

ENRD Workshop on NRN Communication

Workshop highlights

This ENRD workshop brought together Network Support Unit (NSU) representatives dealing with rural development communication tasks to exchange on and improve communication activities at both the national (NRN) and European (ENRD) levels.

Participants heard from external communication experts, exchanged communications practices and learned from peers about the different ways of improving communication to reach NRNs' target audiences. The meeting provided an excellent opportunity to take stock of past experiences and build on successful examples that can easily be transferred to other NRNs.

The workshop was organised back-to-back with the [11th NRNs' meeting](#) of 31 May 2018.

Event Information

Date: 1 June 2018

Location: Prague, Czech Republic

Organiser: ENRD Contact Point

Participants: Over 60 participants who deal with communication tasks, mostly representing NRNs, but also Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies and LAGs.

Outcomes: Exchange on communication practices, examples of tools and channels used to reach different target groups and inform about rural development.

Website: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-nrn-communication_en

New ideas and inspiration

Innovative communication practices & tools



The morning session of the event looked at how our own stereotypes and habits get in the way of innovation and creativity in communication.

External communication experts run simple and interactive exercises showed how breaking these stereotypes and removing hard-wired habits could significantly improve people's attention span and concentration, resulting in them remembering the content presented more easily and vividly.

Avoiding these unwanted stereotypes and encouraging thinking outside the box is a key part in the creative process. However, there must be an impulse for re-starting this process.

Another important element of effective communication is storytelling as it helps to keep audiences engaged from the start until the end. Participants engaged in an interactive exercise on practical storytelling in the aim of creating short stories. This uncovered how technical information can easily be incorporated in brief, impactful stories. The session served as an inspiration to participants to use storytelling in their daily work.

Engaging the online community: website & social media



A website is not merely an information repository, it is also a tool to disseminate meaningful content and engage with the intended audiences.

Identifying and setting its purpose from the start can lead the 'user journey' experience. This will in turn make it easier for the intended audiences to understand the information and engage with the organisation.

Similarly, an organisation needs a specific purpose to be present on social media. The objectives need to be clear in order to develop a social media strategy that is content-rich and enables interaction with the audience.

Equally, it is important for the strategy to include 'SMART goals' that help reach the intended objectives. Defining the audience to be targeted allows to identify the most appropriate channel for the purpose. There are different techniques for content creation that help engage with the audience, including the different options on platforms such as Facebook or Twitter to increase post reach. For example, making use of audio-visual media helps increase post reach on social media platforms. However, each platform has its own purpose and the content needs to be tailored.

Sharing practices across the EU



This poster session featured interactive presentations of five NRNs' communication practices.

1. [Europe in your neighbourhood](#), Flemish Rural Network (Belgium). An annual event to communicate the practical benefits of the EU rural development, regional, social, and fisheries funds to the broader public.
2. [Educational materials for schools](#), Czech Rural Network. A series of booklets targeted at elementary school pupils of different ages, promoting Czech agriculture and communicating the benefits of the Rural Development Programme by showcasing good project practice in an easy-to-understand language.
3. [Website User Experience](#), Finnish Rural Network. A website user experience exercise that helped
4. [Rural4Learning](#), Italian Rural Network. A comprehensive communications campaign – including a website, publications, educational materials, networking events, audio-visuals, business and peer-to-peer training – aimed at raising awareness of Rural Development policy's role in supporting environmental sustainability and consumer protection.
5. [Facebook group for LAGs](#), Polish Rural Network. A Facebook discussion group intended only for Polish Local Action Groups (LAGs) to enable free communication around the practicalities of LEADER implementation, finding solutions to common challenges, and exchange of good practice.

Building future actions

In preparation for this workshop, ENRD CP conducted a short survey among NRN colleagues in charge of communication tasks. The results informed the main topics of discussion in order to address the most immediate communication needs.

→ [See survey results](#)

Discussion Group 1: Target groups and how to reach them

The discussion focused on practices and examples of targeted communication that NRNs have been using and found successful. Two examples from Sweden (use of webinars and podcasts for farmers) and Italy (multi-channel communication targeted to different stakeholders) framed the discussion.

The survey conducted in preparation for the workshop revealed five main target groups for NRNs' communication. For each group, participants identified examples from their own work:

1. **LAGs:** specific newsletter with information for LAGs; LEADER bus bringing together policy-makers, beneficiaries, media and other LAGs; national and regional events meant to promote the assets and products of an area covered by the LAGs.
2. **Farmers:** direct contact with farmers' associations; radio; podcasts; TV spots; video; making use of existing channels, such as local newspapers, that are appealing to farmers.
3. **Local/regional institutions:** newsletters; direct contact via email; workshops and seminars; field trips.
4. **Project beneficiaries:** videos; campaigns in the area (banners, leaflets, etc.); TV spots.
5. **Broader public:** Facebook campaigns (sponsored content); celebrities & influencers as guests for podcasts, videos or TV spots; campaigns in school (materials, field visits, etc.); agri-tourism establishments; fairs.

Participants considered monitoring and evaluation important to inform and bring about any changes in the way they communicate and the channels they use to reach their target audiences.

→ Download handout: [Webinars on rural topics](#)

→ Download handout: [Podcasts on rural areas](#)



Discussion Group 2: Creative audio-visual communication

The discussion highlighted examples of video use to promote rural development opportunities and results to potential beneficiaries and interested parties.

In Scotland, the NSU produced longer case study films, while the Portuguese NSU decided to produce one-minute films to attract the attention of a broader audience. The Welsh NSU produced a video on a LEADER project to encourage tourism in the local area. The Finnish NSU cooperated with a young vlogger to promote life in rural areas to the target group of young people of his age.

A key element relates to the ownership of the videos produced together with relevant local actors, fostering their further engagement. Using existing channels and involving local stakeholders in deciding what to present in the videos is crucial to successful rural development video production.

For example, discussions within thematic working groups seems to be a good way to identify what the video production should aim to achieve.

→ Download handout: [Rural development on film](#)

→ Download handout: [The power of visuals](#)



Discussion Group 3: Digital Communication: website & social media

Two examples of launching a new, revamped website (French NRN) and developing web tools – a rural environment database and an interactive map of LAGs (Irish NRN) – framed the discussion on this topic.

Participants exchanged on success factors for developing and maintaining a strong online presence, as well as difficulties faced throughout the various stages of these processes.

To be effective, digital communication needs to have a clear overall purpose, extended through specific individual objectives for each of the various tools and channels used. Content needs to be generated through a collaborative internal process and be kept short and simple in order to match a wide range of information needs.

Obtaining users' feedback and consulting them regularly throughout the process of creating content or developing web tools is an important success factor. Ways of collecting feedback include, but are not limited to, qualitative and quantitative surveys, engagement on social media, word of mouth, piloting of new tools with selected focus groups, and monitoring outreach through web and social media analytics.

Difficulties with digital communication activities include: long, complicated and costly development of web tools; complex selection and targeting of content to specific groups; obligation to comply with sometimes inflexible internal structure or requirements such as the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

→ Download handout: [Enhanced NRN website](#)

→ Download handout: [Interactive map of Irish LAGs](#)

→ Download handout: [Rural environment database](#)



Discussion Group 4: Events

The discussion was kick-started by two examples of events: a series of six farm visits spread over 18 months (Walloon NRN) and an annual fair promoting rural life (Estonian NRN).

An effective aspect of event management is engaging with local actors during the preparation of an event, which has broader implications for NRNs' stakeholder involvement. Peer-to-peer exchanges are useful to gain additional insight into what the target audiences will look to get out of an event.

Events intended for wider audiences can help NRNs engage with a broader, interested audience as long as they successfully pick the interest of the media. Cooperation and joint ownership of events between NRNs and NGOs or other actors can reduce the effort of event organisation in terms of finances, skills, people and time. Other shared benefits include: generating ideas, connecting actors, knowledge sharing and improving visibility.

→ Download handout: [Innovation Route](#)

→ Download handout: [Open Farm Day](#)



Joint communication activities & initiatives

This session identified actions that can be undertaken jointly at the EU level by NRNs and the ENRD. The potential cooperation with the ENRD CP offers opportunities for NRNs' involvement in the preparation, delivery and/or follow-up of planned ENRD activities in the upcoming year. This includes NRN meetings, capacity building events, thematic workshops/seminars, and conferences.



A separate exercise mapped out what NSUs are already doing and/or are planning to do in terms of dissemination, translation and links to ENRD information materials.

Wrap-up & next steps

Participants valued the importance of practical exercises carried out during the morning session and reflected upon their own habits and stereotypes used in communication. They welcomed the chance to discuss and share their knowledge and tools used in communicating about rural development.

In addition, the meeting and the fruitful exchanges helped reinforce the network of rural communicators that are now increasingly active on the Facebook group '[Communicating RDP](#)'. It is intended that this group will strengthen its role as an exchange platform between NRNs and with the ENRD.

The ENRD CP will continue to map out good practices in communication, make them available on the website and disseminate them to all relevant parties.