

Alternative Protein Communications Playbook

A practical six-step framework for mission-driven organizations in the alternative protein sector



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Executive Summary

Strategic communications have become essential to the future of the alternative protein sector. As the industry moves beyond early scientific breakthroughs and venture-backed growth into commercialization and large-scale adoption, organizations face increasing competition for funding, policy attention, research investment, partnerships, and public trust. Organizations must communicate their work clearly, strategically, and in ways that resonate with the audiences they need to influence.

While many organizations recognize the importance of communications, few have the time, resources, or internal expertise to develop a structured communications strategy. As a result, communications often become reactive—focused on individual reports, social media posts, funding proposals, or events—rather than part of a coordinated effort to achieve long-term organizational goals.

This playbook was developed to address that gap. Designed for small and medium-sized organizations working to advance the alternative protein sector—including nonprofits, research institutes, advocacy organizations, think tanks, industry associations, and other mission-driven organizations—it provides a practical framework for planning, implementing, and continuously improving strategic communications.

Rather than focusing on marketing or public relations alone, the framework helps organizations think strategically about who they need to influence, what those audiences care about, how communications can support organizational objectives, and how success should be measured over time.

The framework consists of six connected steps:

1. **Define the Problem** – Identify the communications challenge your organization is trying to solve.
2. **Get to Know Your Audience** – Understand the motivations, barriers, and desired actions of your priority stakeholders.
3. **Create Your Strategy** – Develop a communications strategy that aligns with your organization's mission and long-term objectives.
4. **Develop Your Messaging** – Build audience-specific messages that communicate the same purpose in ways that resonate with different stakeholders.
5. **Make a Plan and Execute** – Translate your strategy into a practical communications and audience engagement plan with objectives, channels, activities, and measures of success.
6. **Review, Learn, and Adapt** – Evaluate your communications, capture lessons learned, and refine future activities based on evidence rather than assumptions.

Each chapter produces a practical deliverable—from a problem statement and audience map to a messaging matrix, communications plan, and communications review. Together, these outputs form a complete strategic communications toolkit that organizations can adapt to campaigns, advocacy initiatives, fundraising, stakeholder engagement, policy engagement, or broader organizational planning.

Throughout the playbook, readers will also follow the fictional OpenCultivate Institute, demonstrating how each step builds on the last to create a complete communications strategy in practice. Rather than presenting isolated concepts, the examples show how strategic communications evolve from defining a problem through to measuring results and continuously improving future communications.

Ultimately, this playbook is built around one central idea: Strategic communications are not about producing more content—they are about creating the right conversations with the right people to achieve meaningful change.

Introduction: Strategic Communications in the Alternative Protein Sector

The alternative protein sector—spanning plant-based, fermentation-enabled, and cultivated products—has reached a critical inflection point. What began as a nascent industry driven by venture-backed experimentation has matured into a global effort to redefine the future of food. However, as the industry transitions into a demanding phase of scale-up, it faces a complex web of scientific, financial, political, and cultural hurdles.

Many of the organizations working to advance this transition—including nonprofits, research institutes, advocacy organizations, think tanks, industry associations, and other mission-driven organizations—play a critical role in shaping policy, accelerating research, mobilizing funding, and building public understanding. Yet these organizations often operate with limited communications capacity and resources.

For these small and medium-sized organizations, strategic communications can no longer be treated as an afterthought or a simple marketing function. It is a vital tool for securing funding, influencing policy, building partnerships, navigating complex regulatory environments, and strengthening public trust.

This playbook is designed for these organizations. It provides a practical six-step framework to help alternative protein advocates communicate more strategically with policymakers, philanthropic funders, public research funders, institutional partners, and other priority stakeholders.

Figure 1. Why Strategic Communications Matters. Strategic communications connect an organization's activities to the outcomes that enable long-term impact.



The Sector is Entering a New Phase

The alternative protein sector has entered a period of transition. During its early years, progress was driven largely by scientific breakthroughs, entrepreneurial startups, and strong venture capital investment. Today, the industry is shifting toward commercialization, scale-up, and long-term market adoption. This transition brings both opportunities and new challenges.

Across all three pillars of alternative proteins, significant progress has been made. Global retail sales of plant-based products continue to grow overall despite uneven regional performance, cultivated meat has moved from laboratory proof-of-concept to commercial launches in several markets, and precision fermentation has expanded from producing enzymes to generating animal-identical proteins and functional food ingredients. At the same time, companies across the sector are increasingly forming strategic partnerships with established food manufacturers to accelerate commercialization, improve manufacturing capacity, and expand market access (Battle and Carter 2026).

However, commercialization introduces a different set of demands. Organizations must now compete not only on scientific excellence but also on their ability to attract investment, navigate regulation, recruit talent, build public confidence, and demonstrate real-world impact. As technical innovation becomes increasingly intertwined with policy, economics, and public opinion, communications move from the margins of organizational strategy to its centre.



KEY TAKEAWAY FOR COMMUNICATORS

As the sector matures, scientific innovation alone is no longer sufficient. Organizations must communicate effectively with multiple stakeholder groups to secure the investment, policy support, partnerships, and public trust needed for long-term success.

Funding and Investment Challenges

The financial landscape for alternative proteins has shifted dramatically. The private funding environment has severely tightened across all pillars of the industry, with broader venture capital increasingly dominated by artificial intelligence (Battle, Carter, et al. 2026a). Venture capitalists and philanthropic investors are highly risk-averse in the current climate, leaving alternative protein companies facing significant barriers to raising capital (Battle, Bomkamp, et al. 2026).

Because private capital is constrained, public-private partnerships (PPPs) and direct government funding are stepping in to fill the void. Policymakers are increasingly funding shared biomanufacturing hubs and research centers to support startups. However, there is still a massive shortfall: a mature alternative protein sector requires up to \$10.1 billion annually in public investment globally, yet current government funding covers less than 10% of this need (Battle and Carter 2026).

For many organizations, this changing funding landscape requires a shift in communications strategy. Rather than speaking only to investors, organizations increasingly need to communicate with public research funders, philanthropic foundations, development agencies, and policymakers. Different audiences require different evidence, different narratives, and different measures of success.



KEY TAKEAWAY FOR COMMUNICATORS

Effective communications can help organizations demonstrate not only scientific potential but also societal impact, economic value, and strategic relevance—qualities that are increasingly important when competing for both public and private investment.

Policy, Regulation, and Political Challenges

As alternative proteins have become more visible, they have also become increasingly political. Governments around the world are no longer simply deciding whether these technologies are scientifically viable—they are making choices about how they fit within national priorities relating to food security, industrial policy, agricultural competitiveness, climate goals, and economic development.

Some countries have embraced this opportunity. China, Denmark, South Korea, Singapore, and several European nations have incorporated alternative proteins into broader national strategies focused on biotechnology, food innovation, and economic resilience. Public investment is increasingly supporting shared biomanufacturing facilities, research centres, regulatory development, and commercialization programmes designed to strengthen domestic industries and reduce dependence on traditional supply chains (Battle and Carter 2026; EPNZ 2022).

At the same time, support is far from universal. In several countries, alternative proteins have become politically contentious. Restrictions on product labelling, debates over terminology, and outright bans on cultivated meat demonstrate that scientific evidence alone is rarely enough to shape policy outcomes. Political decisions are often influenced by competing narratives surrounding agriculture, national identity, rural livelihoods, and economic priorities (Battle and Carter 2026).

This creates a fundamentally different communications challenge. Policymakers are rarely persuaded by technical specifications or environmental statistics alone. Instead, they are more likely to respond to messages that demonstrate how alternative proteins contribute to objectives they already care about, such as strengthening domestic manufacturing, supporting farmers, improving food security, increasing export opportunities, or creating high-value jobs.

For communications professionals, this means moving beyond explaining *what* alternative proteins are toward demonstrating *why they matter* within existing political priorities.



KEY TAKEAWAY FOR COMMUNICATORS

Communications with policymakers should begin with their priorities—not yours. Frame alternative proteins in terms of economic competitiveness, food security, nutrition, innovation, public health, and national resilience rather than assuming environmental arguments alone will resonate.

Building the Innovation Ecosystem

Innovation does not happen in isolation. While startups are often the most visible part of the alternative protein ecosystem, their success depends on a much broader network of universities, research institutions, investors, manufacturers, suppliers, policymakers, and established food companies working together.

Many countries have begun investing in this wider innovation ecosystem. Public funding increasingly supports university research, open-access scientific infrastructure, pilot facilities, and collaborative research programmes designed to accelerate innovation across the sector. Europe, for example, has experienced rapid growth in publicly funded alternative protein research, while governments around the world are investing in shared biomanufacturing infrastructure that individual startups would struggle to finance independently (Battle, Carter, et al. 2026a).

However, a major bottleneck globally is the lack of institutional and academic awareness. In many regions, there is very little engagement with alternative proteins at the university level, meaning companies struggle to draw from a skilled talent pool. Targeted advocacy can unlock these academic bottlenecks by establishing dedicated academic courses and research hubs, ensuring that foundational discoveries are made available to the entire research community through open-access publishing (Child 2025).

Communications can play a critical role in strengthening this ecosystem. By raising awareness, sharing success stories, highlighting career opportunities, and facilitating collaboration between academia, industry, and government, organizations can help build the networks required for long-term innovation.

**KEY TAKEAWAY FOR COMMUNICATORS**

Communications should not focus solely on consumers. They can also attract researchers, inspire students, strengthen partnerships, and build the collaborative ecosystem needed for long-term sector growth.

Public Trust and Consumer Acceptance Challenges

Perhaps no challenge illustrates the importance of strategic communications more clearly than consumer acceptance.

Despite growing awareness of sustainability and animal welfare, many consumers remain hesitant to adopt alternative proteins—particularly newer technologies such as precision fermentation and cultivated meat. While taste, price, and availability continue to influence purchasing decisions, research increasingly shows that cultural perceptions are equally important.

Meat is not simply another food product. It carries deep cultural meaning, symbolizing tradition, family, celebration, strength, and identity. Consumers therefore do not evaluate alternative proteins solely on their nutritional profile or environmental impact. They evaluate them against powerful emotional and cultural associations that have developed over generations.

At the same time, many alternative protein products are perceived as overly processed, artificial, or technologically complex. Scientific terminology such as "precision fermentation," "cell cultivation," or "bioreactors" may accurately describe production methods, but these phrases often reinforce perceptions of industrialization rather than familiarity or trust (EIT Food Consumer Observatory 2025a). The EIT Food Consumer Observatory concludes that future success depends not only on scientific progress but also on emotional resonance, cultural fluency, and authentic storytelling.

This represents a communications challenge rather than simply a marketing challenge. Organizations must move beyond explaining technologies toward helping consumers understand how these products fit within everyday life, cultural traditions, and shared values.

**KEY TAKEAWAY FOR COMMUNICATORS**

People rarely adopt foods because they understand the science. They adopt foods because they trust them, recognise them, and see them fitting naturally into their lives. Effective communications should therefore emphasize familiarity, transparency, and shared values alongside scientific credibility.

Putting Strategic Communications into Practice: The 6-Step Method

Understanding the communications landscape is only the first step. Organizations also need a practical process for turning communications challenges into strategic action.

The **strategic communications cycle** presented in this playbook provides a six-step framework that guides organizations from identifying a communications problem through to measuring results and continuously improving their approach. Rather than viewing communications as a one-off campaign or isolated activity, the framework encourages organizations to think of communications as an ongoing cycle of planning, learning, adapting, and building trust.

Each step in the cycle answers a different strategic question and produces a practical output that organizations can immediately apply to their work. By the end of the framework, users will have developed a complete communications package that can be adapted for campaigns, advocacy initiatives, fundraising, stakeholder engagement, or organizational strategy.



Figure 2. The Strategic Communications Cycle. The six-step framework that guides organizations from defining a communications problem to continuous learning and improvement.

The six steps are:

1. **Define the problem** → Develop a clear problem statement.
2. **Get to know your audience** → Create an audience-to-action matrix
3. **Create your strategy** → Develop a communications strategy.
4. **Develop your messaging** → Build a messaging matrix.
5. **Make a plan and execute** → Create a communications plan and execute.
6. **Measure, review, and adapt** → Conduct a communications review and identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

Each chapter in the remainder of this playbook explores one of these steps in detail, providing practical guidance, templates, examples, and recommended resources that organizations can adapt to their own communications challenges.

How to Use This Playbook

This playbook is designed to be practical rather than theoretical. Each chapter concludes with a tangible deliverable that organizations can complete as they work through the framework. Together, these deliverables form a **Strategic Communications Toolkit** that can be used to guide future communications planning, campaigns, and decision-making.

The framework is designed to be completed sequentially, with each step building on the one before it. By the end of the playbook, you'll have developed a complete communications toolkit tailored to your organization's goals, audiences, and priorities.

To help illustrate how the framework works in practice, each chapter concludes with an example from the fictional **OpenCultivate Institute**. These examples show how each deliverable is developed and how the different components fit together into a cohesive communications strategy. An overview of OpenCultivate and its mission can be found at the end of this introduction.

Strategic Communications Builder

The playbook can be used independently or alongside the [Strategic Communications Builder](#), an AI-powered assistant built around the Strategic Communications Cycle.

While the playbook explains the principles behind each step of the framework, the Builder helps organizations put those principles into practice. The playbook provides the strategic context, communications guidance, and practical examples that explain *why* each step matters. The Builder then guides users through the process of applying those concepts to their own organization.

Rather than simply presenting a series of questions, the Builder acts as an interactive communications coach. It asks follow-up questions, helps users clarify their thinking, and uses the information gathered throughout the process to generate each deliverable. As users progress through the framework, the Builder carries information forward between steps, ensuring that every deliverable remains consistent and strategically aligned.

Each completed deliverable can be downloaded as a Microsoft Word or PDF document. Together, these documents form a comprehensive **Strategic Communications Toolkit** that organizations can adapt, update, and use long after completing the framework.

Playbook in Practice: The OpenCultivate Institute

Throughout the playbook, you'll follow the fictional **OpenCultivate Institute**, a nonprofit organization working to advance alternative proteins through research, communications, and policy engagement.

Rather than presenting abstract concepts or blank templates, the OpenCultivate examples demonstrate how each step of the framework can be applied in practice. As you progress through the playbook, you'll see the organization define its communications problem, identify priority audiences, develop its strategy and messaging, create a communications plan, and evaluate its results.

By following OpenCultivate's journey alongside your own, you'll gain a clearer understanding of how the individual deliverables work together to form a complete strategic communications toolkit.



OpenCultivate INSTITUTE


PLAYBOOK IN ACTION

The OpenCultivate Institute

Throughout this playbook, you'll follow the OpenCultivate Institute, a fictional organization, as it works through each step of the Strategic Communications Framework. While the organization is fictional, its communications challenges are based on those faced by many organizations across the alternative protein sector. By the end of the playbook, you'll see how each deliverable builds toward a complete Strategic Communications Plan.



MISSION

To **accelerate the commercialization of cultivated meat** through open-access research that reduces production costs, advances enabling technologies, and strengthens the global innovation ecosystem.



VISION

A future where cultivated meat is affordable, scalable, and accessible to consumers worldwide through collaborative scientific innovation.



WHAT DOES OPENCULTIVATE DO?

Unlike cultivated meat companies that develop products, the OpenCultivate Institute focuses on solving the shared scientific bottlenecks that slow progress across the sector. Rather than commercializing products itself, the Institute supports the broader cultivated meat ecosystem by:

- ✓ **Funding** open-access cultivated meat research.
- ✓ **Coordinating** multi-university research collaborations.
- ✓ **Advancing enabling technologies**, including lower-cost cell culture media, scaffolds, and bioprocessing.
- ✓ **Advising policymakers** on cultivated meat research and innovation.
- ✓ **Convening researchers**, industry, and public research funders to accelerate scientific progress.

Step 1: Define the Problem

A strong communications strategy begins with a clear understanding of the problem the organization is trying to solve. Defining the problem means identifying the specific barrier, gap, or opportunity that communications can help address. This gives the organization a clearer starting point and prevents communications from becoming scattered, reactive, or overly focused on one preferred solution.



Clarify the communications challenge before deciding what to say or do.

What this step does

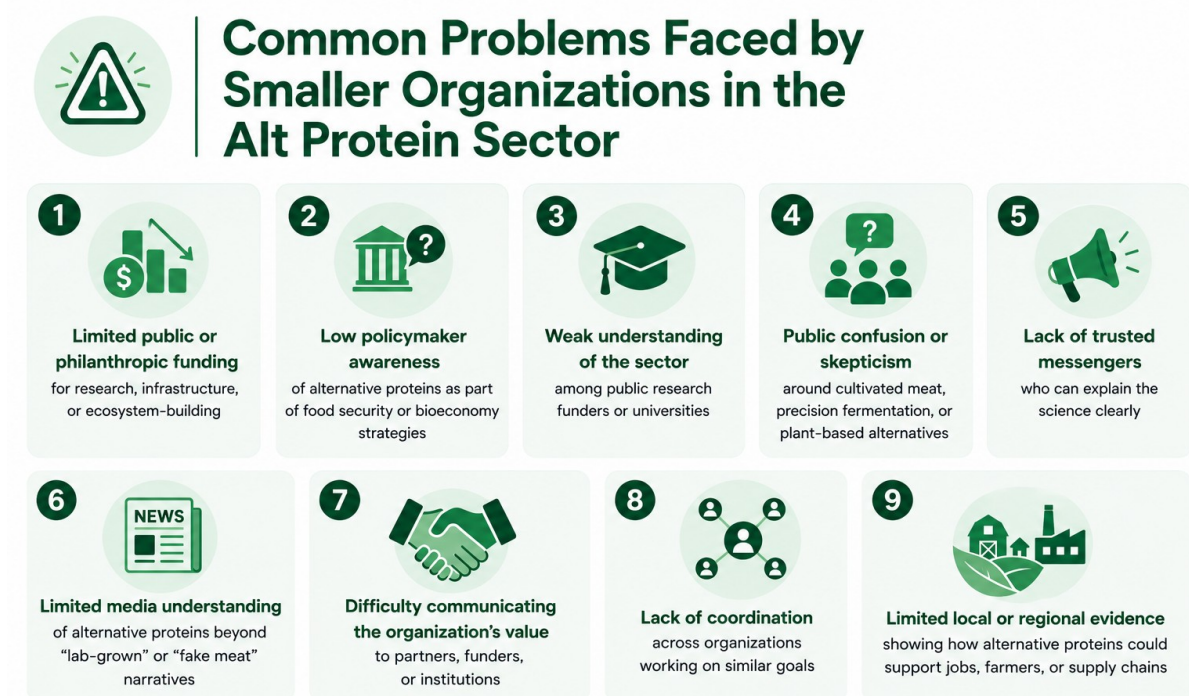
- Clarifies the communications challenge
- Identifies who is affected
- Explains why the challenge matters

A well-defined problem should be broad enough to allow several possible solutions, but specific enough to guide action.

For example, “we need more funding” is a goal, but it is not yet a clear problem statement. A stronger problem statement might be: “There is insufficient public and philanthropic funding available to support open-access alternative protein research and shared infrastructure.”

This framing opens up several possible communications approaches, including engaging public research funders, developing philanthropic proposals, building university partnerships, joining coalitions, or advocating for dedicated funding calls.

Figure 3. Common Communications Challenges. Common communications barriers faced by small and medium-sized organizations working in the alternative protein sector.



The Main Output: Problem Statement

A problem statement is a clear, concise description of an issue that needs to be addressed. It explains what the problem is, who it affects, why it matters, and often what the consequences are if nothing changes. It does *not* describe the solution—that comes later.

To define the problem, ask the following questions:

- **What problem are we trying to solve?**
- **Who is affected by this problem?**
- **What are the consequences of this problem**

➤ **What is causing or worsening it?**

A simple formula is:

The problem is [issue], which affects [who], resulting in [consequences], because [underlying cause or context].

EXAMPLE PROBLEM STATEMENTS

CHALLENGE	PROBLEM STATEMENT
 “We need more funding.”	Many organizations working in the alternative protein sector struggle to secure sustainable funding because they find it difficult to communicate their impact, differentiate themselves in a crowded funding landscape, and align their messaging with funders' priorities. As a result, promising initiatives may be delayed, scaled back, or never implemented.
 “We need policymakers to care.”	Policymakers often have limited awareness of alternative proteins or do not view them as a policy priority compared with more immediate economic, agricultural, or political concerns. Without communications that connect alternative proteins to existing policy goals, opportunities for supportive legislation, research funding, and public investment may be missed.
 “People do not trust our product.”	Consumers may be hesitant to adopt alternative protein products because they have concerns about safety, naturalness, taste, or processing, or because they lack reliable information. Low public trust can reduce product adoption and slow the growth of the sector despite technological advances.
 “Universities are not engaging enough.”	Many universities have limited awareness of the research and educational opportunities within the alternative protein field or face competing institutional priorities. As a result, investment in research, teaching, and talent development remains lower than the sector requires to support future innovation.
 “The media keeps using bad language.”	Media coverage of alternative proteins sometimes relies on inaccurate, sensational, or inconsistent language that reinforces misconceptions and oversimplifies the technology. This can shape public understanding in ways that reduce trust, increase polarization, and make evidence-based discussions more difficult.

Figure 4. Example Problem Statements. Examples illustrating how broad communications challenges can be reframed into clear problem statements.



OpenCultivate Defines Their Problem

The first step for the OpenCultivate Institute is to clearly define the communications problem it is trying to solve. Rather than jumping straight to solutions or communications activities, the organization first works through the four guiding questions.

1

What problem are we trying to solve?

There is insufficient public and philanthropic investment in open-access cultivated meat research and enabling technologies.

2

Who is affected by this problem?

Researchers, universities, research institutes, and the broader cultivated meat ecosystem.

3

What are the consequences of this problem?

Scientific progress is slowed, commercialization is delayed, and shared technical bottlenecks remain unresolved.

4

What is causing or worsening it?

Many policymakers and research funders have limited awareness of cultivated meat's scientific, economic, and food security potential.

OpenCultivate Institute used the problem statement formula:

The problem is [issue], which affects [who], resulting in [consequences], because [underlying cause or context].

And they developed the following problem statement:

The problem is insufficient public and philanthropic investment in open-access cultivated meat research and enabling technologies, which affects researchers, universities, research institutes, and the broader cultivated meat ecosystem. This results in slower scientific progress, delayed commercialization, and unresolved technical bottlenecks, because many policymakers and research funders have limited awareness of cultivated meat's scientific, economic, and food security potential.

Step 2: Get to Know Your Audience

Before developing any communications materials, organizations must understand who they are trying to reach, what that audience has the power to influence, and what core values drive their decision-making.



Identify the audiences who matter most, what they care about, and the actions you want them to take.

What this step does

- Identifies priority audiences
- Maps motivations and barriers
- Defines the action each audience should take

Alternative protein organizations often communicate with several audiences at once, but treating them as a monolith is a recipe for failure. Because meat and food carry deep cultural, emotional, and economic weight, a message that inspires a philanthropic funder might actively alienate a policymaker or a local consumer.

Key Audiences

Successful communications begin with understanding your audience—not your message. Research in strategic communications, behavioral science, and message framing consistently shows that people are more likely to engage with information when it aligns with their existing values, priorities, and decision-making context rather than relying on facts alone.

For this reason, successful organizations tailor their communications to the audiences they are trying to influence. Rather than asking, *"What do we want to communicate?"* begin by asking, *"What does this audience care about, and how does our work help them achieve their goals?"*

The following table provides an overview of primary audiences for many alternative protein organizations, as well as their description.



KEY AUDIENCES FOR ALTERNATIVE PROTEIN ORGANIZATIONS

KEY AUDIENCE	WHO ARE THEY?
 Policymakers and Government Decision-Makers	Government actors, regulatory officials, and regional representatives who control public funding allocations, regulatory approvals, labeling frameworks, and national biosecurity or food strategies.
 Established Food Industry and Corporate Partners	Legacy food brands, global meat processors, major ingredient suppliers, commercial distributors, and large-scale co-manufacturers capable of providing the commercial infrastructure, manufacturing capacity, and market access required for industrial scale-up.
 Philanthropic Funders	Institutional foundations, high-net-worth donors, and highly analytical, metrics-driven investment groups (including EA-aligned networks) targeting high-impact, neglected structural bottlenecks that can unlock systemic, uncapped global scalability across the sector.
 Public Research Funders and Academic Institutions	Grant boards, university leadership, and open-access scientific bodies responsible for financing foundational discovery, managing open scientific infrastructure, training a skilled talent pool, and advancing pre-competitive workforce development.
 Public Audiences and Consumers	The general public, everyday shoppers, and flexitarian consumers whose cultural perceptions, trusted information sources, and purchasing habits define market adoption and heavily influence the political risk tolerance of policymakers and corporate brands.

Figure 5: Key Audiences for Alternative Protein Organizations. Overview of the primary stakeholder groups commonly engaged by organizations across the alternative protein sector.

The Main Output: Audience-to-Action Matrix

Historically, organizations built “audience personas” that listed static demographics. In a fast-moving, highly politicized sector, strategic communications requires something much sharper.

The primary output of this step is an **Audience-to-Action Matrix**. This matrix bridges the gap between *who the stakeholder is* and *how you must frame your narrative* to earn their trust. By mapping five core components for each key stakeholder group, you instantly create a functional bridge between *who your audience is* and *how your narrative must behave*.

The matrix is comprised of the following four essential components:

- **Target Segment:** This component defines the specific stakeholder group, gatekeeper, or decision-maker you need to reach to address your problem statement. Instead of using broad generalizations like “the public,” this column might include a distinct group, such as regional agricultural policymakers or flexible institutional buyers.
- **Core Motivation:** This component maps what drives the target segment, what they inherently care about, and the existing priorities under which they operate. In the alternative protein sector, motivations vary, ranging from macro-economic targets like

job creation and national food security for policymakers, to asset utilization and margin protection for corporate partners.

- **Primary Barrier / Hesitation:** This component identifies the primary hesitation, skepticism, cultural friction, or perceived risk that prevents the stakeholder group from supporting alternative proteins. This requires analyzing their specific vulnerabilities, such as a consumer's distrust of "artificial" processing or a legacy meat company's fear of low commercial margins and supply chain volatility.
- **Desired Action:** This component explicitly outlines the concrete, measurable step you need the target segment to take to help resolve your primary communications problem. Defining a clear action transforms your communication from a passive exercise in "raising awareness" into a highly focused advocacy tool (e.g., getting a funder to conduct an introductory meeting or a partner to sign a letter of intent).

EXAMPLE AUDIENCE-TO-ACTION MATRIX

 TARGET AUDIENCE	 CORE MOTIVATION (What drives them?)	 PRIMARY BARRIER / HESITATION (What scares them?)	 DESIRED ACTION (What do you want them to do?)
 Legacy Food Co-Manufacturer	Asset utilization; finding new high-margin revenue streams to fill excess plant capacity.	Fear of low margins, manufacturing bottlenecks, or alienating existing livestock industry clients.	Sign a letter of intent to co-develop a regional scale-up pilot project.
 Philanthropic Funder (EA-aligned / Systems-focused)	Systems-level impact, cost-effectiveness, and resolving neglected structural bottlenecks. They want to see global scalability.	Risk of funding duplicative work, narrow organizational self-interest, or hype that fails to move the field-wide needle.	Approve a multi-year grant allocation to fund a foundational, open-access research infrastructure.
 Public Research Funder / University Board	Academic and scientific advancement, securing research excellence, technology transfer, and domestic workforce development.	Navigating institutional bottlenecks, lack of academic awareness, and competing campus funding priorities.	Establish a dedicated academic course or localized research hub with open-access publishing commitments.
 Public Audience / Consumer (Flexitarian Everyday Shopper)	Practical considerations like taste, price, familiarity, health, and how well a product fits into daily family traditions.	Deep-seated cultural friction, a strong fear of processing or "artificial" food, and alienation caused by industrial or "lab" jargon.	Commit to trying a plant-based or fermentation-derived alternative during a regular weekly grocery shop.

Figure 6. Example Audience-to-Action Matrix. Example showing how audiences, motivations, barriers, and desired actions are mapped to guide communications planning.



OpenCultivate Gets to Know Their Audience

After clearly defining its communications problem, the OpenCultivate Institute's next step is to identify the audiences that have the greatest influence over the challenge it is trying to solve.

Rather than relying on assumptions, the Institute gathers information from a variety of sources to better understand what these audiences care about, what barriers may prevent them from supporting cultivated meat research, and what actions the Institute ultimately hopes they will take.

To develop its Audience-to-Action Matrix, the Institute uses several approaches, including:



Internal workshops with staff and leadership to identify priority audiences.



Interviews with researchers, policymakers, and existing funding partners.



Conversations with philanthropic organizations and academic collaborators.



Desk research, including reports on stakeholder engagement and cultivated meat communications.



Academic literature on science communication, public opinion, and innovation policy.



This process helps ensure that communications decisions are based on evidence rather than assumptions.

One Important Discovery

Through this process, the Institute realized it had a strong understanding of public research funders, philanthropic funders, policymakers, and academic researchers, as these audiences had formed part of its existing network.

However, the team recognized that it had far less insight into how journalists and media professionals understood cultivated meat. Although media coverage plays an important role in shaping public and policy discussions, the Institute had limited direct engagement with journalists and lacked evidence about the narratives and terminology most commonly used in reporting.

Rather than making assumptions, the communications team reviewed media analyses, sector reports, and existing research on cultivated meat coverage to better understand how the topic was being framed and where opportunities existed to improve future communications.



This highlighted an important lesson:

Organizations rarely understand every audience equally well. Identifying knowledge gaps—and filling them through research—is an important part of audience analysis.

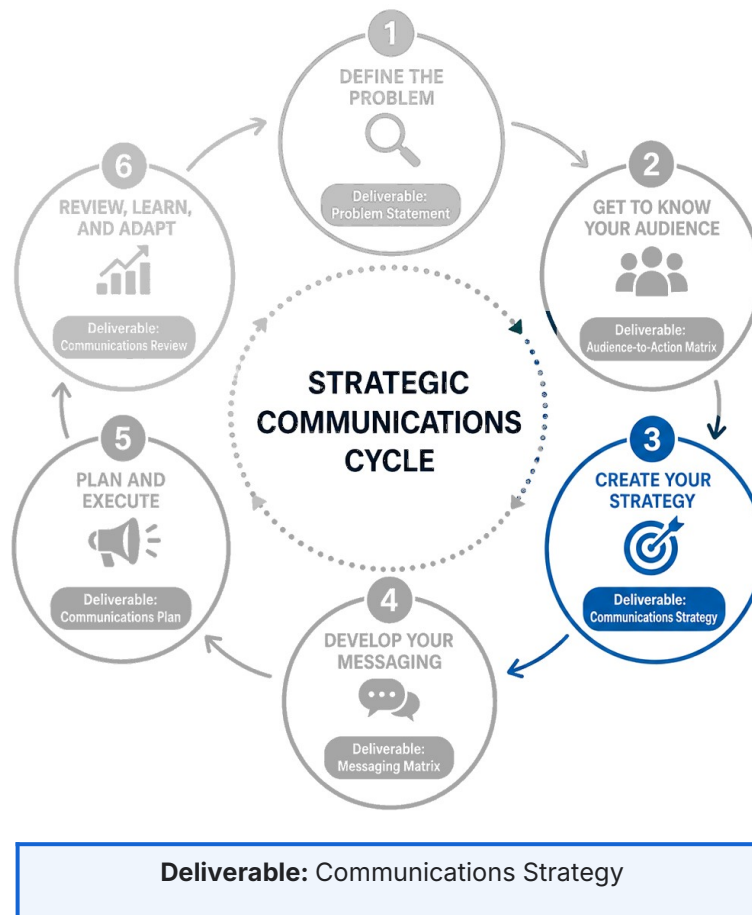


OpenCultivate's Audience-to-Action Matrix

Target Segment	Core Motivation	Primary Barrier / Hesitation	Desired Action
 Public Research Funders	Advance scientific innovation, national competitiveness, and economic growth	Limited awareness of cultivated meat as a strategic research field	 Establish dedicated funding calls for cultivated meat research and enabling technologies
 Philanthropic Funders	Maximize impact, address neglected opportunities, and support public goods	Uncertainty about the field's maturity and long-term impact	 Fund open-access cultivated meat research programmes and collaborative initiatives
 Policymakers	Food security, biotechnology leadership, economic competitiveness, and job creation	View cultivated meat primarily as a consumer product rather than a strategic biotechnology platform	 Support public investment, national strategies, and research infrastructure
 Universities & Researchers	Scientific excellence, collaboration opportunities, and research funding	Limited institutional support and funding opportunities for cultivated meat research	 Develop new research partnerships and establish cultivated meat research programmes
 Media & Journalists	Accurate, timely, and engaging stories that resonate with readers	Limited familiarity with cultivated meat and reliance on sensational or oversimplified narratives	 Report on cultivated meat research using accurate, evidence-based language and highlight its scientific and societal relevance

Step 3: Create Your Strategy

Once you understand the problem you are trying to solve and the audiences you need to influence, the next step is deciding how communications will help your organization achieve its mission.



Align your mission, audiences, outcomes, and positioning to guide future communications.

What this step does

- Aligns communications with your mission
- Defines objectives and positioning
- Establishes a clear strategic direction

Many organizations jump straight into producing communications outputs—writing social media posts, publishing reports, issuing press releases, or launching campaigns—without first defining what those communications are intended to accomplish. As a result, communications often become reactive rather than strategic, responding to day-to-day opportunities instead of advancing long-term organizational goals.

The purpose of this step is to ensure every communication your organization produces is guided by a clear strategic direction. A communications strategy provides the bridge between your organization's mission and its day-to-day communications activities, helping ensure that every communication contributes to a broader organizational objective.

Why a Communications Strategy Matters

An effective communications strategy should never exist in isolation—it should support your organization's broader strategy.

Most organizations will already have a mission, vision, values, strategic plan, or theory of change that defines what they are trying to achieve. Rather than creating these from scratch, this step is about translating those strategic priorities into a communications strategy that guides how your organization engages with the outside world.

When communications are aligned with organizational strategy, they become intentional rather than reactive. Every grant proposal, policy brief, media interview, conference presentation, website update, and social media post should reinforce the same organizational purpose rather than existing as a series of disconnected activities.

A communications strategy also creates consistency across teams, campaigns, and stakeholders. It ensures that regardless of the channel or format, communications reinforce the organization's mission, speak to the priorities of key audiences identified in Step 2, and contribute to clearly defined organizational outcomes.

Why Being Strategic Matters

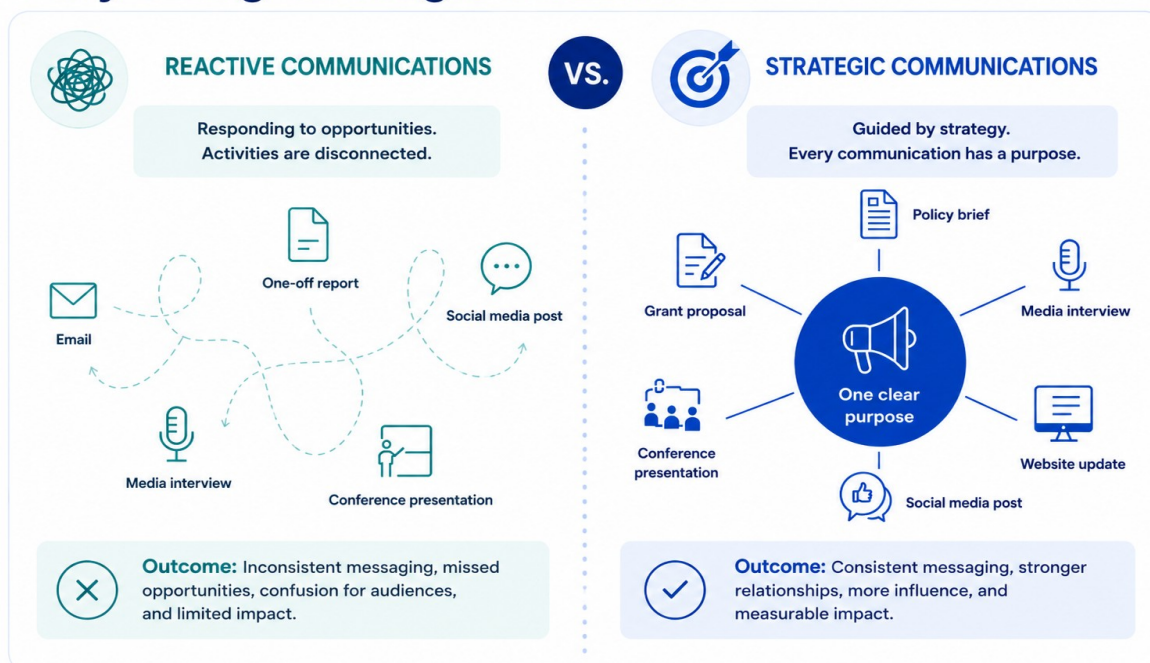


Figure 7. Reactive vs. strategic communications. Comparison of reactive communications activities with a coordinated strategic communications approach.

The Main Output: Communications Strategy

The primary output of this step is a communications strategy—a concise document that brings together your organization's strategic foundations with the communications decisions that will guide future campaigns, partnerships, funding proposals, and public engagement.

Rather than creating lengthy communications strategies that are rarely revisited, organizations should develop a practical working document that serves as a reference point for future communications decisions.

The communications strategy combines the work completed throughout the first three steps of this framework into a single planning document.

It should include the following:

- **Mission: What does your organization do today?**
- **Vision:** What future is your organization working to create?
- **Core Values:** What principles should guide how your organization communicates?
- **Primary Audiences:** Who are the priority audiences identified in Step 2?

- **Communications Objectives:** What specific outcomes should communications help achieve?
- **Communications Positioning:** How should your organization present itself across different communications channels?



Figure 8. Communications strategy framework. The core components of a practical communications strategy and how they work together to support organizational goals.

Building on Your Organization's Strategic Foundations

The good news is that you don't need to develop your mission, vision, or core values from scratch. Most organizations will already have these defined in their strategic plan, annual strategy, or theory of change.

The purpose of this step is to ensure these strategic foundations are reflected consistently in your communications.

Your communications strategy should translate your organization's broader purpose into the way it communicates with external audiences. While your mission explains **what your organization does**, your vision describes **the future you are working toward**, and your values guide **how you communicate** and engage with others.

Together, these elements create a foundation for every communication your organization produces—from grant proposals and policy briefs to presentations, media interviews, and social media.

Incorporating Your Primary Audiences into Your Strategy

Your primary audiences were identified in Step 2 through the Audience-to-Action Matrix. These audiences should now become a central part of your communications strategy.

Rather than trying to communicate with everyone, your communications strategy should clearly identify the audiences that are most important to achieving your organization's mission. These are the stakeholders whose decisions, behaviours, or support will have the greatest influence on the communications problem you identified in Step 1.

Including your primary audiences in your communications strategy helps ensure that future campaigns, messages, and communications activities remain focused on the people who matter most. It also creates consistency across your organization, allowing staff, partners, and leadership to work toward the same communications priorities.

Developing Strategic Communications Outcomes

Much of your communications strategy has already been completed—or likely already exists within your organization.

This means that the primary task in this step is to identify the strategic communications outcomes your organization wants to achieve. These outcomes define the long-term role communications should play in supporting your organization's broader mission and strategic priorities.

Strategic communications outcomes will vary depending on your organization's mission and role within the alternative protein ecosystem. The examples below illustrate how different organizations might define the long-term change they want their communications to achieve.



Figure 9. Examples of strategic communications outcomes. Examples of long-term communications outcomes across different types of alternative protein organizations.

Notice that these describe strategic directions rather than individual communications activities or performance targets. The specific campaigns, channels, timelines, and metrics used to achieve these outcomes will be developed later in your communications plan.

Communications Positioning

The final component of your communications strategy is deciding how your organization wants to be perceived.

While your mission, vision, and communications objectives define *what* you are trying to achieve, your positioning shape *how* your organization consistently presents itself to the outside world. They influence everything from grant proposals and policy briefs to website copy, presentations, media interviews, and social media.

A clear position helps distinguish your organization from others while ensuring your communications consistently reinforce your purpose.

For example, an organization might position itself as:

- A trusted source of independent scientific expertise.
- A leading advocate for public investment in alternative proteins.
- A connector between researchers, industry, and policymakers.

- A champion of open-access innovation.
- A reliable partner for evidence-based policy development.

Your positioning should reflect your organization's mission and strategic priorities rather than trying to appeal to everyone.



OpenCultivate
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PLAYBOOK IN ACTION

OpenCultivate Institute Communications Strategy

This communications strategy provides a framework for how the OpenCultivate Institute communicates with external audiences. It ensures that every communication supports the Institute's mission, reinforces its strategic priorities, and contributes to long-term organizational outcomes.

The OpenCultivate Institute exists to accelerate the commercialization of cultivated meat through open-access research that reduces production costs, advances enabling technologies, and strengthens the global innovation ecosystem. It works toward a future where cultivated meat is affordable, scalable, and accessible to consumers worldwide through collaborative scientific innovation.

Our communications are guided by the principles of scientific excellence, open collaboration, innovation, transparency, and public benefit, ensuring that every communication is evidence-based, credible, and aligned with our mission.

OpenCultivate's communications will primarily focus on the audiences identified through the Audience-to-Action Matrix:

- Public research funders
- Philanthropic funders
- Policymakers
- Universities and researchers
- Journalists and media

These audiences have the greatest influence over increasing investment in cultivated meat research, strengthening research partnerships, and building institutional support for enabling technologies.

Through its communications, the Institute will:

1. Position cultivated meat research as a strategic scientific, economic, and food security priority.
2. Increase support for public and philanthropic investment in open-access cultivated meat research.
3. Strengthen collaboration between researchers, governments, funders, and industry.
4. Increase recognition of OpenCultivate as a trusted source of independent scientific expertise.
5. Build greater awareness of the importance of enabling technologies in accelerating commercialization.

OpenCultivate positions itself as a trusted, independent research institute advancing open-access science to accelerate cultivated meat innovation.

Across all communications, the Institute seeks to be perceived as evidence-based, independent, collaborative, credible, forward-looking, and solutions oriented.

Regardless of the audience or communication channel, every communication should consistently reinforce this position.

Step 4: Develop Your Messaging

Once you have defined your communications strategy, the next step is translating that strategy into messages that resonate with your audiences. Core messaging translates strategy into language. It provides a consistent foundation for grant proposals, funding applications, policy briefs, presentations, websites, media interviews, social media content, and stakeholder engagement.



Translate strategy into messages that resonate with different audiences while staying consistent in purpose.

What this step does

- Develops audience-specific messages
- Selects credible evidence and language
- Identifies trusted messengers

Effective messaging is not about finding a single message that works for everyone. Instead, it is about communicating the same underlying purpose in ways that resonate with different audiences. Different audiences care about different issues, respond to different evidence, and use different language when making decisions. A message that resonates with a philanthropic funder may not resonate with a policymaker, while language that appeals to consumers may be inappropriate for researchers or corporate partners.

The purpose of this step is to develop messaging that remains consistent in purpose while being flexible enough to resonate with each audience.

The Main Output: Messaging Matrix

The primary output of this step is a messaging matrix. The messaging matrix translates the strategic decisions made in Steps 1–3 into practical communications guidance. Rather than starting from scratch every time your organization prepares a presentation, grant proposal, policy brief, media interview, or communications campaign, the matrix provides a consistent reference for tailoring messages to different audiences.

A completed messaging matrix should include the following:

- **Audience**
- **Core Motivation**
- **Desired Action**
- **Core Message**
- **Supporting Evidence**
- **Preferred Language**
- **Language to Avoid**
- **Trusted Messenger**

Together, these elements help ensure that communications remain consistent, audience-focused, and strategically aligned across every communication channel.

Not every organization will use every message in every situation. Rather, the messaging matrix provides a flexible foundation that can be adapted across different audiences, communication channels, and communications activities while maintaining consistency.

Completing Your Messaging Matrix

Like the communications strategy, the messaging matrix builds on work you have already completed. Rather than creating entirely new content, this step translates your strategy into practical messaging that can be used consistently across all communications.

Your Audience-to-Action Matrix completed in Step 2 already identified your priority audiences, their core motivations, and the actions you want them to take. Step 3 established your organization's strategic direction, communications outcomes, and positioning.

This means that the primary task in this step is to develop the messages, language, evidence, and messengers that will motivate each audience to take the desired action you identified earlier.

The sections below explain how to complete the remaining components of the messaging matrix.

Crafting Your Core Message

Your core message should explain why your work matters, not how the technology works.

Most audiences do not need a detailed explanation of bioreactors, cell culture media, extrusion technology, or fermentation pathways during their first interaction with your organization. Instead, they want to understand the problem you are solving and the outcomes your work helps create.

Research in science communication consistently shows that audiences engage more readily with messages that connect innovations to tangible societal outcomes rather than technical mechanisms. By leading with impact rather than process, organizations can make complex technologies more relevant, understandable, and memorable.



Figure 10. Leading with impact. Examples of reframing technical explanations into audience-focused messages that emphasize societal impact.

Tailoring Your Message to the Audience

Although your core message should remain consistent, the way you frame it should vary depending on your audience.

The audience analysis completed in Step 2 should now guide how your message is presented. Rather than emphasizing every possible benefit, identify the outcomes that matter most to the audience in front of you.

Different audiences evaluate the same information through different lenses. Policymakers may be motivated by food security and economic competitiveness, while philanthropic funders may be more interested in systems change and neglected opportunities. Consumers, on the other hand, are more likely to care about taste, affordability, familiarity, and trust.

Effective communicators do not change the evidence—they change the frame. For example, the same investment in precision fermentation infrastructure could be presented as:

- a food security opportunity for policymakers,
- a neglected systems intervention for philanthropic funders,
- a scientific research challenge for universities,
- or a way to produce familiar foods more sustainably for consumers.



Tailoring Your Message to the Audience

Different audiences care about different issues, respond to different evidence, and use different language when making decisions. **Frame your message to reflect what matters most to each audience.**

 Audience	 Lead With	 Avoid Leading With
 Policymakers	Food security, economic competitiveness, jobs, rural development	Moral judgment, anti-farmer language, excessive technical detail
 Philanthropic Funders	Systems change, leverage, neglected bottlenecks, public goods	Product marketing, hype, organizational self-promotion
 Public Research Funders	Scientific advancement, research gaps, workforce development	Consumer advertising or vague impact claims
 Corporate Partners	Commercial opportunity, manufacturing capacity, market growth	Disruption rhetoric or criticism of existing industries
 Public Audiences	Taste, familiarity, affordability, health, trust	Technical jargon or unfamiliar production processes



Remember: The facts have not changed—only the frame. Use this guidance to tailor your core message so it resonates with each audience while staying true to your purpose.

Figure 11. Tailoring messages to different audiences. Examples of adapting the same core message to resonate with different stakeholder groups.

Support Every Message with Evidence

Strong messaging is persuasive because it is supported by evidence that the audience finds credible and relevant.

Once you have identified your core message, ask yourself, “*What evidence is most likely to convince this audience?*” Different audiences evaluate evidence through different lenses. A policymaker may be persuaded by government statistics or economic analyses, while a public research funder may place greater weight on peer-reviewed research and evidence of scientific impact. Corporate partners may look for market data or case studies, whereas journalists often value real-world examples and independent experts.

The goal is not to include as much evidence as possible, but to select the evidence that is most meaningful to the audience you are trying to influence.

AUDIENCE	EVIDENCE THEY MAY VALUE
 POLICYMAKERS	 Government statistics, economic analyses, food security data
 PHILANTHROPIC FUNDERS	 Independent evaluations, systems-change evidence, impact assessments
 PUBLIC RESEARCH FUNDERS	 Peer-reviewed research, scientific publications, research gaps
 JOURNALISTS & MEDIA	 Independent experts, real-world examples, new research findings
 CORPORATE PARTNERS	 Market analyses, pilot projects, commercial case studies

Figure 12. Evidence different audiences value. Examples of the types of evidence different stakeholder groups consider most persuasive.

Defining your preferred language

It is important to use clear and consistent terminology. The words your organization chooses influence how audiences perceive and understand emerging technologies. Technical accuracy is important, but so is accessibility.

Research on food innovation consistently finds that unfamiliar or emotionally charged terminology can increase perceptions of risk, while clear, familiar, and transparent language improves understanding and trust. Consistent terminology also helps create a shared narrative across the broader alternative protein ecosystem.

Terminology is one of the simplest but most powerful framing decisions an organization makes. The words you choose influence how audiences interpret unfamiliar technologies before

you've even explained them. Where possible, use language that is scientifically accurate while remaining easy to understand.

✓ PREFERRED TERMINOLOGY	✗ TERMINOLOGY TO AVOID
 Cultivated meat	 Lab-grown meat
 Plant-based meat	 Fake meat
 Precision-fermented protein	 Synthetic meat
 Animal-free whey	 Artificial protein
 Animal-free egg protein	 “Frankenfood”
 Fermentation-derived ingredient	

Figure 13. Preferred terminology. Recommended terminology and examples of language to avoid when communicating about alternative proteins.

Build Trust through Credible Messengers

Even the strongest message will have limited impact if audiences do not trust the person delivering it.

Research across public health, science communication, and risk communication consistently shows that **who** delivers the message is often just as influential as **what** is being said. Different audiences place their trust in different institutions and individuals.

Depending on your audience, trusted messengers may include:

- Independent scientists
- Universities
- Public research institutions
- Regulatory experts
- Farmers and producers
- Chefs and food professionals
- Health and nutrition experts
- Community or religious leaders

Selecting the right messenger can significantly increase the credibility and effectiveness of your communications.



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PLAYBOOK IN ACTION

OpenCultivate Develops Its Messaging Matrix

Having established its communications strategy, the OpenCultivate Institute is now ready to develop its messaging matrix. Rather than creating entirely new content, the Institute builds on the work completed in the previous three steps.

The audience-to-action matrix already identified the Institute's priority audiences, their motivations, and the actions OpenCultivate hopes they will take. The communications strategy established the Institute's mission, positioning, and long-term communications outcomes.

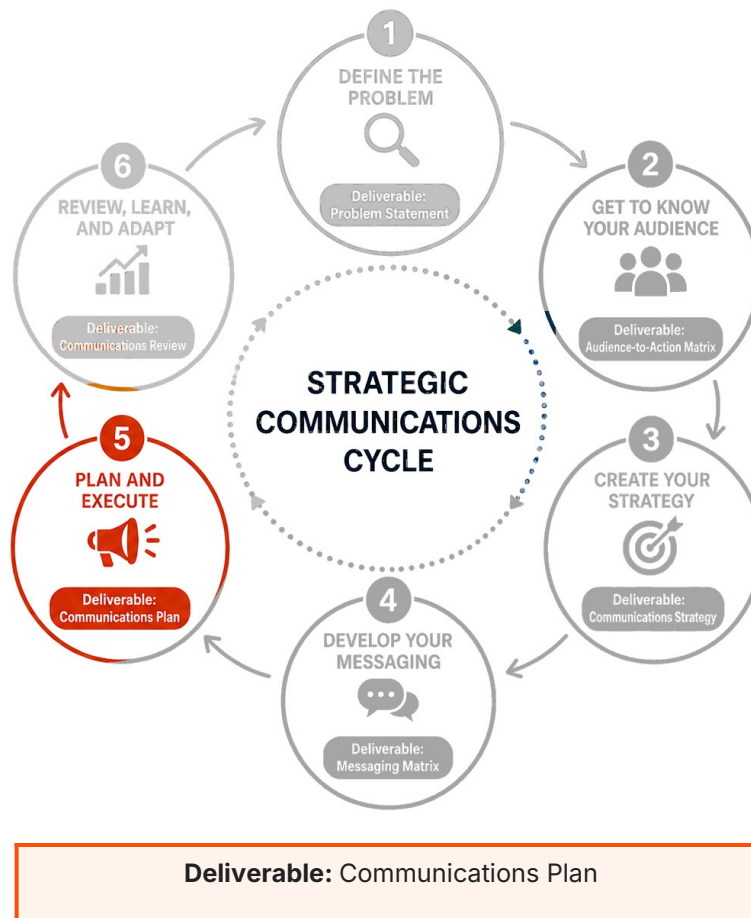
The messaging matrix brings these elements together into practical guidance that can be used consistently across grant proposals, policy briefs, presentations, media interviews, website content, and stakeholder engagement.

OpenCultivate Messaging Matrix

Messaging Element	Public Research Funders	Policymakers	Universities & Researchers
Core Motivation	Advance scientific innovation, research excellence, and workforce development.	Strengthen food security, economic competitiveness, and biotechnology leadership.	Advance scientific excellence, collaboration, and research funding.
Desired Action	Establish dedicated funding calls for cultivated meat research and enabling technologies.	Increase public investment in cultivated meat research and enabling technologies.	Develop new research partnerships and establish cultivated meat research programmes.
Core Message	Open-access cultivated meat research addresses critical scientific bottlenecks and accelerates innovation across the entire sector.	Investing in cultivated meat research strengthens national food security, drives economic growth, and positions the country as a biotechnology leader.	Collaborative research accelerates scientific discovery, develops future talent, and helps overcome the shared scientific bottlenecks limiting commercialization.
Supporting Evidence	Peer-reviewed publications, research gap analyses, government R&D priorities.	Government statistics, economic analyses, food security projections, workforce data.	Peer-reviewed research, collaborative publications, international case studies, funding opportunities.
Preferred Language	Open-access research, enabling technologies, cultivated meat, scientific innovation.	Food security, biotechnology, innovation, economic competitiveness, domestic manufacturing.	Scientific collaboration, enabling technologies, open-access research, interdisciplinary innovation.
Language to Avoid	"Lab-grown meat," hype-driven claims, consumer marketing language.	Anti-farmer language, excessive technical jargon, moral arguments.	Consumer marketing language, exaggerated impact claims, hype.
Trusted Messenger	Universities, independent scientists, public research institutions.	Government scientists, universities, respected economists, research institutes.	Leading researchers, universities, scientific societies, research institutions.

Step 5: Plan and Execute

By this stage, your organization has already made the key strategic communications decisions. You have defined the problem, identified the audiences who can help solve it, developed a communications strategy, and built a messaging matrix that outlines what each audience needs to hear. The next step is turning those decisions into action.



Turn strategy into action through channels, activities, timing, and audience engagement.

What this step does

- Selects channels and communications activities
- Maps the audience journey
- Assigns timing, responsibilities, and measures

A communications plan provides a practical roadmap for implementing your communications strategy. It identifies what activities will take place, who they are for, when they will happen, who is responsible, and how success will be measured.

Rather than producing communications on an ad hoc basis, a communications plan helps ensure that every activity contributes to a broader strategic objective.

The Deliverable: A Communications Plan

The primary output of this step is a communications plan—a practical working document that translates your communications strategy into coordinated action.

At its core, a communications plan answers one simple question:

How will we deliver the right message to the right audience, through the right channel, at the right time, to achieve the desired outcome?

Keeping this question at the centre ensures that every communication has a clear purpose. Rather than producing disconnected activities, organizations can see how each report, meeting, presentation, or campaign contributes to broader communications objectives. In this way, the communications plan becomes more than a schedule of activities—it becomes a roadmap for achieving strategic outcomes.

Components of a Communications Plan

A communications plan brings together the decisions you have already made throughout this framework into a single working document. It connects your audiences, messages, objectives, channels, and activities so that every communication reinforces the same strategic direction.

Although communications plans vary in complexity, most include the following components:

- **Target Audience(s):** The audience each communications activity is designed to reach.
- **Core Messages:** The audience-specific messages developed in your messaging matrix.
- **Desired Audience Action:** The platforms or formats used to reach each audience.
- **Communications Objectives:** What communications are intended to achieve
- **Communications Channels:** How you will reach each audience (e.g., LinkedIn, policy brief, conference, webinar, newsletter, media, website).
- **Communications Activities:** The reports, events, campaigns, meetings, or other communications outputs that deliver your messages.

Your target audience and desired audience action were identified in the audience-to-action matrix in Step 2, while your core messages were developed in the messaging matrix in Step 4. This means that much of your communications plan has already been completed.

The primary focus of this step is to determine how those audiences and messages will be put into practice. The remaining sections of this chapter will guide you through developing your communications objectives, selecting the most effective communications channels, planning your communications activities, building a realistic timeline, as well as assigning roles and responsibilities that will help you evaluate whether your communications have achieved their intended objectives.

Writing Communications Objectives

Communications objectives create the bridge between strategy and action. While your strategic communications outcomes describe the long-term change your organization hopes to achieve, communications objectives define the specific changes your communications should create over a defined period of time.

Well-written objectives provide focus. They help teams prioritize activities, select appropriate channels, measure progress, and determine whether communications are contributing to broader organizational goals.

A strong communications objective should:

- Be **specific** by clearly describing the desired outcome.
- Be **audience-focused** by identifying whose behaviour, perception, or decision you want to influence.
- Be **action-oriented** by defining the change your communications should help achieve.
- Be **aligned** with your organization's broader communications strategy and strategic communications outcomes.
- Be **measurable** by including a clear success indicator and timeframe.

A useful way to write communications objectives is:

**Desired Outcome + Audience + Strategic Communications Outcome + KPI +
Timeframe**

The following table illustrates the difference between weak and strong communications objectives.

EXAMPLES OF WEAK VS. STRONG COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVES

Strong communications objectives are specific, audience-focused, action-oriented, measurable, and time-bound.

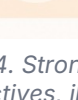
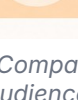
 WEAK COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVE	 STRONG COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVE
 Raise awareness.	 Increase awareness of plant-based school meal programmes among local education policymakers, measured by securing meetings with eight school district decision-makers within the next 12 months. <i>(Plant-based advocacy organization)</i>
 Improve communications.	 Position the organization as a trusted source of alternative protein market intelligence among food manufacturers, measured by increasing downloads of its annual industry report by 30% within the next 12 months. <i>(Market research organization)</i>
 Get more funding.	 Strengthen donor confidence among philanthropic funders, measured by securing five new philanthropic funding conversations within the next 12 months. <i>(Non-profit organization)</i>
 Grow our audience.	 Increase engagement among livestock producers, measured by recruiting 50 producers to participate in transition workshops within the next 18 months. <i>(Farmer transition organization)</i>
 Build public trust.	 Increase consumer confidence in cultivated meat, measured by achieving a 20% increase in positive sentiment in post-campaign surveys within the next 12 months. <i>(Public engagement organization)</i>

Figure 14. Strong and weak communications objectives. Comparison of weak and well-written communications objectives, illustrating how clear objectives connect audiences, desired outcomes, KPIs, and timeframes.

Selecting Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Measuring communications is about much more than counting outputs. Publishing reports, hosting events, or posting on social media may demonstrate activity, but they do not necessarily demonstrate impact.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) help organizations determine whether their communications influenced the audiences they intended to reach and whether those audiences took the desired actions identified earlier in the framework.

Every communications objective should therefore include one or more meaningful KPIs. Examples of outcome-focused KPIs include:

- Stakeholder meetings secured
- Partnerships established
- Policy citations
- Newsletter subscriptions from priority audiences
- Meaningful audience engagement
- Speaking invitations

When selecting KPIs, ask:

- Does this KPI directly measure the objective?

- Is it realistic to collect and monitor?
- Does it measure an outcome rather than simply an activity?

Choosing Your Communications Channels

Once you know who you are trying to influence and what you want them to do, the next step is deciding where to communicate with them.

Different audiences consume information in different ways. Selecting the right communications channel means understanding where your audience already looks for information, who they trust, and how they prefer to engage.

Rather than asking, *"Which communications channel should we use?"* ask, *"Where is this audience most likely to see, trust, and act on this message?"*

Successful communicators do not begin by selecting their favourite channel. They begin by understanding how their audience discovers information, who they trust, and where important decisions are influenced. The most effective communications plans therefore match the channel to the audience rather than expecting audiences to adapt to the channel.

For example, policymakers may be more likely to engage with policy briefings, conferences, and one-to-one meetings than with social media. Researchers often rely on academic publications, conferences, webinars, and professional networks, while philanthropic funders may prefer direct conversations, newsletters, or tailored funding proposals.

 AUDIENCE-CHANNEL EXAMPLES Match your communications channels to the audiences you want to reach.						
 AUDIENCE		 CHANNELS THEY ARE MOST LIKELY TO USE				
 Policymakers		 Policy briefs	 Stakeholder meetings	 Parliamentary events	 Conferences	 Government consultations
 Public Research Funders		 Funding calls	 Research forums	 Scientific conferences	 Newsletters	 Direct meetings
 Philanthropic Funders		 Funding proposals	 One-to-one meetings	 Newsletters	 Annual reports	 Webinars
 Universities & Researchers		 Academic journals	 Conferences	 Webinars	 LinkedIn	 Research networks
 Journalists & Media		 Press releases	 Media briefings	 Interviews	 Expert commentary	 Newsworthy reports
 Consumers		 Social media	 Websites	 Videos	 Influencers	 Community events

Figure 14. Audience-channel examples. Examples of various communications channels that different types of audiences might use.

Planning Your Audience Engagement

Communications activities rarely succeed in isolation. Most audiences require multiple interactions before they change their thinking, build trust, or take meaningful action. A policymaker is unlikely to support new research funding after reading a single policy brief, just as a philanthropic funder may require several interactions before making a grant.

Rather than viewing communications as a series of one-off outputs, successful organizations think about how different activities work together to create an ongoing conversation. A report may introduce an idea, a conference presentation may build credibility, a stakeholder meeting may deepen relationships, and follow-up conversations may ultimately lead to action.

When planning your audience engagement, think about the sequence of interactions your audience is likely to experience. Ask yourself:

- What is the first interaction this audience is likely to have with our organization?
- How can we build credibility after that initial interaction?
- What opportunities exist to deepen engagement?
- What communications activity is most likely to encourage the desired action?
- How will we maintain the relationship after that action has been taken?

Rather than viewing reports, meetings, webinars, and campaigns as standalone outputs, consider how they can work together as part of an ongoing engagement journey.

Planning Your Communications Activities

Communications activities are where strategy becomes visible. They are the practical actions your organization takes to move audiences from awareness to engagement and ultimately toward the desired action identified earlier in the framework. These include reports, presentations, webinars, meetings, campaigns, media engagement, and other activities.

The strongest communications plans do not rely on a single report or event. Instead, they combine complementary activities that reinforce one another over time. Each activity should support a communications objective, communicate a consistent core message, and move a priority audience one step closer to the desired outcome.

The examples below demonstrate how a well-defined communications objective provides the foundation for selecting communications activities and channels that work together to achieve a desired outcome.

 EXAMPLES OF COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVES, ACTIVITIES, AND CHANNELS Different objectives require different activities and channels to reach the right audience and drive the right outcome.		
COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVE	EXAMPLE COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITIES	PRIMARY CHANNEL(S)
 Increase awareness of plant-based school meal programmes among local education policymakers, measured by securing meetings with eight school district decision-makers within the next 12 months.	• Produce an evidence-based policy brief • Organize a stakeholder roundtable • Develop an advocacy campaign • Prepare briefing materials for decision-makers	• Direct meetings • Education conferences • Government consultations • Email outreach
 Position the organization as a trusted source of alternative protein market intelligence among food manufacturers, measured by increasing downloads of its annual industry report by 30% within the next 12 months.	• Publish an annual market intelligence report • Produce an executive summary • Record an expert webinar • Develop a series of data visualizations and infographics	• Company website • LinkedIn • Industry newsletters • Trade media • Food industry conferences
 Increase engagement among livestock producers, measured by recruiting 50 producers to participate in transition workshops within the next 18 months.	• Develop a farmer transition toolkit • Organize regional workshops • Produce video case studies featuring early adopters • Create a practical FAQ resource	• Farmer associations • Agricultural events • Webinars • Email newsletters • Online farming communities

Figure 15. Connections between communications objectives, activities, and channels. Framework showing how communications objectives, activities, timelines, and primary channels are related to each other.



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PLAYBOOK IN ACTION

OpenCultivate Creates Its Communications Plan

Having completed the previous four steps of the framework, the OpenCultivate Institute is now ready to translate its communications strategy into action. The communications plan below demonstrates how the Institute brings together its communications objectives, audiences, messages, channels, activities, and success measures into a practical roadmap for implementation.

OpenCultivate Institute Communications Plan

	Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3
Communications Objective	Increase awareness of the importance of public investment in cultivated meat research among national policymakers.	Strengthen confidence among philanthropic funders in OpenCultivate's open-access research model.	Increase collaboration with universities and researchers to expand the national cultivated meat research network.
Target Audience	National policymakers	Philanthropic funders	Universities & researchers
Core Message	Public investment in cultivated meat research strengthens food security, innovation, and economic competitiveness.	Open-access research accelerates innovation across the entire cultivated meat sector.	Scientific collaboration helps solve shared technical challenges faster than organizations working alone.
Desired Audience Action	Support increased public investment in cultivated meat R&D.	Invest in OpenCultivate's collaborative research programmes.	Join OpenCultivate's research network and collaborative projects.
Primary Channels	Policy briefings, stakeholder meetings, government consultations, conferences	Grant proposals, donor briefings, newsletters, annual reports	Conferences, webinars, LinkedIn, research networks
Communications Activities	Publish policy brief; organize stakeholder meetings; present at conferences; submit consultation responses	Publish impact report; organize donor briefing; distribute quarterly newsletter; submit funding proposals	Host research webinar; present at conferences; publish collaboration opportunities; launch researcher newsletter
Audience Engagement Journey	Policy Brief → Conference → Stakeholder Meeting → Consultation → Follow-up	Impact Report → Donor Briefing → One-to-One Meeting → Grant Proposal → Partnership	Webinar → Conference → Research Workshop → Collaborative Project → Long-term Research Network
KPIs	Five policymaker meetings; two consultation invitations; three policy citations	Five funding conversations; two multi-year grant proposals; one new funding partner	Ten universities engaged; three collaborative research projects; twenty-five webinar participants

Step 6: Review, Learn and Adapt

Strategic communications does not end when a report is published, a campaign concludes, or a stakeholder meeting takes place. In many ways, this is where the most valuable work begins. Every communications activity generates evidence about your audiences. It reveals which messages resonated, which channels encouraged engagement, which assumptions proved correct, and where your strategy may need to evolve.



Evaluate results, capture lessons, and adapt future communications based on evidence.

What this step does

- Measures progress and outcomes
- Captures lessons and evidence of impact
- Adapts future communications

Organizations that regularly review their communications become better communicators over time. Rather than relying on instinct alone, they continuously refine their approach using evidence gathered from every interaction.

Just as importantly, these insights provide valuable evidence for demonstrating impact. A well-documented communications review can inform annual reports, funding proposals, grant reporting, board updates, stakeholder communications, and other organizational reporting by providing concrete examples of progress, lessons learned, and measurable outcomes.

The purpose of this step is to help your organization measure progress, capture lessons learned, document communications impact, and adapt future communications based on evidence rather than assumptions.

Why Reviewing Communications Matters

Reviewing communications is not about judging success or failure. It is about learning. Even objectives that are only partially achieved can provide valuable insight into audience behaviour, emerging opportunities, and future communications priorities.

Many organizations evaluate communications by measuring outputs, such as the number of reports published, events delivered, newsletters sent, or social media posts shared. While these metrics provide useful information about what was delivered, they rarely demonstrate whether communications influenced the audiences you identified, encouraged the desired actions, or contributed to your broader strategic communications outcomes.

Effective communications evaluation therefore focuses on **outcomes rather than outputs**. Instead of asking *"How much did we produce?"*, ask *"What changed because of our communications?"*



Figure 16. From activity to impact. Examples illustrating the differences between outputs (what you produced) and outcomes (what changed because of it).

The Deliverable: Communications Review

The deliverable for this step is a Communications Review—a concise document that captures what happened, what changed, what was learned, and how future communications should evolve.

Rather than producing a lengthy evaluation report, think of the Communications Review as an opportunity to pause, reflect, and make better decisions before beginning the next communications cycle.

A communications review should answer six simple questions:

- Did we achieve our communications objectives?
- Did we reach the right audiences?
- Which messages resonated most?
- Which communications activities and channels were most effective?
- What changed because of our communications?
- What should we continue, improve, or stop doing?

Together, these questions help ensure that communications become more strategic and effective over time.

Completing Your Communications Review

By the time you reach this stage, your organization has already completed the work outlined throughout the previous five steps of the framework. The purpose of the communications review is to revisit those decisions with fresh evidence.

Did your assumptions about your audiences prove correct? Did your messaging resonate as expected? Were the channels you selected the most effective? Did your activities contribute to your communications objectives?

The following sections will help you answer these questions and identify opportunities to strengthen your next communications cycle.

Figure 17. From activity to impact. The Communications Review captures whether the objective was achieved,

COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW			
Six key questions to reflect on and strengthen your communications impact.			
REVIEW AREA	KEY QUESTION		
1  OBJECTIVES Review your strategic communications outcomes.	Did we achieve what we set out to accomplish? 		
2  AUDIENCES Review audience engagement and reach.	Did we reach the right people and engage them meaningfully? 		
3  MESSAGES Review the impact and resonance of your messaging.	Which messages resonated most with our audiences? 		
4  ACTIVITIES & CHANNELS Review the effectiveness of your communications activities and channels.	Which communications and channels were most effective? 		
5  RESULTS Review the results and actions achieved.	What changed because of our communications? 		
6  NEXT STEPS Identify lessons learned and priorities for the next cycle.	What should we continue, change, or stop doing next? 		

whether or not the communications activity engaged with the correct audiences, which messages resonated, which communications channels were the most effective, the impacts of communications efforts, as well as lessons learned.

Review Your Communications Objectives

Start by revisiting the communications objectives you developed in Step 5. These objectives provide the benchmark against which your communications should be evaluated.

Remember that communications objectives are intended to guide learning as much as performance. If an objective was not fully achieved, ask why. The answer may reveal opportunities to strengthen your activities, refine your messaging, or reconsider your assumptions about your audience.

Review Audience Engagement

Communications success is not determined by how many people saw your content—it is determined by whether the right people engaged in meaningful ways. This stage is an opportunity to reflect on how your priority audiences responded and whether they progressed toward the desired actions identified in your Audience-to-Action Matrix.

Consider whether or not you reached the intended audiences, as well as which audiences engaged most positively and if they took the desired actions.

Review your Messaging

Messages should evolve as your organization learns more about its audiences. The language that resonates today may become less effective as political priorities, scientific evidence, or public conversations change.

Reviewing your messaging helps ensure your communications remain relevant, persuasive, and aligned with the needs of your audiences.

Ask yourself:

- Which messages generated the strongest response?
- Which messages failed to resonate?
- Did any language create confusion?
- What questions or objections emerged repeatedly?
- Should any framing, terminology, or supporting evidence be updated?

Review your Activities and Channels

The final step is understanding how effectively your communications activities and channels worked together to achieve your objectives.

No communications channel is inherently "good" or "bad." Their value depends entirely on whether they reached the intended audience and encouraged the desired action. The goal is to

identify which combinations of activities and channels generated the greatest impact so future communications can focus time and resources where they are most effective.

Reflect on questions such as:

- Which communications activities generated the greatest impact?
- Which channels reached the intended audiences most effectively?
- Which activities encouraged meaningful conversations or partnerships?
- Which activities delivered limited value relative to the time and resources invested?

These insights will help you prioritize future communications efforts.

Capture Lessons and Identify Next Steps

Every communications cycle provides an opportunity to become a better communicator.

By documenting lessons learned while they are still fresh, organizations build institutional knowledge that can strengthen future campaigns, improve relationships with key audiences, and help new staff understand what has worked previously.

These lessons become the starting point for the next communications cycle—ensuring that your communications strategy continues to evolve alongside your organization and the audiences it serves.



OpenCultivate Creates Its Communications Review

One year after implementing its communications plan, the OpenCultivate Institute conducts its first Communications Review. While many of its communications objectives were achieved, the review also identifies several opportunities to strengthen future communications. Rather than treating these findings as successes or failures, the Institute uses them to refine its communications strategy for the next planning cycle.

Review Area	Findings	Adaptations for the Next Communications Cycle
Communications Objectives	OpenCultivate secured six meetings with national policymakers, exceeding its target of five. However, only one meeting resulted in a discussion about long-term public investment. Policymakers were more interested in the economic competitiveness and biotechnology benefits than technical research priorities.	Revise future communications objectives to focus not only on awareness, but also on encouraging concrete policy discussions around public research funding.
Audience Engagement	Policymakers and public research funders engaged more actively than expected. The Institute also attracted interest from regional economic development agencies, an audience that had not been identified during Step 2.	Add regional innovation agencies as a secondary audience and develop tailored messaging that emphasizes regional investment, job creation, and economic development.
Messaging	Messages focused on reducing production costs generated less engagement than messages emphasizing national competitiveness, food security, and scientific leadership. Policymakers consistently asked how cultivated meat research could strengthen domestic biotechnology industries.	Update the Messaging Matrix to lead with innovation, economic competitiveness, and food security before discussing technical research priorities. Strengthen supporting evidence using national economic impact data.
Activities & Channels	Stakeholder meetings and conference presentations generated the strongest engagement. Unexpectedly, several policymakers first encountered OpenCultivate through LinkedIn posts shared by universities and research institutions before requesting meetings. Traditional press releases generated little engagement.	Continue prioritizing direct engagement while expanding LinkedIn as a strategic awareness-building channel. Reduce investment in standalone press releases and instead repurpose research findings into short, shareable digital content.
Results	The Institute exceeded its meeting target, established two new university partnerships, and received an invitation to contribute evidence to a national food innovation consultation. These outcomes strengthened OpenCultivate's reputation as a trusted scientific advisor.	Build on these relationships through regular policy updates, annual stakeholder briefings, and collaborative research events to maintain engagement between funding cycles.
Lessons Learned & Next Steps	Communications were most successful when they connected cultivated meat research to national priorities rather than technical innovation alone. Building awareness through trusted scientific partners also proved more effective than relying on traditional media.	Revise the Communications Strategy and Messaging Matrix to reflect these insights. Expand digital thought leadership, strengthen relationships with research partners, and introduce new engagement activities targeting regional innovation agencies.

Conclusion: Strategic Communications is a Continuous Process

Strategic communications is not a one-time exercise or a collection of individual communications activities. It is an ongoing process of understanding audiences, making deliberate decisions, building relationships, and continuously learning from experience.

Throughout this playbook, you have worked through a six-step framework designed to help organizations move from reacting to communications challenges to communicating with purpose. Each step builds on the one before it, creating a practical system that connects strategic thinking with day-to-day communications activities.

The framework is intentionally cyclical. Every communications review generates new insights that help organizations redefine problems, better understand their audiences, strengthen their messaging, and refine future communications plans. In this way, communications become a process of continuous improvement rather than a series of isolated campaigns.

Communicating for Impact

One of the central ideas running throughout this playbook is that effective communications are not measured by the volume of content an organization produces, but by the change those communications create.

Publishing more reports, attending more conferences, or posting more frequently on social media will not necessarily increase impact. Strategic communications begin by identifying the audiences that matter most, understanding what motivates them, and creating opportunities for meaningful engagement. Every message, activity, and channel should support a broader strategic objective and encourage a clear next step.

When communications are grounded in strategy rather than activity, organizations are better positioned to secure funding, influence policy, build partnerships, strengthen public trust, and accelerate progress across the alternative protein sector.

Looking Ahead

The alternative protein sector will continue to evolve. New scientific discoveries, changing political priorities, emerging regulations, and shifting public attitudes will create both opportunities and challenges for the organizations working within it.

For many small and medium-sized organizations, resources will always be limited. Yet strategic communications do not require large communications teams or substantial budgets. They require thoughtful planning, a clear understanding of audiences, consistent messaging, and a willingness to learn and adapt over time.

This playbook was developed to provide a practical framework for doing exactly that. Whether your organization is seeking to influence policy, secure funding, build research collaborations, engage industry, or increase public understanding, the principles remain the same: define the problem, understand your audience, communicate with purpose, and continually learn from the results.

Ultimately, strategic communications are about more than sharing information. They are about helping the right people understand why your work matters—and creating the relationships, trust, and momentum needed to turn that understanding into meaningful action.

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