



START Communications Plan

Updated November 2020

1. Introduction

In order to increase awareness and engagement around its vision, work and impact, it is essential that START effectively articulates its “brand”, or “story”, and communicates about it consistently across products and platforms. START’s narrative - what START is, what it has achieved, what it aspires to be, and why new partners and funders should work with START - will provide a basis for the development of core messages that will help START communicate consistently and strategically to its key target audiences. START has already facilitated two communication workshops internally, aimed at unpacking elements of the START brand, and will continue to refine and improve core messaging in 2020-2021.

Attractive, informative and compelling products, both in print and online form, play an important role in disseminating these core messages. Products include a printed and online communications kit (About START brochure, program flyers), newsletters, ProSus magazine, STARTcast podcast, branded PowerPoint presentations, and stories that feature START’s alumni, work and impact, published on the website and social media channels. In parallel, it is essential to maintain tools and platforms that allow all the organization to communicate consistently and engage with key networks and actors, such as START’s templates and START’s contacts database.

START is committing substantial time and resources to strengthen our online communications and presence as a result of COVID-19. For instance, we are accelerating the production of several communications tools to have greater visibility and to provide virtual learning and connections in the digital space. START is also adapting program content and delivery through virtual facilitation and webinars. One example is the [STARTcast](#), an online podcast featuring topics and resources for early career researchers and practitioners in the sustainability space. Each episode will feature a different guest speaker highlighting their experience with the season theme in an accessible, humorous, and candid way. At the end of the first season, highlights and insights will be compiled into a [ProSus e-magazine](#) issue. Season one of the podcast focuses on challenges faced by early and mid-career researchers during the scientific proposal writing

process, with special challenges faced during our current situation regarding COVID-19. The first episode of the STARTcast aired on September 1st and new episodes will be released every Tuesday through November.

The following workplan aims at putting in place or reinforcing critical platforms for START to effectively communicate with existing and potential partners and funders. START is investing in key website developments during the remainder of 2020 before our current core award ends in January 2021.

2. Communications Themes

1. We promote connectivity

We promote connectivity across sectors, disciplines and geographic boundaries through providing opportunities for researchers to collaborate with societal partners, and a space for early-career researchers to connect with experts and networks at regional and international scales. We believe that capacity development outcomes are strongest where efforts to promote connectivity are linked to experiential learning and skill building.

2. We integrate science with society

START programs bring together groups from different backgrounds to identify priorities and co-produce more equitable and effective solutions to challenges associated with global environmental change. To facilitate this process START supports efforts to communicate research findings to non-scientific audiences, as well as efforts that build the capacity of the communities living in the projects' sites.

3. We empower leadership in science

We empower science leadership through providing experiential learning and enabling connections so that early-career researchers from different backgrounds can advance and become leading voices in their field.

4. We support regionally-owned strategies and solutions

Science capacity development outcomes are strongest where regional priorities, ownership, and cultural contexts are front and center. We work with partners to amplify voices from the global south that reflect regional needs and priorities.

5. We create long-lasting impact

We invest in early-career researchers and practitioners and re-engage them in successive programs and activities, creating the basis for long term, sustained networks and partnerships and impacts that continue well after the initial investment.

3. Communications objectives

- Articulate and consolidate START’s “story” - aspirations, impact, niches and comparative advantage
- Update and grow the suite of products used to communicate START’s “story” to key audiences
- Maintain tools and platforms to reinforce START’s communications efforts - with consistent and professional brand identity, and solid platforms to keep track of and further grow START’s networks

4. Outputs, process and timelines

4.1. Articulate and consolidate START’s “story”

| Outputs | Roles | Tasks/Milestones | Timeline/Deadlines |
|--|---|--|---|
| Articulation of why START is unique, START’s offerings, key audiences, what START has achieved, aspirations for the next 5 years | All START to participate in the process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lead START through a process of guided discussions to delve into the key elements of START’s brand/story (some elements have emerged from the organizational strategy process) ● Draft discussion outcomes for internal review ● Finalize and save key findings (“brand book”) in shared drive | Two internal communications workshops have taken place in August 2019. |
| “Elevator pitch” and short statement about START (30 seconds, 3 minutes narrative) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lead START through a process to concretize the findings from the previous process into short statements and tagline. ● Finalize and save key findings in shared drive ● Include key elements in website and communications products as needed | Communications themes and niche documents have been developed. |

4.2. Update and grow a suite of products to communicate START’s “story” to key audiences

| Outputs | Roles | Tasks/Milestones | Timeline/Deadlines |
|---------|-------|------------------|--------------------|
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| “About START” brochure | START colleagues (SS, JP) to review the draft and all START to use the brochure at meetings and events | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Draft and design in-house brochure ● Run brochure draft for review ● Explore options for printing ● Send document to the printer | Brochure developed in September 2019 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Update regularly |
| “Work with Us” brochure | START colleagues to review the draft and all START to use the brochure at events and online outreach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Draft and design in-house brochure ● Run brochure draft for review ● Circulate to as appropriate to current and future partners | Final version available in Sept 2020 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Update regularly |
| “About START” and other various PowerPoint presentations | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide guidance on the use of the template ● Support with layout and design | Ongoing |
| 2018-2019 biennial report | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Draft and design in-house brochure ● Run brochure draft for review ● Post on website & circulate to as appropriate | Finalized in Sept 2020 |
| Redevelopment of the “Milestones and Results” website page to better bring to life START’s achievements, including by developing and featuring stories and testimonials | START colleagues to contribute to identifying and developing stories and review draft page | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify project stories and testimonials that illustrate START’s work and impact ● Repackage existing stories and develop new ones ● Work with Assyst to display the information on the website in a lively, compelling way | Finalized in Sept 2020 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Update regularly |
| Quarterly e-newsletter | All START to submit content | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Send proposed outline to staff, asking for any submissions (30 days notice) ● Draft/edit content ● Publish articles on website ● Design and send the newsletter in MailChimp, post on website and social media | 4 issues/year: March, June, September, December |
| Biannual Prosus “e-magazine” focusing on one topic/program | SS, JP and program staff to review outline and contribute | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Draft an action plan for the issue, including angle, objectives, outline. ● Seek contributions from identified authors and draft/edit content | Issue 1 - Nov 2018 Issue 2 - May 2019 Issue 3 - Nov 2019 Issue 4 - July 2020 |

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| related to START's work | content as needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lay out the e-magazine and work with Assyst to display the magazine on the website | Issue 5 - due May 2021 |
| STARTcast A podcast focusing on topics relevant for early to mid-career researchers and practitioners | START staff to host season one episodes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft interview guides for episodes in season one Record episodes and produce show notes Implement outreach strategy | Season 1 - September - November 2020 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss timeline and season 2 content at the end of Dec 2020 |
| Website and social media: regular program and organizational updates, series of stories highlighting successes (reactive - new developments - and proactive - editorial calendar covering active programs, with angles contributing to overall objectives) | All START to submit content. Work regularly with all staff for program news and stories. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft, edit and publish ongoing reactive updates Develop and share an editorial calendar for proactive updates Create a page for "Science Leadership Development" Create a page for "Women in Science" Resources section: create a podcast section, create a filter for Opportunities in Sustainability (under Publications), better highlight all the materials we have (current "featured publications" box is not highlighting all the various options) | Ongoing, when new developments (usually with peaks when publishing newsletters) |

4.3. Maintain tools and platforms to reinforce START efforts to communicate to its key audiences

| Outputs | Roles | Tasks/Milestones | Timeline/Deadlines |
|---|--|---|---------------------------|
| Suite of branded templates: letterhead, PowerPoint template | All START to use the templates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain templates, make them available, provide guidance for their use Make adjustments as needed, as the templates are reviewed and used by the staff | Ongoing |
| Functioning and updated contacts database, linked to e-mailing software (MailChimp) | All START to regularly provide contacts to be uploaded | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request staff to provide any recent contacts that can be uploaded in bulk (e.g. meeting participants), as Excel spreadsheet Send message to new contacts inviting them to subscribe to mailing list Organize regular quality checks | Ongoing |

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| <p>Regular posting of opportunities in the global sustainability space on the website and social media, with twice-monthly “opportunities” email blast</p> | <p>CO to research and select opportunities and send e-mail</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review e-mailings and announcements on social media, and publish relevant opportunities and news ● Send a digest of latest announcements as e-mail blast | <p>Ongoing</p> |
| <p>Increased and engaged social media communities</p> | <p>CO, MTH</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Regular engagement on Facebook and Twitter: post opportunities and news, share information from partners and other organizations, reply to questions and comments as needed, and promote posts to grow constituencies. | <p>Ongoing</p> |