Nordic Council of Ministers Communication Strategy 2015–2018

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ANP 2015:790

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ISBN 978-92-893-4384-8 (PRINT)

ISBN 978-92-893-4385-5 (PDF)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.6027/ANP2015-790>

ANP 2015:790

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Cover photo: ImageSelect

Print: Rosendahls-Schultz Grafisk

Printed in Denmark

This publication has been published with financial support by the Nordic Council of Ministers. However, the contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views, policies or recommendations of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

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Nordic co-operation

Nordic co-operation is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, the economy, and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and aims at creating a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe.

Nordic co-operation seeks to safeguard Nordic and regional interests and principles in the global community. Common Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

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Foreword

The traditional ability of Nordic co-operation to create synergies and share experiences and knowledge in order to develop effective solutions for the benefit of the region's citizens is more important than ever before. In our increasingly globalised world, free movement between the Nordic countries and international visibility are crucial for the region's competitiveness. The vision of Nordic co-operation is that we are stronger together, based on the belief that continuing and strengthened co-operation is vital for the region's ability to overcome the challenges faced by society.

There are four pillars supporting the vision *The Nordic Region – together we are stronger*:¹

- Freedom of movement.
- Innovation.
- Visibility.
- International engagement.

Innovation, creativity, and the ability of the Nordic welfare model to overcome global economic challenges have created a strong Nordic brand. Nordic participation is sought after in international fora. While further international branding in accordance with the new strategy for the international branding of the Nordic region² can contribute to an even greater influence and a sharper competitive edge, it is also important to make Nordic co-operation visible within the region itself. Co-operation benefits the citizens of the Nordic region and builds on their trust.

¹ The vision of the Nordic Council of Ministers – *Together we are stronger* (in Swedish)
<http://www.norden.org/sv/nordiskaministerraadet/samarbetsministrarna-mr-sam/deklarationer/norden-2013-tillsammans-aer-vi-starkare/>

² The Nordic perspective – Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region 2015–2018,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.6027/ANP2015-708>

In the efforts to sustain a Nordic advantage, communication is a key tool. We can reinforce the political relevance of Nordic co-operation by using our good relations with each other and awareness of the world around us to pick up on how people perceive the importance of Nordic co-operation, as well as by entrenching its concrete outcomes and making them more visible. We can start a dialogue by engaging with people wherever they may be via the appropriate communication platforms at the time.

The objective of dynamic co-operation that is in a state of constant regeneration, as set out by the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation, not only requires insight into the needs of the world around us, but also a focus on communication from the inside out.

Modern communication technologies and smart distribution channels are necessary, but insufficient in themselves.

The entire organisation must be characterised by a willingness and ability to communicate both internally and with the rest of the world.

1. Introduction

This communication strategy is an overarching strategy for the Nordic Council of Ministers – a supporting and, within its field of expertise, governing document that will help to increase the visibility and impact of Nordic co-operation.

Nordic co-operation is governed by a total of eleven councils of ministers. This is a complex structure comprising units (secretariats, institutions, offices, etc.) each of which have various duties. Therefore, this overarching strategy must be complemented by unit-specific strategies and guidelines.

The *Nordic Council of Ministers Communication Strategy, 2015–2018* shall ultimately underpin the Nordic Council of Ministers' vision and goals and relate to the organisation's other governing documents. This strategy has been passed by the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation and replaces the previous strategy, *Nordic Council of Ministers Communication Strategy, 2011–2013*. The sub-strategies and guidelines for internal and external communication that complement this overarching strategy within the various units of the organisation shall derive from this overarching strategy.

The Director of Communications at the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers is responsible for co-ordinating and monitoring this strategy.

2. Communication Strategy

2.1 Purpose

This overarching communication strategy is designed to govern and guide the communication activities of the Nordic Council of Ministers so that they contribute to its political objectives. It will serve to support the communicative priorities and balances that are necessary to achieve the visibility and subsequent awareness of and engagement with Nordic co-operation.

In order to achieve good results that will make an impact, communication throughout the organisation must be a management issue that is dealt with in an integrated manner, with a high degree of expertise and the use of effective tools.

2.2 Attributes

The Nordic Council of Ministers' communications must be characterised by:

- Clarity and political relevance.
- Expertise and strategic thinking.
- Transparency and a willingness for dialogue.

2.3 Objective

The objective is that the Nordic Council of Ministers as an organisation should be perceived as communicative and open to dialogue. By using communication as a tool, the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation will achieve their objective of a dynamic co-operation that is in a constant state of regeneration to strengthen the Nordic governments' ability to overcome current political challenges. Such communication shall ensure the popular support necessary to secure citizens' confidence in Nordic co-operation. Not only shall it contribute to concrete and visible results, but it will also brand and position the Nordic region as a political actor both in the region itself and globally. Clear political messages will form

the primary content of the communication, while politicians will be the primary messengers.

In a world that is full of messages, the ability to prioritise and focus should be the primary tool in our communication efforts. In order to achieve the level of visibility that is appropriate to dialogue with the outside world and the opportunity to influence social development, communication resources should focus on measures which ultimately support the primary messages and general political objectives as set by the prime ministers, Ministers for Nordic Co-operation, and the country currently holding the presidency.

The communication strategies and guidelines that complement this overarching strategy shall in turn underpin the objectives established in each sector and area.

2.4 Measurable goals

If they are to be meaningful, communication activities have to start from within before being conveyed externally. With the help of the guidance provided by this strategy:

- Employees and others connected to the organisation should find it is easy to communicate internally and within the network. Communication is a management issue. The creation of an open and communicative culture underpinned by effective communication tools will facilitate opportunities for co-operation that generate good results. Additionally, good communication internally and within the network contributes to employees' and others' knowledge and sense of the operation as a whole, thus bolstering their ability to act as ambassadors for Nordic co-operation. The importance of communication within the work environment must be included in satisfaction surveys and their equivalents.
- Communication must be integrated into operations. This means that communication efforts are to be planned, targeted, and resources allocated at the start of each task, and shall be monitored throughout.
- By using a clear link between this overarching strategy and the sub-strategies, the Nordic Council of Ministers will be a clearer source of communication. In this way, there will be greater awareness of Nordic co-operation and its priority areas. The precision and scope of the communication efforts will be measured regularly and compiled

and complemented by a comprehensive awareness survey at the end of this strategy period in 2018.

2.5 Target groups

Nordic co-operation largely occurs by way of exchange of experiences, knowledge building, and political resolutions that are passed by consensus between the countries. For this reason, target groups within the Nordic network are prioritised, as are interested parties. Decisions and measures directly affecting Nordic citizens, as well as those which strengthen the good reputation of Nordic co-operation, are disseminated via media channels and the platforms relevant to each target group.

An integrated approach identifies specific target groups in connection with the planning of each assignment.

Ultimately, it is Nordic citizens who should feel the benefit and significance of Nordic co-operation. However, there is also the objective of boosting the standing of the Nordic region on a broad international level. Increased awareness of the activities of Nordic co-operation as a whole sets the scene for increased interest in what is being achieved in the individual parts of the organisation.

2.6 Forms and channels of communication

Internal communication

Communicative power which portrays an organisation's desired image is built up from within.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' internal communication underpins its employees' ability to generate good results and to act as ambassadors for the organisation. It clarifies the organisation's expectations of its employees and provides the resources needed to achieve its objectives.

Communication is a responsibility of line management. Specialist support for internal communication may be provided by the HR function, the communication function, or both.

The primary channels of internal communication are meetings and the intranet.

Network communication

In a network-based organisation as broad as the Nordic Council of Ministers, network communication – which can be both internal and external – plays a pivotal role. It increases awareness both of operations as a whole and of their individual components. Opportunities to convey and reinforce a message grow as the risk lessens of conflict and duplication in communication. Dialogue by way of meetings and the network's digital channels must strengthen the message and boost its impact.

Crisis communication

The role of communication during crisis events or crises of confidence is dependent on clear rules and reporting channels. Every part of the organisation must have plans for crisis communication, and the entire organisation must know who the spokesperson(s) is/are for various crisis levels.

The Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers is the spokesperson for events or malicious rumours involving the entire organisation. The Secretary General must be contacted if there is a risk of a crisis affecting the organisation as a whole. Where relevant, the Secretary General contacts political leaders and enters into dialogue with them to appoint possible political spokespersons.

External communication

Co-operation between the Nordic governments has the overall objective of creating a common policy for the benefit of Nordic citizens and strengthening the region's role as an international partner and source of inspiration. Communication with the outside world must create the visibility and take the international approach necessary to contribute to this objective.

This requires targeted and co-ordinated communication efforts in which awareness of the world around us, branding, prioritisation, and channel selection are key. In terms of media and points of contact, actions and channel selections should be tailored to each task, but should also be co-ordinated to a certain extent in order to have a greater impact.

Employees should be encouraged to express themselves in the media in their respective areas of expertise. Matters relating to organisational liability must be dealt with at the relevant management level within the relevant line. However, employees should be made aware of their rights as whistle-blowers, which means that they cannot be prohibited from speaking about conditions in their workplace.

Specialist support for external communication, including crisis communication and network communication, is provided for by the communication function.

International branding and positioning

Efforts to increase international impact are supported by a specific strategy, *The Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region*.³ As these efforts consist largely of communication and marketing skills areas, they are also supported by this strategy.

Employer branding

External communication designed to recruit staff and harness skills forms part of this strategy. Primary responsibility for *Employer branding* lies with the HR function.

Social media

The use of social media must primarily support the dialogue between those already involved in Nordic co-operation and those who may become or are already interested in Nordic co-operation. Although social media does not recognise national borders, other than at the level of language, it supports dialogue and debate within various spheres of interest. Nordic co-operation is Europe's largest and most effective example of regional co-operation. Dialogue via social media can help to cement this further. By being active, visible, and engaged, and by inviting people to participate in discussions on Nordic topics and issues, we can connect our spokespersons with those who are interested in the Nordic region's role in political development.

Dialogue on social media is fast-paced and individualised. It is as much about listening as speaking. Getting involved in this dialogue means that it is possible to act quickly and comment on posts even when they are critical.

Website – www.norden.org

Our website, www.norden.org, is the web portal of the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council, as well as a stepping stone to other Nordic institutions. It creates a transverse connection among all the activities and projects that make up Nordic co-operation. By being in-

³ The Nordic perspective – Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region 2015–2018, <http://dx.doi.org/10.6027/ANP2015-708>

formative and active, www.norden.org will make the Nordic region's political processes and outcomes more visible.

Norden.org will communicate on its readers' terms and is generally based on accessibility, open digital formats, and the free sharing of current affairs, knowledge, and services:

- *Current affairs*: To convey Nordic co-operation's role as a political actor.
- *Facts and knowledge*: To convey statistics, facts about the Nordic region, and knowledge generated by way of the extensive production of publications through Nordic co-operation.
- *Service*: To help Nordic citizens and other relevant groups to make use of the services available in Nordic society.

Publications

Each year, the Nordic Council of Ministers funds a number of projects and activities whose results are published in the form of reports or books. Measurements show that publications by the Nordic Council of Ministers are highly regarded. Production, including forms of distribution, must ensure that the knowledge acquired and contained within the publications is fed back to decision makers within the political co-operation of the Nordic region and relayed to researchers, business and industry, and other interested parties. The innovative and cross-institutional publication platform, *Nordpub*,⁴ which is based on the principle of Open Access, as well as other dynamic initiatives, has increased international visibility considerably. The objective is to ensure the highest possible level of visibility and the best possible accessibility to publications by Nordic co-operation.

The importance of co-operation will be further entrenched by collating Nordic publications on *NordPub* and thus making Nordic co-operation a clear source of qualitative communication.

Further synergies will be achieved by the many actors in Nordic co-operation who use each other's publications in communicative contexts.

Find out more in the specific guidelines for publication within the Nordic Council of Ministers.⁵

⁴ www.norden.org/nordpub

⁵ <http://www.norden.org/en/publications/guidelines>

2.7 Graphic profile

The secretariat, institutions, and offices of the Nordic Council of Ministers must be graphically interconnected through the use of the Nordic “swan logo”. The proper use of the shared logo, together with the associated institution name, will serve to achieve a clear common source identity that will benefit the branding and positioning of Nordic co-operation.

There are clear rules and guidelines regarding the use of the logo. The publication unit at the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers is responsible for and gives advice regarding who must and who may use it.

The guidelines formulated by participants subordinate to the Nordic Council of Ministers must take into account⁶ the common rules regarding the shared graphic profile.

2.8 Interpreting and translation

Interpreting and translation are not only communicative tools for increased visibility but also strengthen the cultural community in the region. The objective is to facilitate communication between parties who do not understand one another’s language. Even at the planning stage, participants and writers must evaluate what type of language intervention is required in relation to the target group and the desired effect and impact. The choice of language is critical to the recipient’s ability to absorb what is being conveyed.

Specialist support is provided by the interpreting and translation unit of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Find out more in the Nordic Council of Ministers’ guidelines for interpreting and translation and The Nordic Language Declaration.⁷

2.9 Structure and distribution of roles

Communication in the Nordic Council of Ministers must be integrated. That means that it must form part of the operation as a whole, as well as be a responsibility of its managers and leaders.

⁶ www.norden.org/logo_en

⁷ <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-607>

In addition, this means that every employee must take their share of communicative responsibility.

Furthermore, this means that communication is part of the planning, budgeting, and monitoring process, which in turn means that communication objectives, activity plans, follow-ups, and resource allocation are established as part of overall organisation plans and for each assignment. Communication specialists play a role as the organisation's advisers and operational support in these efforts. In cases where the communication units have primary responsibility for assignments, that is where the resources are allocated.

The Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers has a central, shared communication process to support these efforts. The process can be adapted to operations in other parts of the organisation and is available at norden.org and Nordlys.

In line with the secretariat's control of institutions and other units within the Nordic Council of Ministers' internal networks, the secretariat's communications department will play a guiding and co-ordinating role in its area of expertise in relation to other communication units.

The communication strategies and guidelines of these units must break down this general communication strategy to form a unit-specific version. General plans and follow-ups are conducted when relevant, such as in connection with co-ordinated activities.

In keeping with a communicative perspective, communication specialists must be the organisation's eyes and ears in the outside world. They must keep abreast of key political debates in the Nordic countries and the rest of the world so as to be able to initiate, give advice regarding, and execute activities designed to publicise Nordic co-operation. Overall, there should be a high level of expertise throughout the field of communication, and work should be proactive, accomplished, and be carried out in the spirit of effective co-operation.

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