

# Getting your community on board

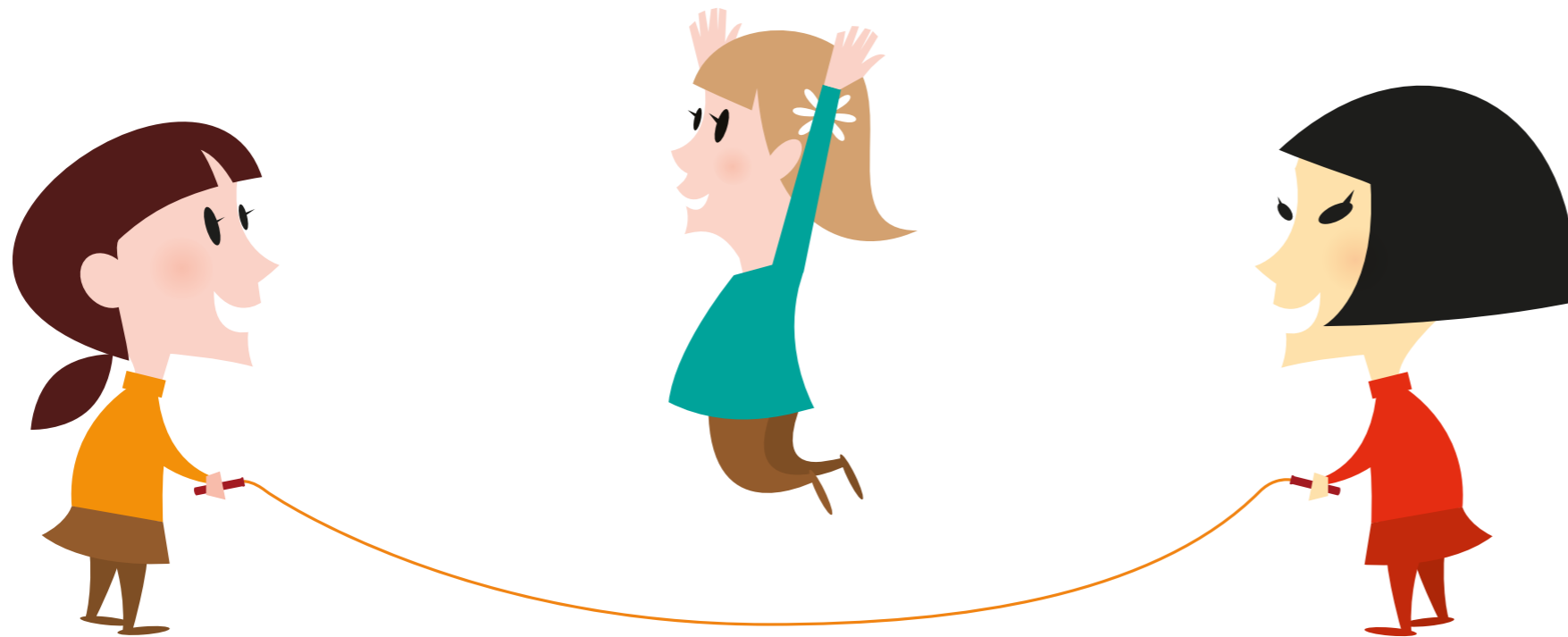
Academies Communications Toolkit



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# Why you need your community behind you



**Successful Academies are hugely important community assets. But to get to the stage where your new school is open and proving its value, you have to persuade your community to share your excitement and enthusiasm for the project.**

Schools are like no other area of public interest. Everyone has many years' experience of going to one, many people have children attending one, and the vast majority of people have opinions on them.

Your community will be keen to get its hands on as much information as possible about what is being proposed and what that means for them. Anti Academy groups are very aware of this, and are often actively campaigning from the moment an expression of interest is published.

This is why you need to get the story of Academies – and the plans for your particular Academy – well and truly out and circulating in your community from as early a stage as possible. Your aim should be not only to inform your community, but to engage them, getting them involved and interested in the project.

This guide has been compiled based on the experiences of Academies that have already been through this process. It gives suggestions and ideas for getting a positive communications campaign up and running.

## What is your story?

**There will probably be two or three main strands to the story you need to get circulating in your community.**

- 1. What Academies are.**
- 2. What your Academy in particular would be.**
- 3. Who your Academy sponsor is, and why they want to be involved.**

### **What Academies are**

In the introduction to this pack you'll find an up-to-date, standard description of Academies, put together by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. You'll also find a list of standard questions and answers about Academies.

It is important that you know these pretty much off by heart. A lot of the organised opposition you will face will be an attack on the idea of Academies in principle – so it will help you to have ready answers at your fingertips.

It's also important that you give your community the means to acquaint themselves with the concept of Academies. In this pack you'll also find a DVD and leaflet that has been designed for parents – use these to help people understand.

### **Your particular Academy**

Even in the very early days, you will have a clear vision for your Academy, and the ethos that will guide everything it does and achieves. You will know what you want its specialism to be, and why you want it to be that. This is the heart of your story. Your particular story is your brand.

You need to tell it, and keep telling it until taxi drivers tell visitors to your area: "That new school – it's going to specialise in science and engineering. That's because we've got big employers in our town who need those skills."

### **Your Academy sponsor**

Some Academy projects generate intense interest in the Academy sponsor, so you need to be prepared for questions. You also need to proactively circulate the story of your Academy sponsor. Who are they? Why did they want to get involved with the project? You have to work on the basis that people will want to know, and get the information out into your community.

## How you tell your story

### **Bite size**

If you are going to achieve the 'cabbie factor' (where your story is such common currency, it's easily reeled off by taxi drivers), you need to tell your story in a way that's easy to understand, remember and repeat.

This means not making too many separate points in one communication – as this will be too much for people to take in and process. It also means trying to encapsulate your story into easy-to-remember soundbites.

### **The Academy will have hundreds of after school clubs and activities for children to choose from.**

Is much more understandable and repeatable than...

### **A broad and extensive enrichment programme is planned to enhance learning opportunities for children.**

### **Get your story straight**

Make sure that everyone involved in the Academy project is telling the same version of the story, and is telling it in the same way.

### **The words you use**

Avoid jargon, waffle and overly complicated language. These will just confuse and obscure the story you are trying to tell. For more advice on writing, see page 18 of *Building your Academy's brand*.

### **The imagery you use**

Using positive, dynamic images of children learning can help to illustrate what your Academy might bring to your area.

### **Honesty**

Don't promise what you can't deliver. Don't try to hide the truth behind difficult-to-understand language. No-one likes spin, and you will quickly use up your stores of goodwill if you use it.

### **The basics**

Make sure you thoroughly proofread all materials before you publish or send them.

## Setting emotional objectives

**When you tell your story, it's a good idea to have some emotional objectives in mind. Your communications process shouldn't just be a matter of ticking off that you've transmitted messages X, Y and Z to target audiences A, B and C.**

For your communications to be successful, you need to consider how they will make your audiences feel.

If you want them to feel reassured, enthused, optimistic, excited... then you need to identify the parts of your story that are most likely to make them feel that way. And you need to make sure that the language you use in your communication is natural, direct and easy to understand.



**For example:**

Message	Emotional objective	Communication
The Academy will promote independent, active learning.	To make your audience excited and interested.	Learning at the Academy will be so much more than sitting in a classroom listening to a teacher. Students will be encouraged to take the initiative, experiment and make contacts with the business community.
We will encourage children to take part in a broad range of sporting activities.	To make audiences excited, interested and happy – and to reassure less sporty students.	Our sports facilities will be amazing. They will include dance studios, a fully equipped professional gymnasium and sports hall. We'll even have dance mat classes, trampolining and fencing. Our ambition will be to help everyone find an activity they love to do.

## Who is responsible for communications?

### Getting professional help

The scale of this job should not be underestimated, so you may want to consider getting a professional communications agency to create and implement your community communications plan.

Planning and implementing effective communications takes time. This can be challenging if your project is being fast-tracked, but taking the time to communicate with your community can offset ill feeling and criticism.

You will need to dedicate (probably significant) resources to managing your community communications campaign.

One of the common pitfalls of communications is lack of ownership. Somebody needs to pick up the mantle.

Before implementation, responsibility for communication will fall to either the Academy sponsor, the local authority or the project management company. Many Academy projects appoint a communications working group where responsibility is shared between all three.

However you decide to coordinate communications, you need to make sure that everyone on the project team is aware of what is being said, how it is being said, to whom and why.

You also need to ensure that you create an agile procedure that is capable of responding to situations quickly and easily.

### Example structure

Role/body	Responsibilities
<b>Communications Working Group</b> – comprising representatives of each of the delivery bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing the communications plan.</li> <li>• Signing off significant communications activity.</li> <li>• Accountable to the project steering group.</li> </ul>
<b>Communications officer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Day-to-day implementation of the communications plan.</li> <li>• Central contact for all communications activity.</li> </ul>
<b>Media relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicating your Academy's story to the media.</li> </ul>

## Communication is two-way

**To get your community on board, you need to listen to what they say. Your community needs to know that you care what they think, and will take their concerns into account.**

Also – and maybe even more importantly – by listening to your community's concerns, you will undoubtedly discover important details that will help smooth the path to your opening. Listening to your community will enable you to provide them with the information they really want!

### Communications officer

The responsibilities of the person charged with this role will include:

- Leading the development of the communications plan.
- Writing, editing and proofreading all communications materials.
- Managing the production and distribution of communications materials.

### Resources

Don't underestimate the resources you will need to sustain an effective communications campaign. Costs involved will include staffing, print, design and venue hire. The Project Steering Group will need to commit funds to cover all of these and more.

# Identify your audiences

## Identify your audiences

Every community is made up of diverse groups of people, each with different interests, needs, beliefs and priorities. If you are going to communicate effectively with them, you need to know and understand what these groups are.

Having a good understanding of your audiences will also help you to target communications effectively – because different groups will want to know different things at different times.

### Your audiences are likely to include (but certainly won't be limited to):

**Pupils** – from existing, predecessor or feeder primary schools

**Parents**

**Teachers, governors and support staff** – from existing, predecessor or feeder primary schools

In-depth advice on how to engage these important audiences is set out in the *Communicating with staff, students and parents* guide in this pack.

**The media**

*Working with the media* – also in this pack – gives detailed advice and information on working with press and broadcast outlets.

**Local residents**  
**The local authority**  
**Local councillors and MPs**  
**Staff associations**  
**Faith groups**  
**Youth groups**  
**Other community groups**

The advice in this guide is intended to help you communicate with these groups – although there will clearly be areas of overlap.



If you don't know what your audiences feel about Academies, you need to find out so that you know what you're up against. This is best done face to face, by talking to people at events, at the school gates or over the phone. Some Academies have carried out a phone survey with a sample of key audience groups to find out what they know and think about the schools.

"You need to know and understand the community in order to engage with them effectively. If you don't know the community yourself, pinpoint somebody who works for the local authority and learn from them." Project manager



# Map, prioritise, target

**Once you have identified your different audience groups, it will help you to formulate and prioritise your communications if you map them out.**

### Map

Mapping is a way of identifying your most important audiences – those most capable of influencing the Academy’s success or failure.

You start by drawing up a table of all audience groups and assessing whether they are likely to support or oppose the Academy. Crucially, because it clearly identifies individuals and their views, it will help you think about how you can reach them.

Name and position	Organisation	Contact details	Category*
1			
2			
3 etc			

\*Possible categories : A = Supportive, B = Challenger, C = Neutral

### Prioritise

Knowing your audiences’ views is one thing, but what will really help you to prioritise communications is identifying the influence they have.

Influence isn’t simply a question of power and position. You may find that one of the most influential people in the Academies debate in your area is a member of the catering staff at a predecessor school. This person has access to hundreds of children and parents, belongs to a local church and community groups, and is highly vocal and active.

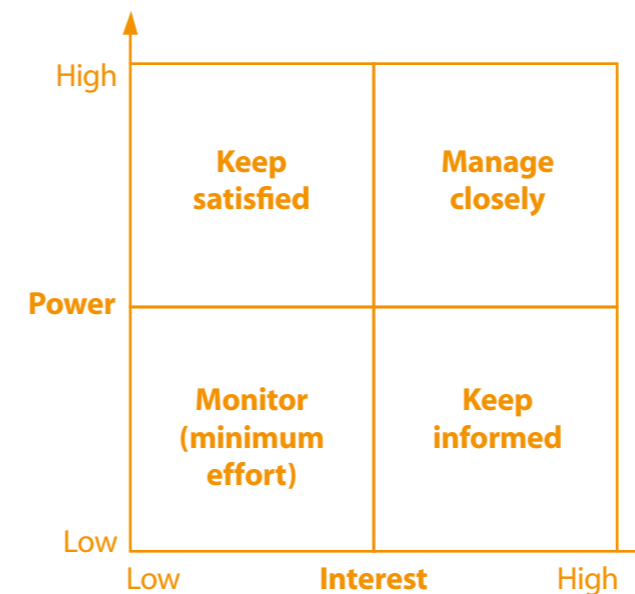
Using a chart like this will help you to plot groups’ and individuals’ interest against the influence they have.

The most important people to communicate with are those with the highest levels of interest and influence. Other audiences – for example, those with high interest but low influence – should be consulted and kept informed, but there is a less immediate need to communicate with them.

### Target

It is worth considering talking to groups individually to make things more manageable. Each group is going to have different questions and concerns. Your communications to each group should specifically meet their needs and concerns too.

“Targeting is more effective than a scattergun approach – go after each audience in turn.”  
Project manager



**Left: Power/interest grid for stakeholder prioritisation**



# Prepare to campaign



**The most important thing about effective communication is that it isn't a one-off. Once you have started talking to your community, you will need to continue with regular updates. The object, ideally, is to make sure that everyone is informed – but also to create a real buzz of interest and excitement. And that needs constant prompting and feeding.**

“Tell them everything, even if you have nothing to say, talk to them anyway. Be honest. If you don't have an update on progress, just say that, but keep talking. Don't go quiet and say nothing. If there is a gap in information, rumours will kick in.”  
Multiple Academy sponsor

To start your campaign, you will need to prepare the following:

### **Crib sheet and frequently asked questions**

You will need to know your story – and the responses to how it may be questioned or attacked – off by heart. Use the FAQs in the introduction to this pack, and build on them.

### **Identify communications materials and channels**

How are you going to reach your target audiences? What methods will have most impact? Consider setting up a website or web presence.

### **Make a schedule**

You need to plot out the timeline of your Academy's launch (as far as you can), identify flashpoints where communication will be necessary, who will want to know about them, what you're going to say, and how and when you're going to say it.

## Identify communications materials and channels

**People use and trust different sources for their information – which means you need to consider many different means and channels of contacting your audiences.**

### People

**Recruiting Academy champions** is a powerful way of spreading your message and making sure that the community has people it can go to for information who are already known and trusted. Use the audience mapping and prioritising process to identify who your Academy champions might be. These people will be important supporters and you'll need to make sure they are armed with all the latest information about the progress of the project, and any information materials they can give away to people who ask them questions.

The value of having champions should not be underestimated, especially as anti Academy groups will have supporters out spreading their own message.

**Build relationships with key individuals.** Each area and community has its opinion formers – the people who help to shape what the community as a whole thinks about issues. Make efforts to meet these people and understand their views, opinions and communication needs. You should also establish relationships with your local media outlets. Read *Working with the media* to find out how.

**Face-to-face communications** are often the most effective. Find out where and when community groups meet and events take place so that you can get out into the community and discuss the project.

“You have to get out there and talk to people, whether it’s in a church or somebody’s living room over tea and biscuits. I recommend catching parents at the end of the day, engaging with them face-to-face to hand out leaflets. We even had a stand in the local ASDA supermarket.” Project manager

### Drop-in sessions

Many Academies and principals also provide drop-in sessions where people can pop in to ask questions. These are held in a variety of convenient locations from community centres and church halls to cinemas.

“We held drop-in sessions at the local cinema, which is a convenient location at the heart of the community.” Academy principal

“We had a large in-take from a special needs school, and the parents were very vociferous. ‘How are you going to care for our kids?’ they rightly demanded to know. So we held drop-in one to one sessions so that they could ask questions and we could explain how the Academy would meet their needs.

“We mounted a charm offensive for the whole catchment area. This included camping out at a parish hall to make myself available to answer questions on a Tuesday night for weeks and weeks on end.” Academy principal

### Events

Large public **meetings** will happen throughout consultation. Smaller, hand-picked meetings with individual groups can also be a very effective way of keeping audiences informed all the way through implementation. You'll find more advice on how to get the most from meetings later on in this guide.

**Exhibitions** can be a great way of catching the attention of local residents. If you have computer generated images of what the Academy may look like, this can be a great opportunity to showcase them. You can also make case studies from existing Academies available to read.

Give **presentations** at community events and meetings.

## Identify communications materials and channels (cont.)

### Digital

**A website** or easy-to-find web presence is a must. It's the easiest way of publishing information about the progress of the project in a way that most people can access. Think carefully about your website design, making sure it is easy to read, navigate and follow.

**Creating a blog** could be an excellent way of keeping the public informed of what's happening in the day-to-day progress of the project.

**Social networking** sites and media could be a fantastic way of reaching younger or more media-savvy audiences. You could publish clips on YouTube (perhaps of the Academy sponsor introducing themselves and explaining why they want to be involved), or time lapse footage of the progress of new buildings – or even CGIs of new buildings. You could set up a group for the Academy on Bebo or Facebook, and use it as a means of updating members.

**Email** can be a great way of keeping interested parties in touch with what you're doing, and informed about up-coming events. You will need to get the permission of individuals to use their email address, and you must give them the chance to opt out of receiving emails if they get fed up. You should also remember to hide email addresses when sending out mass emails (put them all in the BCC field) so that you don't share their contact details inappropriately.

**SMS** – some schools already operate computerised SMS messaging systems that send communications to all parents and carers. If you have groups who would like to sign up for these kind of updates, this could be a great way of reminding people about meetings or letting people know when key decisions have been made.

### Materials

**Leaflets** – a good leaflet gives readers information in a way they can easily understand. Design and layout are important, so consider getting professional help. Poor design will look amateur and could undermine your professionalism.

The leaflet contained in this pack has the advantage of having already been tested with groups of parents – so we know they found it easy to understand.

**Letters** – sending a letter is often a well-received courtesy. Keep them short, accessible, professional and friendly, and make it very, very clear what you want the recipient to do as a result of receiving it.

**Newsletters** can be a great way to let your community know what is happening. But they can be time consuming to produce. You can distribute them electronically or in print, but you must do so regularly. If you're thinking about producing a newsletter you should carefully consider if you will have enough material to fill it. You could also consider including your own information in someone else's newsletter.

**DVDs** showing people what Academies look like can be a powerful persuader. The DVD in this pack shows successful Academies in action, and features Academy sponsors, principals, teachers, parents and students.

"It helps people to see other Academies in practice. We use a DVD at public events. It's really important to show children enjoying their school life. Sometimes people forget that's what it's all about."  
Project manager

### Big or outdoor

Materials such as posters, bus sidings, street art, banners and exhibition stands can be helpful in delivering specific messages. Their design will also help to convey a tone of excitement and professionalism.

### Give-aways

Give-away items such as mugs, bookmarks, pens and drinks mats can help to embed the Academy in the consciousness of your community by giving it a small physical presence. They can also be used to convey your Academy's vision and values. Many now open Academies have used items like this to help share their vision and values with their community.

### Distribution

How you distribute these materials will depend on the audiences you are targeting. It's worth considering channels including youth groups, community groups, GP surgeries, job centres, leisure centres, community centres, feeder primary schools, predecessor schools and existing schools.

It can also be valuable to ask community groups, residents' associations and neighbourhood forums what the most effective channels for reaching your audiences might be.

# Phases of communication

The launch of an Academy follows a timeline with different phases that each throw up specific communications opportunities and challenges.

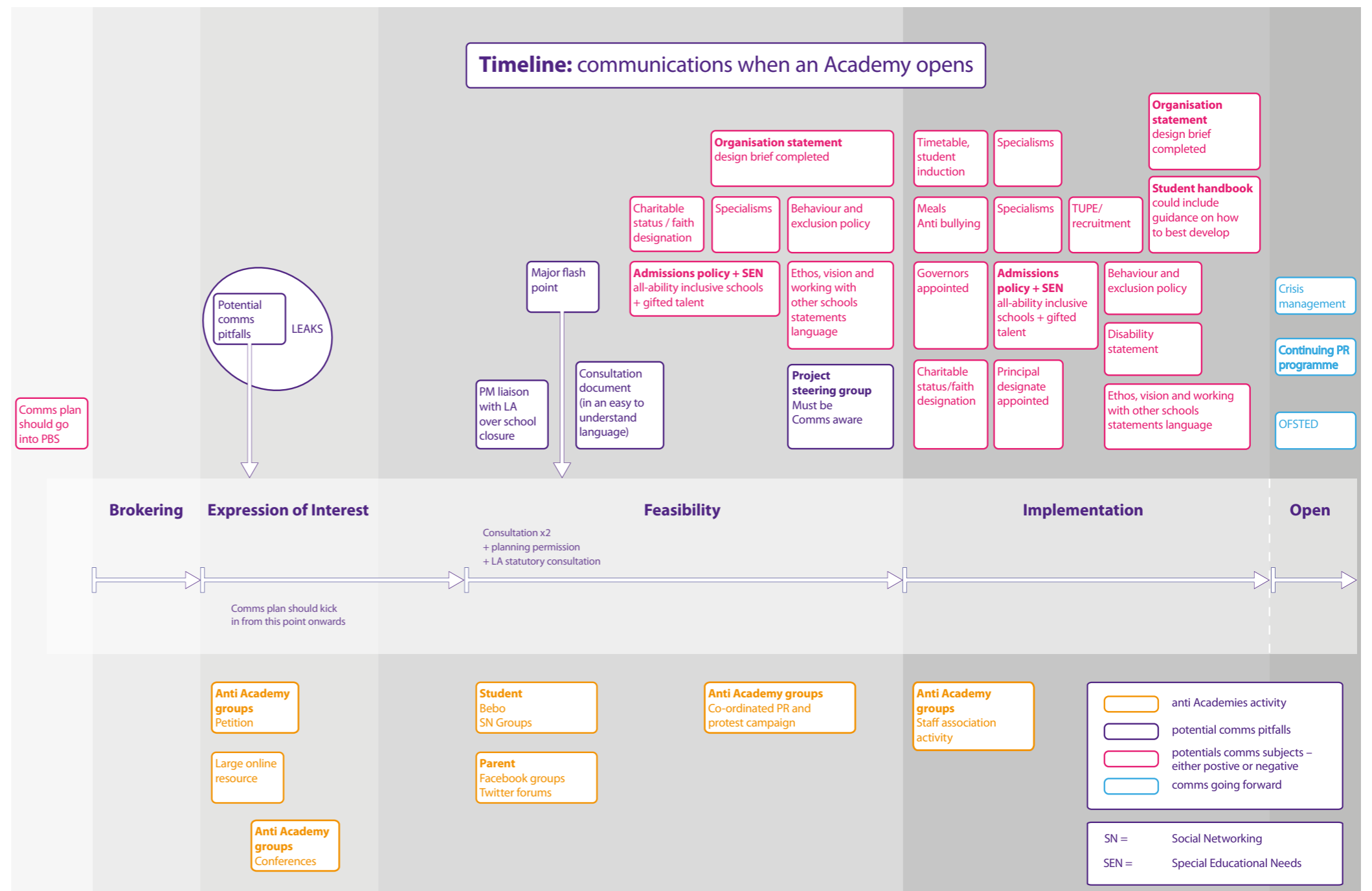
## Before an Academy opens

Even when an Academy is still only an idea, there are several areas where negative press coverage could potentially flare up.

We know from the experience of the Academies that are already up and running that there are key times when the media (national and/or local) can become very interested – and which could certainly attract comment or action from anti Academies groups. You will need to be prepared for media activity to flare up at these points.

This diagram shows where those flashpoints can be plotted against the Product Breakdown Structure (PBS), and the notes describe what action you can take to offset adverse media interest.

Please refer to the PBS for more detailed information.





## Phases of communication – the expression of interest

**You should start to prepare communications activity from the moment an expression of interest is published.**

The public doesn't necessarily understand that you don't have much of a team in place. They will want to know what the official line is, and it's better you get it out there before detractors begin to aggressively stake out the communications landscape.

Things you should consider putting in place at this point:

- Establish a web presence.
- Order in stocks of the leaflet and DVD in this pack, and distribute them to key audiences.
- Make contact with the local press – make sure they know who to contact for comment, and how to contact them.
- Begin to sketch out a campaign plan.



## Phases of communication – feasibility and consultation

**This is a tremendously important – and sometimes incendiary – period in the early life of an Academy.**

It's when the wider community is asked to comment and air its views on both the closure of the predecessor school, and the opening of the new Academy. If you are planning new buildings, there will also be a planning permission process to go through.

There will be public meetings, a lot of press interest, staff association and anti Academy group activity.

It's an enormous opportunity to tell the story of the planned Academy's vision, values, specialism and ethos – and it is one that you have to grasp with both hands.

Be prepared:

- Your campaign plan should be in place, and should outline timings, resources, messages and emotional objectives.
- Your crib sheet and FAQs should be prepared.
- You are your most important brand asset – you should remain positive and cheerful, reassured and enthusiastic in your communications.
- Mobilise your Academy champions. Make sure they're kept up to date, and fully stocked with information and communications materials.
- Use the local press and your website to let the community know where and when you'll be holding drop-in surgeries.

There is more advice on communicating through consultation in the *Working with the media* guide.

## Phases of communication – implementation

**When your Academy gets the go-ahead, you will have enormous amounts of information to add to the story you are telling your community. In fact, your story may grow by the hour.**

Keep your audiences up to date using all the channels and materials at your disposal.

All the flashpoints marked on the timeline (and many more in addition) will be of potential interest to your community.

But don't just wait for big news items – keep people informed of day-to-day progress too. If new buildings are in progress, you could organise time lapse photography or a webcam to show your community how things are going.

You could publish interviews or podcasts with the architect or other suppliers on your website or blog.

You should keep actively involved with the press and try to get them interested in as many feel-good stories as possible.

Keep face-to-face contact high. Recognise and praise the work of your Academy champions, and keep them motivated and enthused.

## Phases of communication – opening

**The opening of your Academy should be a time of celebration, and a great opportunity to share the new Academy experience with the wider community.**

You can stage events, invite the press and send out invitations to the wider community to attend.

It can be a time to thank the wider community for welcoming you – and also for showing them how the Academy will improve their lives too.

**After the Academy has opened**

You will need to keep channels of communications wide open so that your community can report any instances of poor behaviour, or any concerns they have – with the knowledge that you will respond quickly and efficiently.

In the longer term, your website, relationships with the local press, relationships with parents and students, events and celebrations will help to keep the wider community informed of what you're doing and striving towards.

Always think about including the wider community in your school activities. Your community is a valuable and important audience – not least because they're your parents, grandparents, governors, staff and volunteers of the future.

## Managing public meetings

**Regular meetings are a valuable way of engaging with your audiences face to face. However, it's good to bear in mind that they present a range of challenges.**

When you bring large groups of people together the dynamics can be explosive. So you need to prepare carefully for public meetings, and have contingency plans and techniques up your sleeve.

Is a public meeting the best way to exchange information and views?

This is a good question to ask yourself. When consultation is underway, there's a temptation to call big meetings to discuss issues that arise. Sometimes this is exactly the right thing to do. Sometimes, however, it might be more productive for you to hold smaller invitation-only meetings, or for you to visit and present to certain groups.

### Choose an appropriate venue

To set the right tone for telling the story of your Academy, you should think carefully about the location of a meeting. You need to signal change, and make your meetings about the future.

"We didn't hold events in the predecessor school in order to signal a change. We held them in smart business venues instead to start promoting the ethos and ambition of the Academy we were creating. It was an overt way to set expectations and new standards." Academy principal

### Structure

Make sure there is a plan for what the meeting is going to cover, and how much time will be given to each section. Print out an agenda and place one on every seat. Appoint a chairperson with a loud voice, presence and authority. Give him or her the means to be heard over talking or hecklers – a microphone if necessary.

Make it clear what the purpose of the meeting is, and make sure the chairperson has the experience and ability to bring the meeting back in line if it is sidetracked.

Make sure someone from the Academy project is recording or taking notes of the meeting. You can use a transcription service to type up recorded notes.

Consider breaking the meeting out into smaller groups. This could make things easier to handle, and will give people more of a chance to have their say.

### Select your speakers with care

Your spokesperson should be someone who can speak passionately about the new Academy with knowledge and conviction. They should have a thick enough skin, and enough experience to handle criticism, and possibly heckling. If you don't have a person like this, consider getting media training. You could also consider inviting a guest speaker, such as the principal, teachers or parents from an existing Academy.

"Exude confidence about the transformation you can make. Unless you have conviction nobody will believe you." Academy principal

### Build the scene

Make sure there is a leaflet describing Academies on every seat. You could also set up a stand which features case studies from already open Academies.

### Staying in control

Public meetings are often where dissent flares. These tips will help you to keep control of your meeting.

- Involving children in meetings will help to keep things calm. You could start your meeting with a performance from children.
- Play the DVD supplied in this pack. Dimming the lights and starting with an activity that requires silence will help to keep things calm.
- Invite a community police officer. Their presence will help to maintain order.
- Know what you're going to say. Rehearse your questions and answers.
- When people stand up to talk, ask them to introduce themselves – who they are, where they're from, and who they represent. This will expose anti Academy group members who've travelled to your meeting from outside of the area.
- Make sure your Academies champions are present. Anti Academy groups will make sure their supporters are there.



## Drawing up a community communications plan

**Planning your communications shouldn't be done in isolation. Make sure everybody who plays a part in establishing the new Academy all play a part.**

Your communications plan should not be seen as a static document that's set in stone. Circumstances change, and new problems arise as old ones are resolved. Your plan will therefore need to be flexible.

It is also important to recognise that it will not be possible to implement the whole plan at once. You should think about breaking it up into stages that can be carried out over time.

### Agree objectives and responsibilities

Objectives must be agreed by everyone involved. Objectives should be SMART:

**Specific** – clear about what is to be achieved.

**Measurable** – how will success be quantified?

**Agreed** – by everyone involved.

**Realistic** – achievable within the constraints of the situation and in alignment with other objectives.

**Time-specific** – specify time limits and deadlines.

Once objectives are agreed, responsibility for developing the plan should be given to a smaller working group, an individual with appropriate skills, or a specialist external agency.

You'll find a sample communications plan at the back of this guide.

### Evaluating and reviewing communications

It's good to regularly review your local media – print, websites, TV and radio. Your review should cover how often the Academy gets coverage and whether you managed to communicate your key messages effectively.

You could also find out the reach and circulation of broadcasters and publishers to assess how many people may have heard, read or seen stories about the Academy.

Record the level of public enquiries generated by information campaigns and each of your feedback mechanisms – and remember to ask people using these mechanisms how they heard about the Academy.



"If I have one piece of advice over any other, it's to give yourself time. Good communication takes planning." Project manager

### Doomed-to-failure objective

We will work to raise the profile of the Academy.

### SMART objective

We will reach 90% of parents in the Academy's catchment area through a range of communications over the next three months.

# Sample communications action plan

## Objectives

- Build positive relationships with key influencers and community leaders (such as local councillors, MPs and faith groups) prior to consultation.
- Raise awareness of the Academy (what it is, what it stands for and what it will deliver) in the local community during consultation.
- Ensure teaching and support staff within local schools are accurately informed about plans for the new Academy during consultation.
- Actively reach and engage with 90% of parents in the Academy catchment area during consultation and prior to implementation.
- Actively engage all pupils who will be attending the new Academy during implementation.

## Target audiences

- Pupils (from feeder schools)
- Parents (of pupils from feeder schools)
- Teachers, governors and support staff (both new to the Academy and from feeder schools)
- Local residents and community groups
- Faith groups
- The local authority (including the school admissions team)
- Local councillors and MPs
- Local media

## Implementation plan

Phase on timeline	Who is responsible	Channels and activities	Notes
<b>Expression of interest</b>	Academy sponsor, LA, project manager or external specialist/ agency support.	<p>Kick start your communications activity early to stop critics such as the Anti Academies Alliance having a free rein.</p> <p>Meet with key influencers and community leaders (such as councillors, MPs and faith groups etc) to brief them on plans for the new Academy.</p>	<p>Recruit Academy Champions – key individuals who can help spread the word about your Academy and what it will offer.</p> <p>Distribute the DCSF's <i>Academies</i> leaflet to parents and the community so they are aware what Academies are and have access to accurate information.</p>
<b>Feasibility</b>	<p>Project manager.</p> <p>Establish a Communications Steering Group to help plan and implement communications.</p>	<p>Identify your stakeholders and audiences using the mapping tools in this guide.</p> <p>Form a communications working group with allocated responsibilities.</p> <p>Refer to the <i>Working with the media</i> guide for help and advice on telling the Academies story to journalists.</p> <p>Agree on protocols for dealing with the press.</p>	<p>Prepare questions and answers for the Academy to ensure everybody is singing from the same hymn sheet.</p> <p>Continue formal briefings with key influencers to update them on progress.</p> <p>Brief the local media using the standard description of Academies and frequently asked questions in this pack – building upon them with information specific to the planned Academy as appropriate.</p>

Continued overleaf >

## Sample communications action plan (cont.)

Continued from the previous page...

### Implementation plan

Phase on timeline	Who is responsible	Channels and activities	Notes	
<b>Consultation</b>	Project manager or communications officer.	<p>Update your Academies Champions with progress so they can continue to spread the word for you.</p> <p>Read the <i>Communicating with staff, students and parents</i> guide in this series for further tips and guidance.</p> <p>Set up a website, or establish a web presence, to explain the vision and values of the school and to give more information on the Academy sponsor. As time goes on, this website should be regularly updated.</p> <p>Continue formal briefings with key influencers and the media to update them on progress.</p> <p>Build an email distribution list during consultation that can be used to keep people up to date throughout implementation.</p> <p>Send the leaflet contained in this pack (or your own materials) to all parents, feeder schools, community groups etc.</p>	<p>Prepare for statutory consultation meetings if you are invited to attend by the local authority.</p> <p>Hold your own series of meetings to engage with each audience group face-to-face.</p> <p>Give copies of the leaflet and DVD in this pack (or your own materials) to your local libraries, community centres, doctors' surgeries etc.</p> <p>Hold a series of drop-in sessions for people to pop in if they have questions.</p> <p>Consider attending local community events to raise awareness of the Academy, or set up a stand in locations where you'll catch the community's attention – such as local supermarkets and shopping centres.</p> <p>Visit hard to reach groups by physically going to see them rather than waiting for them to come to you.</p>	<p>Let your enthusiasm and positivity shine through your communications – but be honest. No-one likes spin.</p> <p>Remember to make sure you are using language that is appropriate to your audience.</p> <p>Consider using the DVD in this pack to set the scene at meetings and events, featuring the stories of successful Academies and their principals, sponsors, pupils and parents.</p>
<b>Implementation</b>	Project manager or communications officer and principal.	<p>Build your Academy's brand consulting the branding guide in this pack.</p> <p>Attend school assemblies and school council meetings to engage pupils.</p>	<p>Provide regular updates using meetings, newsletters (printed or via email) and your Academy website.</p> <p>Continue formal briefings with key influencers and the media to update them on progress and policies as appropriate.</p>	<p>Once the Academy is open you should keep communication flowing by using the channels that have already been established. Ongoing communication is essential.</p>



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