctic Council” displayed prominently on the home page of their sites. In other cases, the relationship of the Working Group to the AC is only included in a secondary page or in smaller print in the middle of a paragraph. As this report was being written, most WG websites had been recently updated.

Next Steps - The Communications and Outreach Contact Group will work with the Secretariat to analyze use of the external website and draft recommendations for consideration by SAOs on how to enhance the effectiveness of the website. Web tools and social media are no longer an optional part of communications and have become central to communicating to a wider audience and are often the initial point of contact for many interested in the Arctic generally and the Arctic Council in particular. However, an updated and relevant website that evolves and contains fresh, valued content requires dedicated resources armed with the requisite experience and knowledge.

KEY ISSUE 4: Lack of Strategic Communications Plan

There is no overall strategic communications plan for the Arctic Council. All actors within the Arctic Council engage in communications activities on the topic of the Arctic, and some may have their own communication plans, but are not able to determine whether their

efforts are part of a coordinated, longer-term plan designed to increase awareness of the Arctic Council and its work among targeted audiences and decision-makers. All contact group participants supported the development of a strategic communications plan to improve efficiency and coordination, focus activities and set out a common vision for action. Some working groups have their own communications strategies or incorporate a communications component in their workplans.

The lack of a communications strategy has had the following consequences:

- Actors do not have key messages to use when communicating that have the approval of all AC members;
- Knowledge of the Arctic Council among decision-makers and media is low and haphazard. There is no strong brand associated with the AC;
- There is no global assessment of the results of individual communications activities.
- Working Groups have prepared or are preparing their own communications plans but are doing so without the benefit of an overarching strategic plan that perpetuates the development of a patchwork of approaches.

What would a Strategic Communications Plan Contain?

Any communications plan must contain; the objective(s), key messages, and key audiences. After that, the modalities of how to fulfil the objectives, deliver the messages and to whom can be determined based on available resources and expertise. The objective(s) and key messages should be developed and approved first before the AC consider options regarding the “how” of message delivery such as outsourcing or finding creative ways to engage talent within the AC system.

Objective

Contact group participants provided input as to what the objectives of an AC strategic communications plan could be:

- To communicate that the AC works to promote environmental protection and sustainable development for the benefit of Northerners and the Arctic environment.
- Highlight the excellent work of the working groups and other groups working with the Arctic Council
- Provide factual information on what the AC is, its mandate and on its various bodies

The contact group would appreciate guidance as to how ambitious the objective(s) should be. The provision of information on AC and WG activities is relatively straight-forward. However, should a media relations objective be included?

Key Messages

Participants in the communications contact group were asked to provide words that they would use to describe the AC’s public persona or brand. The following emerged as the most important concepts identified by the contact group participants: cooperation, consensus-based, science informing policy, credibility and involvement of Northerners. It remains to be seen how the AC is perceived by actors outside of the AC. As a strategic communications plan is developed, SAOs will need to consider which concepts should be part of the AC public persona. If SAOs were to agree on these key concepts and include others, then key messages could be developed around these concepts or “tags”.

Target Audiences

A strategic communications plan will have to decide the key target audiences to whom the ACA wants to focus its messaging. Contact group participants were asked who they believe should be the key target audiences for AC communications and outreach. There was a broad array of views. The two most cited target audiences were: academia/educators/think-tanks/NGOs (grouped into one category) and the general public. Interestingly, Arctic Council actors (Members, PPs and WGs) were cited as a key target audience perhaps reflecting an earlier point that internal communication within the Arctic Council is an issue. Media, indigenous groups and non-Arctic Council governments were also listed. The media is a key vehicle in reaching out to the broader public as are some educators and NGOs. Industry was not mentioned in the questionnaire responses but was raised by some contact group participants as a group not well-served at present both by the AC and WGs.

It will not always be possible to reach out to everyone especially given a general lack of resources dedicated to the area of AC communications and outreach. At present, the contact group participants believed the AC and WGs do a good job of communicating to the scientific community interested in the wide variety of subject areas covered by the AC and WGs. There was almost unanimous agreement that AC messaging and communicating to the wider public was deficient. A strategic communications plan would have to balance the competing requirements of maintaining the good record of outreach to the scientific community while increasing the AC's capability to reach wider audiences.

Translation

Contact group participants identified translation as a communications issue for the Arctic Council. English is the working language of the AC. The Rules of Procedure state:

42. The Host Country of a Ministerial or SAO meeting shall make reasonable efforts to provide for Russian interpretation. [. . .]

44. An Arctic State or Permanent Participant may volunteer to provide interpretation into languages other than English and vice versa.

In line with § 44, other language versions of assessments, brochures, executive summaries, etc. have been produced, but this is not systematic. As acknowledged in § 42, Russian-speakers are most affected. The definition of target audiences could help guide whether and what language versions for Arctic Council products should be published. Resources for translation remains an issue.

Relationship with Working Group Communications Strategies

As stated earlier, some Working Groups have their own communications strategies or incorporate communications plans into their workplans. Any strategic communications plan for the Arctic Council as a whole would have to relate to the plans of the Working Groups (where they exist) and include a section on common look and feel guidelines and messaging across the Arctic Council system.

Next Steps - If SAOs decide to proceed with the development of an Arctic Council Strategic Communications Plan, decisions will have to be made regarding who would develop such a plan. The Communications and Outreach Contact Group will endeavour to prepare an outline of what a strategic communications plan would contain and present options about developing such a plan. However, it is important to note that there will be resource implications arising out of the development of the plan and implementing it once it is prepared and approved. Many contact group participants flagged that there is a lack of communications experience in the working groups and in the AC generally. Options could include engaging outside help on a contractual basis or dedicating resources from members. Both would entail resource commitments either financial or human.

Summary Assessment

The success that the AC has achieved in informing and influencing international discussions on the Arctic is remarkable especially given the AC's unique composition, made up of many distinct groups with wide-ranging interests, and that the Members emphasis on external communications has varied over time,. The AC, directly or through the efforts of WGs, has been successful in influencing some major international policy development (e.g. LRTAP Convention, Stockholm Convention, IPCC Arctic information, IMO work on Arctic shipping, UNEP Mercury negotiations, etc.) which implies certain stakeholders are being reached in an effective manner.

There are lessons from these successful experiences that can be used to strengthen communication in the future.

- **Transparency:** The Arctic Council is committed to transparency. The Working Groups produce first-rate and highly credible scientifically-based reports for which the data and results are shared openly. These findings and data are used by the other Arctic states and other states, and multilateral organizations in their work, thereby influencing the debate on key issues both in the Arctic and globally. This openness is a concrete example of the AC putting its messaging of cooperation across borders into practice. However, some participants commented that in practice the AC's commitment to transparency is not uniform across the range of its activities.
- **Personal, Organizational or National Commitment:** The commitment of individuals, PPs, and states has been key in the promotion of AC work. For example, the high level of awareness of the ACIA was in part due to the effort of the lead coordinator on the report, Dr. Robert Corell, to spread the message by traveling around the world and participating in conferences, seminars, etc. Another example is the Danish Government's commitment to the Greenland Ice Sheet Report (GRIS) enabled it to be presented at COP15 with significant media coverage. While the commitment of Members (and of resources) is key to the success of any AC project, this is particularly true in the area of communications.
- **Targeted Communications Products:** In the examples of successful communication activities provided by contact group participants, an investment was made in the creation of a variety of targeted products and activities. Examples include: media relations and press briefings, press releases, targeted summaries, stock-shots, and video-clips. Developing appropriate materials involves early planning and strategic thought. In order to attract the attention of mainstream media, the product needs to have a simple, distinct message that has not been heard before. In some cases, scientific media or academic analysis are more appropriate. Additional guidance in this area could be included in the Strategic Communications Plan.

However, the contact group participants put forward the following areas of weakness to be addressed:

- **Target Audiences:** AC communications can seem to be written by scientific and policy experts for experts. Experts are an important audience for AC products, but are not the only stakeholders the AC needs to reach. It is an enormous challenge to reduce complex scientific information into simple key messages, but this must be improved if decision-makers, media and the general public are to understand and act on the recommendations of the AC. As target audiences have not been defined to date, communication products and activities have not reached some stakeholders and groups (e.g. Russian-speakers, industry).

- **Consistency:** As noted above, the commitment of particular actors has been key in successful AC communications efforts. The flip side of this is that the amount of time and resources devoted to an activity or project depends on the interests of individual Member States or funding organizations, including the Chair. The focus of communications is therefore variable and often non-strategic.
- **Coordination:** Communication efforts are frequently guided by the structure of the Arctic Council, rather than by the needs or interests of target audiences. For example, there is no way for someone interested in a topic that is covered by more than one Working Group to learn about the efforts taking place on that topic across the AC. Increased coordination between Working Groups and through the Secretariat could allow for better planning and timing of the release of products to increase media interest. An overall Arctic Council Strategic Communications Plan should incorporate methods to increase coherence and coordination between the overall AC plan and WG communications strategies.
- **Guidance and Direction:** There is a clear consensus from contact group participants representing the variety of AC actors that simple, high-level strategic guidance from SAOs and PPs on communications and outreach is necessary. AC actors want to do more to promote the AC, but at the same time want to ensure that their efforts are productive and in line with an over-arching strategy. In the same vein, actors want clarity about their roles and responsibilities so that they can act knowing that they are behaving in a manner that is expected of them.

A Way Forward

All actors associated with the Arctic Council should be proud of the role that it has played in influencing international developments and informing Northerners about domestic and circumpolar activities. There is a huge demand for information on the Arctic, and the AC has many powerful stories to tell. AC Members and Working Groups have shown a remarkable interest in communicating more often and more strategically.

The credibility of Arctic Council communications and outreach will be based on its ability to respond in a timely manner with directness and clarity to emerging questions. The policy recommendations based on excellent science, the large areas of consensus and cooperation, the partnership between Member States and Permanent Participants, the successes in influencing the international agenda and the leadership in sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic are less effective if others don't know about them.

While this report outlines both strengths and challenges, considerable progress can be made through the development of clear communications guidelines that outline the roles and responsibilities of AC actors, and a Strategic Communication Plan that provides high-level guidance on the key messages and target audiences of AC outreach activities. The relationship between Working Group communications plans and protocols and that of the Arctic Council will be critical. There is a lack of communications expertise across the Arctic Council. Another critical question will be how to engage experts in the area of communications to develop effective products and tools to deliver on the objectives set out in a future communications plan.

If SAOs agree, the Communications and Outreach Contact Group will continue its work in order to present recommendations on an Arctic Council Strategic Communications Plan, and draft Communications Guidelines for the consideration of SAOs at their meeting in

October 2010 based on this report and the preliminary conclusions in each of the areas identified above.