

INTRODUCTION

Have you experienced programs that . . .

- start activities in communities without formally introducing the staff to the people they are trying to assist?
- expect people to understand activities as they happen, with no opportunities for them to ask questions or provide feedback in advance?
- expect people to actively influence programs they do not really understand?
- expect people to provide feedback and evaluate activities without communicating what the program is trying to achieve?
- cause conflict at the community level because people don't know why some are benefiting from the program while others are not?

If yes, then this toolbox is for you!

What is the toolbox?

The *Communication Toolbox* offers practical guidance for program managers who want to communicate more effectively with program participants and community members. The tools are designed for emergency programs and development programs.

The toolbox focuses on communicating about programs as a way to improve accountability to those communities.

This toolbox was inspired by programs in Haiti, where Catholic Relief Services observed that relatively simple, low-cost activities that promoted transparent communication substantially improved programs. Programs that did not emphasize the importance of sharing information with communities often faced challenges in implementation.

How should I use the toolbox?

If you need to design a communication plan in an emergency situation, begin with the following tools:

- **TEMPLATE:** “Develop a communication plan in nine steps” (page 3)
- **FACILITATOR’S NOTES:** “How to work with staff to develop a communication plan” (page 26)
- **CHECKLIST:** “Standards for communication in emergency situations” (page 51)

If you need to design a communication plan for a development program, begin with the template and the facilitator’s notes, and consider the following tools:

- **WORKSHEET:** “Choose which communication methods to use” (page 28)
- **TIPS:** “Implement your communication methods” (page 35)
- **TIPS:** “Include communication responsibilities in job descriptions” (page 46)
- **CHECKLIST:** “Standards for communication in development programs” (page 54)

If you want to improve a certain aspect of your current communication approach, you can skip the other tools and go directly to the one that you need.

For information about why you should develop a communication plan, see the following tools:

- HANDOUT: “Why develop a communication plan” (page 47)
- CASE STUDY: “How a resettlement program in Haiti used a communication plan to improve results” (page 49)

In order to get the most out of the toolbox, readers should already have an understanding of the program that they will be implementing and the context in which the program will take place.

This toolbox draws on recognized good practice and on examples from CRS’ programs. The content and guidance are not specific to one context. They can be used worldwide.

A note on terminology

Community: For brevity, the toolbox often refers to the “community.” In reality, every community is made up of individual women, men, girls and boys who fall into different social-economic groups. Individuals may be young or elderly, abled or disabled, program participants or nonparticipants. Communities include local leaders, members of community-based organizations and members of local government.

Program participants: This term refers to the people whom the program aims to assist. Other commonly used terms include *beneficiaries*, *clients* and *people affected by disaster*.

Staff: Throughout the toolbox, *staff* may be read as CRS staff, partner staff or a combination of both, depending on your program.

A note on partnerships

The toolbox is applicable to programs implemented by CRS or partners and can be used by either to ensure good communication between the implementing organization and communities. Teams of CRS staff may support partners to develop a communication plan as part of capacity strengthening.

Programs are more likely to succeed when CRS and its partners communicate with each other. CRS and partners could use this toolbox—especially the template for a communication plan—when jointly deciding on a communication approach.