



# How to Choose the Right Communications Vehicles for Your Project

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This is Part 3 in a 4-part series on Communication Planning for Project Success. Part 1 focused on the reasons project communication planning is so important. Part 2 provided tools to help you analyze your project stakeholders. Part 3 takes a look at how to determine which communications vehicle will best meet the needs of your stakeholders.

Most of us would not ride a moped on the freeway. Yet using the wrong medium to communicate to your project stakeholders creates the same effect. Your message will either be run over by all the other traffic or simply passed by.

So how do you choose the best vehicle to communicate to your stakeholders? This article will provide you with the information you need to help you choose your communications methods so they do not get lost in traffic.

## The PMBOK® on Communications

According to the Project Management Institute, "Project Communications Management provides the critical links among people and information that are necessary for successful communications."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, choosing the right vehicles for communicating is critical.

The medium, method, or vehicle is as important as the message. In fact, the means of communication often have a greater influence on people than the information being sent.

## Step #3 of the Communication Planning Process

As a review, communication planning involves the following four steps:

<b>Step 1.</b>	Identify your project stakeholders.
<b>Step 2.</b>	Analyze the needs and expectations of your stakeholders.
<b>Step 3.</b>	Identify existing and possible new communications vehicles or opportunities, and choose the appropriate vehicles for your stakeholders.
<b>Step 4.</b>	Develop, document, and monitor your communications plan.

The focus of this installment is Step 3. Simply put, step 3 involves choosing the right communication vehicles for your project. First, you and your project team need to identify the existing available communication vehicles (methods). Second, you and your project team should brainstorm and consider new communication vehicles (methods). Then you must match messages and stakeholders to the most effective vehicles.

A list of standard communication vehicles includes publications, email, existing and/or regularly scheduled meetings (e.g. departmental, staff), reports, websites, dashboards, and others. The trick is to make the most appropriate match among methods, messages, and stakeholders. As a guide, here are several questions to ask when determining which method to use for your communications.

- ◆ Which method or vehicle will ensure that the communication reaches the stakeholder?
- ◆ Which method or vehicle will increase the likelihood that the message will be actually received and understood?
- ◆ How much information will be included and at what level of detail?
- ◆ Which method is most appropriate for the type of message?
- ◆ Which method does the stakeholder prefer?



Figure 1. lists several of the most used methods or vehicles for project communications and the suggested stakeholders.

Method/Vehicle	Suggested Stakeholders	Description
<b>Executive level project team status meetings</b>	Executive steering team members, sponsors, other high-level stakeholders	Provides a high-level status update and review of the project with less frequency than the regular project team status meetings.
<b>Project team status meetings</b>	Project team members	Provides regular status updates and reviews of the project. Limit attendance to those who need to be there. Have a clear agenda and distribute action minutes.
<b>E-mail</b>	Project team members, project resources, general messages to all stakeholders	Allows project teams to communicate text, audio, and video files between the team members. Use for routine and day-to-day messages or broad messages to a large audience.
<b>Instant Messaging (IM)</b>	Project team members	Allows team members to communicate real-time.
<b>Telephone/Video conferences</b>	Project team members, project resources, vendors	Provides a medium to involve team members at other locations or in other geographic regions.
<b>Knowledge Respository</b>	Project team members	Houses all of the project documentation including meeting minutes, issues logs, risk management plans, etc.
<b>Intranet, Internet boards, Project Websites</b>	All stakeholders	Formally communicates status, progress, highlights, and objectives.
<b>Project road show</b>	Stakeholders outside the day-to-day implementation, end users of the project results	Provides project information to stakeholders or users and allows for feedback into the project.
<b>Face-to-face</b>	Project team members	Provides the best method for dealing with controversial issues or individual problems with team members.
<b>Walk-about</b>	Project team members	Involves a hands-on face-to-face approach with the project teams.

## The Status Report

The most commonly used communication vehicle on projects is the status report. Typically the status report is compiled on a regular basis (weekly to monthly depending on the project size and activity). Following is a list of the typical information included:

- ◆ High-level project status related to time, budget, and scope
- ◆ Accomplishments
- ◆ Issues and recommended resolutions
- ◆ Upcoming activities

## The Project Web Site

A newer vehicle used by projects is developing a specific web site for the project. Some projects have an outward facing site with information available to all stakeholders and a project team specific site that houses the day-to-day project documentation and information.

Typically, these sites have a high-level overview of the project, timelines, impacts on stakeholders, and questions and answers.

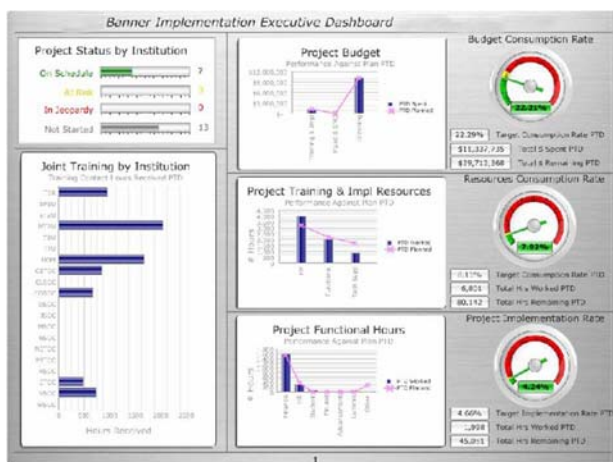
## The Project Dashboard

A project dashboard provides stakeholders with a high-level visual view of the status of the project. This unique vehicle ensures that executive-level stakeholders are able to quickly look at the visuals (usually illustrated in colors and creative graphics) and know how the project is proceeding relative to time, budget, and scope.

Don't let your project communications get lost in the traffic. Choosing the right communications vehicle is crucial in the success of your project. With the right vehicle, you can ensure that your stakeholders receive your messages and stay up to date you're your project.



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