DIY Guide: How to communicate effectively about your action(s)

Why is this guide useful when you organize an action with SR?

This *How-to-guide* is designed to make our collective actions more effective by improving how SR communicates, both internally and to the outside world (externally). Every SR action, whether large-scale or local, benefits from a clear and structured communication plan. Effective messaging and engagement with the media and/or the public helps to ensure that our actions and sense of urgency result in real attention and resonance, creating momentum. By defining goals, key messages, and target audiences from the outset, each action becomes part of a coherent movement narrative that inspires active hope and systemic change.

With a plan, message and focus, and through strategic collaboration with allies such as Scientists for Future, media professionals, and NGOs, our outreach can be more powerful, consistent, and far-reaching, turning every action into a step toward systemic climate action and climate justice. Having this guide as a shared reference empowers every member through our national and local groups. It provides a flexible DIY guide, not a rigid rulebook, that helps align our messaging while leaving room for creativity, freedom to make your own decisions, and context-specific strategies. It ensures that we act in unity and with confidence to the outside world, knowing our communication supports SR's overarching goals.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for everyone who is organizing or intending to organize an SR-action, no matter how big or small. The intent of this guide is to help you reach maximum effectiveness from the efforts you put in. We recognize that time is limited, but a bit of extra time spent on communication at the beginning of your action-planning can go a long way in the end. Let's spend our time and energy usefully and leverage our efforts to have as much effect as we can on the people we want to reach.

If you are planning a (future) action, please read through this manual and see how you can use the tips and strategy given here to make your action known and engage more people and media.

Quick communication checklist (tl:dr)

This is a summary of the full strategy in this document for quick reference. We advise the external communication of any action should contain the following:

- Clearly defined 1) goals, 2) key messages, and 3) target groups or audiences.
- Tone of voice: be both activating and hopeful (*active* hope) and work towards connection. For more information on active hope, please see [Source 1](), [2](), [3](), [4](), [5](), and [6]().
    - Aim to adhere to the Tone-of-voice described on p. 4.
- Communication content, modes and channels that fit your target groups (see p. 5).
- Make (repetitive) use of eye-catching visuals and ear-catching soundbites to generate maximum attention and retention. <u>One good picture can say a 1000 words!</u>
- A storytelling element to help you connect your overarching message to a more personal level.
    - Use relatable examples and language that connects with the target audience's daily lives or with well-known examples.
    - Stay away from calls to individual change in (consumer) behaviour, as this distracts from the system change that have to be established and suggests that the solution lies in consumer change instead of breaking then power of the multi's: the multi-billionaires and the multinationals.
- Collaborate with NGO's, (investigative) journalists and/or other organizations (see Appendix 2 for a list).
- A clear, pre-developed list of statements and calls to action that is repeated by everyone in contact with the media or in the public eye during your action. Use the power of repetition to form a coherent message and present it to your audience. Take sufficient time to learn your key statements by heart when preparing for discussions.
    - Please make sure that any statement you make is fact-checked and as un-debunkable/academically defendable as possible. Expect a backlash of disagreement that you may need to counteract with valid arguments.
    - It is important to consider the framing of your statements in order to achieve maximum impact and make them more relatable to your specific audience.
    - Prepare your defence: your message might generate nasty questions and counteractions. Try to imagine which negative reactions can be expected and how to respond on it (prepare Q&A's in advance).
- Clear and concise statements and calls to actions that any person can do *today* without too much effort (to get them over the first hurdle).
    - Research based on self-perception theory and "positive spill over" effects show that people, once they have done something environmentally conscious, are more likely to repeat or extend that behaviour to confirm the "green" image they have formed of themselves, based on their previous behaviour.
    - We want people to focus on actions that help collective action and change, rather than getting them to do small individual things. Refer to the Tone-of-voice part on p. 4 for more detail on this.
- Rally your SR-colleagues! Make use of the full SR-NL communication power through using SR-NL communication channels and mobilizing allies > contact the SR coordination group to get in touch with the people at the SR communication and media channels.

Full DIY guide:

Defining your goals, key messages and target audiences

It is important to have a clear view of not only the goals of your action, but also your goals for communicating about it. Do you want to inform bystanders by talking to them? Do you want to get attention from a politician by handing over a petition? Do you want to reach a broad audience through a newspaper? Each goal is accompanied by three things 1) a key message you want to convey, 2) a concrete and defined target audience, 3) a means or mode (e.g. a newspaper article, social media post, speech on a stage at a protest, etc.). Try to capture synergy by using different channels and targeting different target groups with the same message.

Defining goals

The goals of the communication about your action should align with the main goal of your action. However, your external communication is not directly aimed at the person or entity you protest against (e.g. Shell), but to a specific group of bystanders (e.g., the people looking at your protest, people doubtful about climate change, or journalists from a specific field or newspaper). This requires you to reframe the main goal of your action to a message that interests and sparks curiosity/connection with your intended target group (see also Target groups on p. 4). Therefore, the goal of your action ≠ the goal of your communication effort.

Key messages

To get your message across to a broad, non-expert, audience, you need to have clear key points you want to convey. These are usually 1 sentence conclusions or statements that are the most important to get across to your audience. The best approach for this is to pick 1-2 key messages that are concise, contain only one key point, and are to the point.

A clear and concise key message could be: the government needs to stop fossil subsidies for oil companies. Be as precise as you can (naming "the government" instead of "we" or "they", specify for who the fossil subsidy is (not "industry" but "oil companies"), but don't get lost in giving too many details in your key message. Below you find some recommendations from SR on how to formulate a key message that conveys the information you need through conveying active hope and calling people to action, while using a constructive and inviting tone-of-voice.

Keep in mind: a message doesn't have to be text, but can also be visual (images, video, art). Make (repetitive) use of eye-catching visuals and ear-catching soundbites to generate maximum attention and retention. One good visual can say a 1000 words!

Calls to action

Every message, article, etc. we send out should inform and give context, but also always should have a clear call to action to a clear defined actor or group of actors. We should also make sure that our calls to actions match with the actors' ability and agency. For example, not "reporting about Shell's green initiatives should be improved.", but "Journalists should be more critical when reporting about Shell's green initiatives." In this way we give a clear directive or action-point to a specific group that also has the agency to do that. Another example, not "we need a coalition of parties that are much stronger on climate policy." But "if people are supportive for stronger climate policies, they should vote on parties that explicitly state x, y, z in their program."

Along general lines, we see the following broad calls to action that could be used and specified for each message we sent out:

- *Dutch journalists/news:* Think about how you have reported on climate change in the past and how you could include system perspectives and climate justice. Also, think about who you could ask to take action, even on small or seemingly unimportant stories about climate change. Remember that repetition can be powerful.
- *General public* (specific groups need to be further specified, see further along in this document): Join others in combating climate change and do things that are about system change instead of individual actions.
- *SR affiliated people:* Keep calling out the role of the big actors in combating climate change, keep raising awareness of the things missing or ignored in climate narratives (e.g. systems thinking, climate justice, agency of big actors)

Tone-of-voice

Most important: as an antidote to the often-used narrative that "the individual is powerless in making systemic change", we have to reach out to everybody who feels uncomfortable about society and climate, and shout '*you are not alone*' as we do that to our fellow activists. We take a "constructive journalism" point of view. This includes:
- We are unwavering in our stance against big companies and right-wing politicians.
  - We have all reasons to be angry, shocked and indignant on them. But this is not always the best way to convey our message and activate our target groups. An option could be to use humor as a strategy. For instance to ridicule the greed and selfishness of the fossil industry, the super-rich and their allies. Be aware that we don't use it in a way that alienates people from our cause and that it matches your goals and key message. For inspiration, see the work of Prof. Max Boykoff (Source 1 and 2).
- We are encouraging towards target audiences in the "general public".
  - Apart from being angry about the wrongdoing of the establishment, we try to be kind and inviting towards the general public, rather than blame or reprimand.
  - We never blame individual behaviour or diminish individual actions against climate change. Instead we focus on countering multinationals, multimillionaires, thinktanks and their supporters in politics and rallying people to contribute to systemic change.
- From an SR-NL point of view, we want our target groups to focus on actions that help collective action and change, rather than getting them to do small individual things.

In general:
- Don't use jargon (such as "intersectionality", "systems thinking") instead explain what we actually mean and what that practically looks like in (daily) life/society, using examples or personal stories.
- Communicate *active* hope vs. *passive* hope. We don't say "keep hopeful thing will get better", but instead rally people to take actions that improve our chances for a better future. For more information on active hope, please see Source 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

Picking target groups

Which target groups do you need to engage to reach your communication goals? Very broadly, from an SR-NL perspective we envision the following target groups. The target groups of your specific action could of course be different:

- *The section of the population that is worried about climate change but not (yet) active:* information & mobilization;

- o This means we are not focusing on pulling climate-deniers to our side, but to nudge the people already worried about climate change from passivity to action! Be aware that the majority of the population, not only in The Netherlands or Europe but worldwide, has the opinion that more climate action is necessary.
- *SR and allies:* inform and mobilize.
- *Large companies and local/regional/national governments:* pressure to stop climate destruction and using false narratives;

For examples of what target group definition can look like, please see Appendix 1. Also take into account: could it be interesting for your action to explore how you can collaborate with other organizations, NGO's, artists or other collaborators to create resonating and emotional content that speaks to your chosen target groups. For a list of inspiration on people or organizations to collaborate with, see Appendix 2.

Modes and communication channels

Each target group has their own favourite modes and communication channels to get information about the world. A mode is a type of communication, e.g., a text, a video, a painting. A communication channel is where that mode is conveyed, e.g., a printed newspaper, a digital newspaper, TV, social media. For each of your specified target groups pick the best fitting modes (an editorial, a short video, …) and the best channel to reach them (social media, the 8 o'clock news, the Volkskrant, TikTok).

Once you have created your content and figured out to which channels it needs to go, it's time to actually start your communication. Please find some tips below:

- Sending out content through different channels to have maximum external reach (see also Target group table above):
  - o Coverage by main news outlets. Make sure you leverage the SR contacts with press and media to produce additional items off of your original content (e.g. news articles, editorials, interviews, …) through which your statements and calls to action are spread further.
  - o If you use social media, contact the SR Social Media group. In general, make sure that your actions are featured on SR-NL channels whenever relevant.
- Organize in-person, local spin-off events organized by local SR groups (for instance public lectures, free to join by anyone in that area who wants to know more about climate change or more importantly what they can do about it).
  - o In-person events (lectures, workshops) either for SR-members, specific target groups or general public.
  - o A journalist-focused event/workshop on improving climate narratives.

Monitoring and evaluation: how well did your plan work?

To know whether your communication plan has work, you need to check the result of your efforts. Of course, what "successful" is, depends on your action and your goals. However, monitoring whether and to what extend your key messages have reached the audience you intended and which responses took place, is a good way to keep track on the effectiveness of your actions. Based on the collected data and information, you have the opportunity to learn and share your learnings in order to continuously improve the effectiveness. In general this can mean (but is not excluded to):

- Monitoring (social) media outreach and discussion in (larger, national) media sources or other channels you aimed for.
- Monitor activity, outreach and discussion on social media (depending on target group, this could be Instagram, LinkedIn, X, Mastodon, etc.) whenever relevant.
- Analyse the critical comments and counter-arguments that your action has raised
- Phrase clear conclusions in terms of do's and don'ts and discuss them within SR in an ongoing learning process.

Example of a communication strategy for an action

Below we provide an example for a campaign with a specific subject and goal: debunking wrong or incomplete media coverage of climate change. As stated above, every campaign should have clearly defined 1) goals, 2) key messages, 3) specified target groups or audiences. It is also worthwhile to pursue collaborations for a campaign, either to create more engaging content or widen its reach and impact.

Goals

The main goals for this campaign are threefold:
1. **Create awareness** among "the public" (specific target groups to be defined) that climate change media coverage is not sufficiently accurate and that truly effective solutions are often underrepresented, i.e. mainly focusing on individual action, not on addressing the big (industry/political) players and climate justice.
2. **Bridge the 'chasm' of inactive public to an active one:** to show the large group of "the public" that agrees that more needs to be done on climate but doesn't get to action for (perceived) lack of social support (Harrison-Plastow 2025), that there are more people like them. The aim is to create a social cue that allows and encourages them to take more action and give them concrete actions to follow (e.g. sign this petition, go to this march, talk about it with friends/relatives/colleagues).
3. **Improve climate change coverage** in the Netherlands, through informing journalists/newsrooms that their coverage often follows particular lines (informed by industry and political narratives), that do not reflect the actions needed as supported by scientific research (= addressing the big players that have emissions and/or high power, focusing on climate justice) through public action, policy, etc.

We want to reach these goals through a public campaign that counteracts the common climate narratives, in which we:
- Confirm people's feeling of climate worry and societal unrest, and encourage them to join social action for climate justice by offering concrete first steps (e.g., sign this petition, be aware of x/y/z when reading climate news).
- Collaborate with journalists and media to create awareness among news producers of their own content and how it could be improved.

Key messages

We will follow a two-pronged approach, balancing between critique on the system and the urgency of climate change, vs. active hope and actions that could be taken. We add a positive counter-narrative. We don't just unmask the incorrect reporting and framing, but also provide a good alternative and tangible, immediately applicable solutions and alternatives.

Key-message: On average Dutch media don't give a complete or full representation of climate change and its systemic solutions.

Therefore our messaging (incl. **tone of voice**) consists of:

- [Critique] Media narratives on climate change are not always accurate or comprehensive. They often fail to convey the necessary sense of urgency and the full range of effective solutions, such as holding major stakeholders accountable, to address the issue effectively. [Hope] How could reporting be improved or where can you find better information.
    - Interesting reads on this: [Linkedin-post Chantal van Leest](#)
- [Critique] The way in which climate issues are reported is influenced by industry narratives and greenwashing. [Hope] SR's objective is to debunk these narratives and highlight the issues.
- [Critique] We are not doing enough about climate change, [Hope] but many people worry about it and wánt to do more / 'you are not alone': the majority of the world population worries as much as you ([UNDP & Oxford University, 2025](#)). [Hope] This is what you can do to join them and help.
    - Interesting reads on this: [Rob Harrison-Plastow](#) (Just Stop Oil)

Target groups, content and channels

From the goals we can deduce three main target groups 1) the "general public", 2) journalists, and 3) industry. Now we need to specify them to specify how we get our key-messages to them.

"General public"

Target group characteristics: based on Goal 1, we focus on people who belief in climate change and read information about it and may have an existing understanding that climate change needs to be solved through individual actions (an understanding we want to counteract). Furthermore, we assume based on Goal 2 that they are already worried about climate change, but that they think they stand (mostly) alone in that. Therefore we can assume this group is already quite well-informed on climate change, but not part of climate change mitigation activities or action-groups etc.

Content and channels: It is however hard to make assumptions about their level of education, age, income, or political affiliations, which also makes picking very specific modes and channels harder. Therefore the best is to aim for channels with a wide reach: popular sustainability or science-oriented social media channels and (national) newspapers.

"Journalists"

Target group characteristics: since we are aiming to improve climate change coverage, we focus our efforts not on all journalists, but on journalists that work on climate change specifically, or for instance at the science editorial team of news outlets.

Content and channels: From the target group table and experience of other SR members, we can deduce that the best channels to inform them are laying direct contact with them (through email and phone) and content-wise to invite them to attend actions and send them press releases about it. To specifically improve their knowledge on climate coverage, we could aim to host events or develop a digital toolbox (such as the Klimaatwiki) to provide them with information and know-how.

"Industry"

Target group characteristics: To reach the right people in industry, it's helpful to specify this to particular sectors or even companies. Furthermore, if possible, specify it to specific people or

functions at these companies. Who is able to make decisions or changes in a company? Or who will be most bothered by the action you are planning? You could also target the shareholders, since they may also be able to invoke change.

Content and channels:

Industry might be hard to reach through conventional media outreach. It might therefore be helpful to collaborate with lobbying organizations or lobbyists who know who to talk to and what type of messaging might be most effective for particular employees or even particular persons. Be aware that your messaging (whatever type of content it will be) should be productive: don't just blame, also provide a solution or way to go forward, or a suggestion for how the company could change or what they could be doing different.

Keep in mind: industry might be a difficult target group to interact with, also because as SR we tend to approach industry from a different perspective than how we approach "the public". Most of the communication tips in this document are focused on reaching "the public", not on how to reach industry or policy makers. Think whether your aim is to invoke change within a company (internal focus), or to point out what they should be different to a large audience to raise a red flag (external focus). Depending on this, you also might need to pick a different type of content and tone of voice.

More information, interesting reads and literature

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Appendices
Appendix 1 – Examples on how to define target groups and spread engaging content through relevant channels

Please view this table as a non-complete overview or example of possible target audiences and specifics to use as an inspiration on how to specify your own target groups:

Exemplary target groups	Readiness to mobilize	Channels	Preferred content formats (modes)	Purpose / goal
Concerned citizens (adults 30+)	High	Progressive news outlets (De Correspondent, De Groene, tv talkshows), Podcasts, Instagram, LinkedIn,	Short video's on social media, quick visual recaps (infographics), (local) events	Mobilize toward collective action. Shift from passive concern to participation.
Journalists and media professionals	Medium	Email, phone, LinkedIn, Twitter/Mastodon.	Press releases, invitations to events/protests, op-eds, briefings.	Improve systemic climate journalism and coverage of our actions, shift framing of climate change and its causes and solutions.
University students (adults 18-25)	High	TikTok, Instagram, on-campus events, student-focussed communication channels (through "studentenverenigingen"), WhatsApp groups	Events, memes, vlogs, short explainer videos, calls to action.	Mobilize and promote climate change concern into early-stage activism.
Middle-class (adults, medium to higher incomes)	Medium	(regional) News, (digital) news, TV (e.g. 8 o'clock news), LinkedIn	Personal stories, personal angle articles, calm explainer videos, call to action (e.g., "sign this petition")	Promote more recognition for social back-up for being concert about climate change and normalize those concerns and willingness to do something.
Tech workers (esp. in data, AI, or energy)	Low to medium	LinkedIn, Reddit, industry newsletters.	Evidence-rich infographics, written or video-narratives that relate to their field of expertise	Foster dissent and climate awareness among workers in high-emission industries.
Local politicians / civil servants	Low-Medium	Professional events, council meetings ("raadsvergaderingen"),	Policy briefs, evidence-based op-	Pressure them to advocate for policies for (local-level)

		LinkedIn, (regional) papers, professional events, direct mail	eds, opinion polls, petitions.	systemic change by increasing climate awareness.

Appendix 2 – Interesting people and organizations affiliated with news/science journalism/climate you could involve

- SR Media and Outreach group, SR Press group and SR Social media group
- Research group Erik van Sebille UU, focused on the effectiveness of communication from scientists about climate change
- Gerrit Hiemstra (meteorologist, climate expert, public face)
- Bart Verheggen (climate scientists, public face for climate-related news on RTL-Nieuws)
- Journalists at Follow the Money
- Klimaatdichters (to create different types of outreach/think more creatively)
- People who debunk fake news or science on social media like Sjamadriaan (Insta-influencer Adriaan ter Braack), Skeptical Science, and others
- SR Klimaatwiki as a source of reliable scientific references

To assist in outreach when rolling out communication:
- Public people/journalists SR has direct affiliation/contact with (=easy to involve/contact/mobilize)
- Journalists at Follow the Money (SR is in touch with some of them)
- Wetenschapsredacties (Volkskrant, NRC, Telegraaf)
- Scientists for Future (S4F)
- Klimaatveranda
- KlimaatHelpdesk
- Urgenda
- Milieudefensie
- XR
- Fossielvrij NL
- Greenpeace
- Klimaatmoeders
- Watkanikdoen.nl
- Collectiefkapitaal.nl
- Netwerk Klimaat FNV