



Arctic Council SAO plenary meeting (eDocs code: ACSAOUS203) 5-6
October 2016, Portland, Maine, U.S.A.

Document Title

Arctic Council communications strategy

Agenda item number

4.2

Submitted by

U.S. Chairmanship

Document filename

EDOCS-3768-v1A-

ACSAOUS203_Portland_2016_4-2_Communications_strategy.PDF

Number of pages, not including this cover sheet

8

Type (e.g. report, progress report, etc.)

Draft communication strategy

Arctic Council Communications Strategy

Background

In 2012, the Arctic Council adopted its first communications strategy; since then, both the Council's communications resources and the landscape in which they reside have changed significantly.

The Council established a standing secretariat with staff dedicated exclusively to managing Council communications, overhauled its website, and launched a social media presence on Twitter and Facebook. It created an Open Access Repository connecting Council publications with university libraries and research databases worldwide, making Council publications available more broadly, and significantly expanded its library of photo, audio, and video materials. In March 2016, the Council adopted its first "Arctic Council Communications and Outreach Guidelines" (Guidelines) codifying roles and procedures.

These changes came even as global events focused ever more attention on the Arctic, altering the communications landscape. The need to draw attention to the Arctic, with its unique questions and concerns, was supplanted by a need to educate on the changes taking place there, and the real consequences for both the region and the world at large; to help audiences better understand the Arctic Council's central role in promoting a constructive, international approach to addressing those changes; and to counteract false narratives of conflict and a "rush for resources."

This communications strategy for the Arctic Council seeks to deploy the full range of Council resources to take on these new communications challenges, in keeping with the 2016 Guidelines and the parameters set forth by the Senior Arctic Officials.

Mission

“Provide accurate, timely, clear and complete information on Arctic issues to inform target audiences and drive support for the Arctic Council and its work.”

Goals

- **Strengthen** the Arctic Council brand – reinforce perception of the Council as the preeminent international forum for addressing Arctic issues (**relevant**)
- **Provide a “voice”** for the Council on issues where it has achieved consensus – position the Council as an opinion leader on important Arctic issues (**credible**)
- **Highlight** the many ways the Arctic Council contributes to positive outcomes in the Arctic, notably through the work of its subsidiary bodies (**active**)
- **Generate** a positive narrative of international cooperation, sustainable development, and environmental protection that counters the popular but inaccurate narrative of conflict and a “rush to resources” in the Arctic

Governing principles

- Arctic Council **communications resources** are limited and must be deployed wisely. Programming and outreach efforts will take this into account and, where additional initiatives are deemed appropriate/desirable, will identify additional resources to support them.
- Successful external communications depend upon effective **internal communications**. In addition to following the procedures outlined in the 2016 Guidelines, communicators within the Arctic Council Secretariat, the Chairmanship, Arctic States, Permanent Participants and the Council's subsidiary bodies will maintain an active exchange of information and best practices through regular participation in the Communications and Outreach Group.
- Much of the work produced by the Arctic Council is scientific, technical, or academic in nature, while the Council's target audiences are diverse. Council communicators will remain mindful of this, and will make every effort to adapt the **language, format, and tone** of their products to best communicate in a clear and concise manner with the audiences they target.
- Along with increasing attention to the Arctic may come media demand for comment from the Council in the event of a disaster or other crisis. The Chairmanship will serve as the primary voice of the Council for any necessary **crisis communications**, and media requests will be directed to the Arctic Council Secretariat, which will redirect them to interlocutors among the Senior Arctic Officials, Permanent Participants and Working Groups as appropriate.
- As the Arctic Council evolves, so too does the communications landscape in which it operates. The Council will account for this by conducting a **biennial review** of this strategy to ensure it remains well-adapted to the prevailing communications environment. The Senior Arctic Officials may choose to call for a more comprehensive reassessment every four years.

Key messages

- *“The Arctic Council is the preeminent forum for addressing Arctic issues; it’s where the Arctic States and indigenous peoples come together to chart a path forward for the region.”*
 - The Council’s projects, research, and agreements are all products of collaboration among the eight Arctic States and indigenous peoples represented by the Permanent Participants, with the active support of the scientific community.
 - The Arctic Council is a forum for indigenous peoples to actively participate in decision making and development in the Arctic region.

- *“At the Arctic Council, the Arctic States and inhabitants of the region address the impacts of climate change together in a responsible, constructive way that safeguards the environment and the interests of Arctic inhabitants.”*
 - The diverse regions and peoples of the Arctic are bound together by a common desire to protect the environment, sustain healthy, vibrant communities, and maintain peace and cooperation in the region.
 - The Arctic Council’s mandates for sustainable development and environmental protection go hand-in-hand, and must be achieved together.
 - The Arctic Council promotes the resilience of Arctic communities and landscapes through its support for, and acknowledgment of, the cultures of Arctic indigenous peoples.

- *“Through dedicated Working Groups, Task Forces, and other bodies, the Arctic Council conducts a wide range of studies and programs aimed at developing the knowledge and solutions needed to address the unique questions facing a changing Arctic.”*
 - The Arctic is undergoing rapid change, and the Arctic States, indigenous peoples and the scientific community are working together through the Arctic Council to better understand and adapt to that change.
 - The Council develops knowledge and networks that empower the inhabitants of the Arctic to take action to improve their quality of life.

Target audiences

- *Inhabitants of the Arctic and the Arctic States*
Keeping those living in the Arctic informed of the Council's work increases understanding of and support for that work. Raising awareness of the Council's work among those living in the Arctic States but outside the Arctic region can help to generate support for allocating greater resources to Arctic issues.
- *Policymakers*
Policymakers engaged with the Arctic (locally, regionally, nationally, or internationally) benefit from a fuller awareness of the Council's research, findings, and policy recommendations. The Arctic and the Council's work benefit from the decisions made by well-informed policymakers.
- *Arctic-focused NGOs, IPOs, and IGOs*
Internationally recognized organizations – both Arctic Council Observers and others – play a significant role in shaping opinion about the Arctic and the issues that it faces. Maintaining an ongoing dialogue between the Arctic Council and those organizations enhances the ability – and opportunities – to amplify messaging on issues of common concern.
- *The Arctic scientific and research community*
Those researching issues in and related to the Arctic may or may not interact directly with the Arctic Council. Outreach to this group can help ensure that all of those whose work could benefit from a greater awareness of Arctic Council initiatives – or could potentially enrich those initiatives – will have the opportunity to interact directly with the Council.
- *Business sectors with interest in the Arctic*
Outreach to businesses and industries with an interest in the Arctic (e.g., resource development, energy, environment, shipping, tourism, and others) can help establish and maintain a dialogue with them on opportunities for sustainable development in the Arctic and the unique responsibilities that accompany it.
- *Youth*
Youth engagement is an important aspect of strengthening the Arctic Council. Informing and engaging youth across the circumpolar region helps build awareness of the Council's work and creates a sense of shared community on issues of common concern and interest to young people living in the Arctic.

Channels

The pipes and pathways that carry our messages to our target audiences...

- *Traditional media*
When you include online platforms for traditional media – television, radio, and print – they remain perhaps the most important source of information for most people today, capable of drawing a wide audience on a regular basis. Traditional media are increasingly seeking out Arctic content, as evidenced by recent pieces in print, broadcast, and online media. They should continue to be a primary focus of our outreach and communications efforts.
- *Social media*
The ability of social media to both amplify messaging and reach key audiences – notably opinion leaders, journalists, and youth – continues to grow. However, effective use of social media requires on-going, real-time interaction that is labor intensive. While investment in social media can pay dividends, that investment must be sustained over the long term in order to deliver results. The Arctic Council’s Facebook and Twitter accounts ([facebook.com/arcticcouncil](https://www.facebook.com/arcticcouncil) and [@ArcticCouncil](https://twitter.com/ArcticCouncil)) are managed by the Arctic Council Secretariat under the guidance of the Chairmanship, while the Working Groups have dedicated social media accounts managed by their own secretariats. Where resources allow, the Council will pursue expansion of its presence on social media platforms.
- *Arctic Council website (www.arctic-council.org)*
An organization’s website is like a shop window, serving as the first point-of-contact and placing the organization’s offerings on display. The Arctic Council website serves as a conduit to Working Group websites, to the Council’s social media presence, and to the Council’s Open Access Repository (public documents). It is maintained and updated by the Arctic Council Secretariat, drawing upon content – meeting updates, visuals, interviews, project overviews, etc. – provided by members of the Council and subsidiary bodies.
- *Events*
The wealth of Arctic-related events and symposia provides a natural platform for the Council’s many experts. Seeking out appropriate opportunities to provide Arctic Council speakers for these events both positions the Council as a credible voice on Arctic issues and provides an opportunity for Council representatives to shape the discussions that take place. Events that draw large numbers of Arctic-focused journalists also provide an opportunity to organize effective media availabilities for Arctic Council communicators.

Resources

What we have...

- *Publications*
Much of the Arctic Council's work is released in printed or electronic publications, and benefits from the broadest possible distribution of those publications. Content from publications can be adapted for distribution across channels and platforms; looking ahead, distribution of digital publications will become increasingly important for reasons of ease, cost, and reach.
- *Multimedia (photo, video, and audio)*
Multimedia material can help to attract many of the Council's target audiences. In addition, all modern media outlets rely on these materials to tell their stories; providing them with quality Arctic Council materials increases the likelihood that our activities receive coverage. The Council continues to build an extensive library of high-quality photographs highlighting its work, but producing video and audio material in-house is both costly and time-consuming. Where possible, the Council should look for cost-effective ways to work with partners and vendors to obtain professional-quality video and audio showcasing its work.

What we need more of...

- *"Ready to use" media materials*
As media covering Arctic issues look more and more to the Council for information, images and comment on a broad range of Arctic issues, Council outreach would benefit from creating "ready to use" materials that can be quickly and effectively deployed.
- *Graphics*
The Council writ large does not yet produce "infographics" charts and similar materials, as the Working Groups do. Well-designed infographics can convey information quickly and engagingly, and lend themselves to sharing via social media. Infographics should become a regular component of Council efforts to inform and engage target audiences.

Evaluation

Communications campaigns benefit from thorough evaluation, with baselining prior to launch, and follow-up studies after, conducted by a professional communications agency. The Arctic Council currently has no budget for such evaluations; in the future, should funds become available, the Council should include professional evaluation in its communications strategies. Until that time, readily available metrics – such as visitors to the Arctic Council website or numbers of followers of the Council’s social media accounts – should be shared regularly with Senior Arctic Officials, Permanent Participants, and subsidiary bodies.

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