

## ***Research Communication in Dialogue Organizations***

*By Mariana Savka and Laura Rose O'Connor*

As the Ottawa Dialogue works to expand our communication work on channels like our newsletter, our social media, website, and public hybrid events, we reflect on some of the communications strategies we've employed over the past year.

### **Key takeaways:**

- ⇒ In the realm of research communications main challenges stem from the lack of specialized training, audience adaptation and resource constraints.
- ⇒ Dialogue organizations should make strategic choices about which knowledge translation avenues to pursue depending on their goals and resources.
- ⇒ Modern technologies offer ample opportunities – from online webinars, to podcasts, social media networks and platform-specific communication.
- ⇒ Never let your contributions go unnoticed.



### **About Ottawa Dialogue**

Established in 2009, Ottawa Dialogue is a university-based organization that brings together research and action in the field of dialogue and mediation. Guided by the needs of the parties in conflict, Ottawa Dialogue develops and carries out quiet and long-term, dialogue-driven initiatives around the world. We create forums where parties can explore difficult issues in an analytical, problem-solving way to develop new paths forward. We then work with our partners to transfer these ideas to places where they can make a difference. As a complement to its field work, Ottawa Dialogue pursues a rich research agenda focused on conflict analysis, third party dialogue-based interventions, and best practices relating to “Track Two Diplomacy”.

While the research is aimed at providing public impact, without proper communication, it stays largely invisible. This Practitioner Piece stems from existing challenges with research communication and aims to highlight some methods that can be of use to researchers in the modern technological age. These include (1) **training** as the academic environment tends to prioritize specialized knowledge and technical expertise over communication skills, (2) **audience adaptation**, where the need to tailor the message to a broader audience meets the challenge of keeping the quality, and (3) **resource constraints**.

Knowledge translation<sup>1</sup> is a much-needed skill in research and practice, which essentially involves translating knowledge into action. The goal is to move research findings past the paper, into the wider academic world and to those, who can put it to practical use. While most often connected to the field of healthcare, it is equally important in the field of peacebuilding and mediation. Research can inform the formulation or adaptation of policies on peace, developing peace-building capacities (Bush & Duggan, 2013) or illuminating new approaches. Many academic institutions and private businesses provide support with research communications through specialized courses, offices, or advisors. If your members are unable to participate in these, there are plenty of online alternatives available. For example, Future Learn offers a “Science Communication and Public Engagement” course or Coursera has a course on [Designing Effective Science Communication by the University of Colorado Boulder](#). In a nutshell these courses focus on identifying a target audience, storytelling and creating a pitch, reputation, and profile building, using technologies and visual aids. Hence, it is always possible to find your own resources for skill building.

### ***Bridging the Gap Between Academic Rigor and Public Dissemination***

Nowadays, many academic researchers find it challenging to bridge the gap between their deep subject expertise and the need to effectively communicate their research to various audiences, including non-experts. The pressure to publish in peer-reviewed journals can lead to a focus on complex, jargon-laden writing that is not easily accessible.

Consider a scenario where you are allocated ten slides and a 20-minute time frame to explain your research to an audience lacking expertise in the subject matter. This exercise would encourage you to think concisely and focus on the most pertinent and fundamental elements. Your target audience should be able to understand a) the goal of your presentation b) the topic of your study c) key findings d) their importance. When you think about the latter, envision the need to articulate your research to a practitioner, prompting a concentration on practical outcomes.

The above exercises are essentially public affairs training, which, while sometimes tiresome, can be useful when needing to promote your research, apply for funding and collaborations, or convert your research into practice. Remember, sharing your findings in plain language is not dumbing down your work; rather, it is finding the most concise way to tell your story.

Modern technologies offer individual researchers within dialogue organizations the means to enhance the efficiency of their writing style for non-specialists. Tools like Hemingway App are designed to assess the readability of your content and offer suggestions for clearer and more impactful writing.

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<sup>1</sup> A Canadian term. Europe uses “implementation science” while the U.S. prefers “knowledge diffusion, dissemination or transfer.”

### *Alternative avenues to communicate research findings*

The [2019 study](#) on the influence of Twitter promotion on research dissemination shows a positive correlation between the two. Publications shared on Twitter were downloaded more times a year after publication compared to publications not shared on the platform. This highlights the importance of using various channels for research communication to enhance the reach of your work.

The following avenues for research communication can be used to disseminate or amplify the published research: blog posts, podcasts and webinars, social media, public talks, and workshops. Dialogue organizations can engage with traditional media by becoming part of subject matter expert lists. It's important to note that such involvement may necessitate readiness to respond on short notice, which ties to the previous section's emphasis on conveying your research in a concise, compelling, and memorable manner. Alternatively, podcasts like [Undercurrents by Chatham House](#) or [Think Peace](#) are examples of increasingly popular podcasts in peace studies.

Lastly, dialogue organizations can enhance their visibility and expertise through their own communication channels. This could involve establishing a blog or website, launching a YouTube channel, or simply creating LinkedIn or Twitter profiles. These platforms offer opportunities to disseminate research within immediate network, utilize promotional advertising tools to extend reach to broader audiences, and foster valuable connections. It is worth noting that certain platforms prefer specific content formats. For example, your organization may want to create a social media graphic or a short video on Canva to communicate your research more efficiently.

Beyond individual promotion efforts through personal social media, organization-based hybrid or online events can also be useful. For example, the Ottawa Dialogue's ongoing Speaker Colloquium series attempts to present our Policy Briefs and Occasional Papers, allowing for discussion between authors and between audience and authors.

### *Building networks*

The importance of network building cannot be underestimated. It can help you find supportive advocates upon research publication, extend the reach of your audience, and present prospects for future engagement in conferences or publications. As much as the COVID-19 pandemic has closed traditional spaces for network building, it also opened new ones. Researchers have been able to connect regardless of their physical locations through online webinars or colloquia. This development has not only provided opportunities for researchers from the global North but has also included those who were traditionally underrepresented in the global South, offering a possibility to build valuable and practical networks.

While networking has traditionally been associated with in-person events like conferences, there are now numerous technological advances that offer alternative options. For example, researchers within a dialogue organization one can check out initiatives by major organizations such as the Culture of Peace News Network by the United Nations.

Furthermore, researchers can join online communities. For instance, LinkedIn groups like Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) brings together hundreds of women organizations globally. Also, one can choose a network that focuses on a particular country or a region such as International Network for Conflict and Peace Research in Colombia or a European Peace Research Association (EuPRA).

Research can also be an isolating practice, particularly in remote work settings, and research networks – both those formally established and informally made on social networks – can be important in understanding the true value and impact in your work and how it fits into your wider research community.

### *Conclusions*

For dialogue organizations, conducting research is crucial but ensuring that your findings reach the right audience and have a meaningful impact is equally important. It can be especially demanding without a dedicated support team. However, the scope of tools available for promotion is constantly evolving, which can lift off some pressure. Despite challenges, the benefits of knowledge translation and dissemination are immense so never let your contributions go unnoticed.

Should you have any feedback, you may reach out to Ottawa Dialogue at [OttawaDialogue@uottawa.ca](mailto:OttawaDialogue@uottawa.ca).