innovative health initiative

Communications guide for IHI projects

Contents

1 About this guide 1
2 Communication – a must for all projects 1
3 Rules for acknowledging IHI support 2
4 Communications advice for projects 3
5 How we promote your project 7
6 How you can help us – projects promoting IHI 9
7 Questions? 9
8 Avoiding confusion between IMI and IHI 9

1 About this guide

Communication is a vital activity for IHI (Innovative Health Initiative) projects, and this is recognised in the legislation creating IHI and the Grant Agreement.

This guide sets out **the IHI rules projects must follow** when communicating – these mostly relate to the acknowledgement of IHI support. It also provides **advice for projects** on things to consider when planning their communications, starting from the launch of the project. Finally, it describes the different **ways the IHI Programme Office supports projects' communication efforts** and **how projects can support wider IHI communications activities**.

2 Communication – a must for all projects

The Grant Agreement (Article 17 and Annex 5) clearly states that beneficiaries **must promote the project and its results** by providing **targeted information** to **multiple audiences** (including the media and the public), in a **strategic, coherent and effective** manner. The annotated Grant Agreement elaborates on this, stating that communication activities must be:

- **effective** (suited to achieving the project's communication and dissemination goals);
- **proportionate to the scale of the action** (activities carried out by a large-scale project with beneficiaries coming from several different countries and a large budget must be more ambitious than smaller actions);
- **strategic** (ad hoc efforts are NOT sufficient);

- **coherent** (avoid contradictory messages);
- **address multiple audiences** (beyond the project's own community), including the media and the public, in a way that can be understood by non-specialists.

Communications should highlight the project's goals and results, and include the public policy perspective sought, e.g. by addressing aspects such as:

- contribution to competitiveness and to solving societal challenges;
- impact on everyday lives (e.g. creation of jobs, development of new technologies, better quality products, more convenience, improved life-style, etc);
- actual or likely exploitation of the results by policy-makers, industry and other communities;
- transnational cooperation in a European consortium (i.e. how working together has allowed to achieve more than otherwise possible).

In addition, we expect IHI projects to highlight the added value of working in a cross-sector, public-private partnership (i.e. how the complementary expertise of the different partners is essential to the success of the project).

3 Rules for acknowledging IHI support

All project communication activities (including media relations, conferences, seminars, information material, such as brochures, leaflets, posters, presentations, etc., in electronic form, via traditional or social media, etc.), **dissemination activities and any infrastructure, equipment, vehicles, supplies or major result funded by the grant are expected to acknowledge IHI support as follows**.

Display the following logos:

- IHI JU logo;
- the EU emblem accompanied by the words Co-funded by the European Union;
- the logos of COCIR, EFPIA, EUROPA BIO, MedTech Europe, and Vaccines Europe (i.e. the members of IHI JU other than the European Union);
- the logos of contributing partners participating in the project (if there are any).

When displayed together with another logo, the logos and the EU emblem must have appropriate prominence.

The IHI logo and logos of the IHI partners can be downloaded in different versions and formats from the project communications page of the IHI website. If you would like these logos in different formats, write to us at communications@ihi.europa.eu.

If you have contributing partners in your project, you should ask them for their logos directly.

Include the funding acknowledgement:

This project is supported by the Innovative Health Initiative Joint Undertaking (IHI JU) under grant agreement No [Number]. The JU receives support from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme and COCIR, EFPIA, Europa Bío, MedTech Europe, and Vaccines Europe [and [insert name(s) of any contributing partner(s) participating in the project.]].

Note that you must list all IHI industry association partners, regardless of whether or not they are represented in your project.

The list of contributing partners should only include official IHI contributing partners as described here. The funding acknowledgement should not list individual project partners that contribute to the project as members or affiliates of the IHI industry associations that are members of IHI.

If the **character count** of the communications format does not allow the full acknowledgement to be used (e.g. for abstracts), the **following phrase** is permitted:

This project is supported by the Innovative Health Initiative Joint Undertaking and its members [and contributing partners], under grant agreement [Number].

Include the disclaimer:

Funded by the European Union, the private members, and those contributing partners of the IHI JU. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the aforementioned parties. Neither of the aforementioned parties can be held responsible for them.

3.1 Review of communication products by the IHI Programme Office

All IHI project communication products should be sent to the IHI Communications Team for review before publication or release. At least two working days should be allowed for this.

- **E-mail: communications@ihi.europa.eu**

The aim of this review is to provide us with the opportunity to verify that the communication rules have been applied correctly; prevent misunderstandings (e.g. confusion between IMI and IHI, confusion between IHI and Horizon Europe); and provide useful input.

3.2 Project-specific rules

Projects may have their own rules on communication (e.g. specific things to mention, logos to include, people to consult). Project participants should familiarise themselves with these rules and respect them accordingly.

4 Communications advice for projects

In April 2019, the IMI Programme Office held a special workshop dedicated to project communications. Much of the advice given below comes from the event, and from other conversations with people from our projects over the years. It is therefore based on the experience of people working on project communications and is applicable to IHI projects.

4.1 Getting started – advice for new projects

- **Start early!** We strongly advise projects to start thinking about communication and working on their communication strategy as early as possible – i.e. before the Grant Agreement is signed. Note however that you should not release any public announcements until after the Grant Agreement is signed.

- **Provide sufficient resources for communications.** It is vital that you ensure that your communications work is allocated sufficient resources (both human and financial) to do a good job. Doing communications well takes time, expertise and, for some tasks, can be quite expensive.

- **Use communications professionals.** We recommend you use experienced communications professionals to guide your communications work. At the start of the project, they will be well placed to help you put together a strong communications strategy with clearly defined goals, audiences, messages and channels. As the project evolves, they will help you to adapt the strategy accordingly. This is particularly important in Horizon Europe, where the grant agreement emphasises the importance of strategic, coherent communication.

- **Don't forget internal communications.** Your project partners are key to the success of your external communications activities. Setting up good internal communications systems will ensure that all partners contribute to the project's communications efforts in a consistent way.

Announcing the start of the project

Your launch announcement is a great opportunity to tell the world who you are, what you are doing, and why it matters. The following tips will help you to make a real splash when you go public.

- **Take the time to agree on your messaging.** You don't need to announce your launch the day your grant agreement is signed. It is better to take a few weeks to agree, as a project, on the main message you want to convey to the world. Do you already have a call to action? If so, your launch announcement should reflect this.

- **Communicate as a project.** The most successful announcements are those where the project partners all issue the same press release on the same day. In most cases, there is a 'core' press release with a paragraph or two that each partner can customise to showcase their specific role in the project.

- **User your partners' communication channels.** Even if you set up project social media accounts in time for your launch announcement, you should encourage your partners to share the news through their existing channels.

- **Keep us informed.** We will happily share your launch announcement through our social media channels, so keep us informed of your plans and send us links to your news stories and posts as soon as you have them.

- **Send us your logo, website address and social media links**. We will need these for the project factsheet on the IHI website.

After the launch… keep communicating!

Hopefully, your launch announcement will have generated a lot of interest among your target audiences. Now you need to keep the momentum going by keeping on communicating! In the early stages of a project, when you are just getting things up and running, you probably won't have big results to communicate. However, there are plenty of other things you can talk about to keep your communications channels active and maintain the interest of your stakeholders.

- **Celebrate small milestones.** The start of a study, or even getting approval to do a study, or setting up an expert group… these aren't results, but they are important milestones and you can use them as an opportunity to explain (again) who you are and why this milestone is important and how it will (eventually) help you to achieve your project goals.

- **Spotlights on project partners.** Use the early phase of the project to publish interviews with your project partners, looking at who they are, what expertise they are bringing to the project, and why they decided to join the project.

- **Explainers.** Many of our projects are working on complex things, including diseases that are not well known, and technologies that many people have never heard of. Explainers using lay language are a good way to demonstrate to a wider public what you project is doing and why it is important.

4.2 During the project: ensuring motivation and message coherence in a large consortium

- **Make it easy for project partners to communicate well and consistently**:
  - Create a project narrative, including a slogan and what you stand for.
  - Ensure your logo and branding elements are easily accessible to your project partners.
  - Make templates for PowerPoint presentations, e-mails, posters and messages, and encourage your colleagues to use them. This will save them time! In particular, prepare a PowerPoint slide library with consistent messages and branding and update it regularly, so that partners can pick and choose slides to build their presentation. Tip: include one single slide that summarises the project, so that they can use it to promote the consortium's work whenever speaking opportunities arise.
  - Prepare a few one-pagers to summarise the key points of your communication plans and regularly remind your colleagues of the materials available.
  - Provide materials such as captioned images, ready-to-use social media posts, and guidance documents (but remember to strike the right balance to avoid flooding your colleagues).
  - Create an effective Q&A to help people manage the unexpected.

- **Engage your project partners in communication decisions**, such as voting for your project logo, so as to encourage them to feel ownership of communication projects. Call for volunteers, especially young researchers, to engage in the project's communication activities.

- **Find opportunities to put project partners in the spotlight**. Highlight successes and give key project partners visibility: other colleagues may want to follow the example.

- **Remind colleagues** of the importance of communications and dissemination activities. Send project partners regular updates, and ask them to share.

- **The phone is your friend**: call your project partners! Or, whenever possible, opt for face-to-face meetings. Do not rely on e-mails and, when you have to, putting the project coordinator in copy can be helpful.

- **Nominate one or two people as communications contacts**: it may prove useful if there is a need for urgent contact and the main PR person is not available.

- **Identify the communication challenges in your project and be aware of cultural differences**: these may be due to different nationalities, different company cultures, or even different cultures according to the field that project partners specialise in.

- **Lead the way!** You are an expert in the communication field, make your voice heard and don't expect others to do the work for you.

- **Set up an internal bulletin** to share information and updates. You can also use tools such as WhatsApp or Slack as informal communications channels within your project.

4.3 Building a communication strategy to prevent strong public opposition to the objectives of your project

Some projects work in sensitive areas that may generate a negative response among some stakeholders. The advice below is designed to address some of these issues up front so that they don't become communications crises.

- **Listen to and have empathy** with people who are for and against your project objectives.
- **Share all the information you have**: scientific facts; information on safety, ethics and regulation. Explain what you do and why you do it, and the medical need underlying this decision.
- **Have a great, clear position statement**: acknowledge the fact that you are aware of a different way of thinking, but here is what you do, and why.
- **Engage with social influencers**, or people who are opposed to your project, ideally in non-public forums; invite them to seminars or focus groups.
- **Humanise the project** through a proactive strategy: have case studies ready introducing people (and their families) who are interested in taking a treatment, in participating in a study or trial, and explain that it is a choice. Tip: interview them!
- **Language**: be careful with your choice of words.
- **Translation**: we have to go beyond speaking in English; consider translating your stories and website.

4.4 Dealing with criticism: what to do when negative opinions of your project reach the public domain?

- **Prepare a mitigation plan early in the project.** At an early stage, discuss with the project the procedures to follow in case of a communications crisis - who should be contacted and how, within a short time frame. Consider the need for different types of strategies, depending on the nature of the criticism you are facing: whether it comes from an external party, or from within the project or its immediate surroundings (e.g. other researchers, other professional partners and collaborators). Prepare pre-approved messages to be used if/when criticism hits.
- **Know your community:** if you know that your community has specific sensitivities, address them in a proactive way, maybe through a long-term strategy to plan ahead.
- **Build long-term relationships with policy-makers and opinion-leaders**, in order to cultivate positive support around you.
- **React fast!** When facing a crisis, time is of the essence.
- **Involve the IHI Programme Office as soon as possible.** The IHI team can support you and liaise with other essential parties such as the European Commission and industry partners.
- **Handling a crisis requires positivity and sensitivity:** do not engage in conflict; build a constructive attitude; try to understand the other party's concerns as well as shared interests you may have; make sure your message is clear and works.
- **Compile a positive story** about the work you are doing.

- **Take the discussion offline** whenever possible.

4.5 Communicating about the end of a project

When a project ends, you will need to think about a number of points:

- How will you communicate the results, impact and legacy of the project to the wider health community?
- How long will you maintain the project website and social media accounts? And even if you stop updating the website content, how long will you keep paying for the domain name?
- Many significant results and impacts (e.g. publication of key papers, regulatory procedures, impacts in organisations and on healthcare…) happen after the official end of the project. Who will inform the IHI Programme Office and the wider community when these things happen?

Once your project has ended, we will contact you to get the information we need on the project results and impacts so that we can update the project factsheet on the IHI website. At this point, we can also update the website link to that of any legacy organisation (if relevant) and add links to key publications summarising the results of the project.

5 How we promote your project

We are always keen to promote our projects' successes and activities, so please inform us of your news. The earlier you inform us of your plans to communicate on something, the better. If you send us some news, we will decide when and how best to make use of it; an overview of the channels we use is provided in the table below.

We are interested in:

- Project results (especially if published in a peer-reviewed journal / presented at a conference, etc.)
- A project result with an impact – e.g. on regulatory processes, organisational procedures, healthcare…
- Creation of new tools / databases for drug discovery
- Public project events (including symposia held during scientific and other conferences, exhibition booths at conferences, etc.)
- The launch of a new activity in your project (e.g. a new clinical study)
- Any aspect of your project where you need input from the wider stakeholder community (e.g. a survey)
- Anything else you think might be interesting to the wider IHI stakeholder community – if in doubt, ask!

Examples of how the IHI Programme Office promotes projects and their activities

Project factsheet on IHI website	All IHI projects have a factsheet in the 'projects and results' section of the IHI website. The page provides an overview of the project, its partners, finance information, and links to the project's own website and any social media channels. We write the text of the factsheet and send it to the projects for an accuracy check. You should send us your logo, website address and any social media links so that

	we can add these to the page as well. If you have a general project leaflet, brochure, or video, we can also add these to the factsheet.
News stories	We regularly write news stories about our projects. Articles are published in our website newsroom and promoted through our newsletter and social media. The articles also appear on the project factsheet.
IHI newsletter	The IHI newsletter is sent out monthly and includes news from our projects.
Social media	We are active on LinkedIn, Bluesky and Mastodon and we share or like most of our projects' posts. If you are on these platforms, send us your handle so that we can follow you, and tag us in your posts to increase the chance of us seeing them: • LinkedIn: Innovative Health Initiative (IHI) • Bluesky: @ihieurope.bsky.social • Mastodon: @IHIEurope@mastodon.social • We also have a YouTube channel where we can post videos from projects. We used to be active on X but stopped using the account in early 2025. We are not currently active on other social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram. However, we can link to your pages/profiles on these platforms from your project's factsheet on the IHI website
Events	IHI events: We often invite project representatives to give presentations at events we organise ourselves. Other events: IHI staff are often invited to give presentations at external events to a wide range of stakeholders. Their presentations often include a sample of project 'success stories'.
Media	Interviews: We often cite project success stories in our answers to questions from journalists, and in some cases we may direct journalists to specific projects. Press releases: If your project has big news, a joint IHI-project press release could be an option. This requires a lot of planning and work, so if you are interested in doing this, you should get in touch with the IHI Communications Team as soon as possible. If you are issuing your own press release, we can also provide you with a quote from an IHI staff member if appropriate.
Reports, brochures and other publications	Our Consolidated Annual Activity Report (CAAR) includes a lot of success stories from our projects. We also produce ad hoc brochures and leaflets and these often include information on our projects.
Scientific publications	IHI staff occasionally write papers for scientific journals, and these often cite our projects and their successes.
Our partners' channels	The IHI partners (i.e. the European Commission plus COCIR, EFPIA, EuropaBio, MedTech Europe and Vaccines Europe) regularly promote our projects through their communications channels, including social media, websites, newsletters, podcasts, etc.

6 How you can help us – projects promoting IHI

The rules outlined above ensure that project communications also help to promote IHI. However, projects should also consider other ways they can promote IHI to their stakeholders (this will also help to put the project into its broader context).

- Include information on IHI on your **project website** and in **printed materials** (we can provide you with texts for this).
- Include IHI news in your **project newsletters**. As long as you acknowledge IHI as the source, you are free to copy texts from our newsletter, website, and brochures in your own materials. NB texts on IHI in external publications and on other websites may be subject to copyright – you should contact the publisher/web manager for permission to reuse these materials.
- **Follow IHI on social media** and share our posts.
- **Tag IHI on social media** and support our communications campaigns by using relevant hashtags.
- Include information on IHI in your **presentations**.
- Distribute IHI materials at **your events** and in **your offices / laboratories**.

7 Questions?

We are always happy to hear from our projects, so if you have a question about IHI, project communications, or anything else, feel free to contact us at communications@ihi.europa.eu.

8 Avoiding confusion between IMI and IHI

The legislation creating IHI replaces the legislation behind the Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI) programme, the forerunner to IHI. From a practical point of view, this means that the IHI Programme Office continues to manage all IMI projects.

However, IMI projects are still IMI projects, not IHI projects, and if you are working on an IMI project, you should continue to acknowledge IMI (and the EU and EFPIA plus Associated Partners for projects that have them) in all project communications, as set out in the grant agreements. Do not use the IHI logo or refer to yourselves as IHI projects.

IMI projects should refer to the separate communications guide for IMI projects which can be found on the project communications page of the IHI website.