

# Community Currencies in Action: Effective Communications Guide

---

## ***Best practices and tips for communications when starting and scaling up a community currency initiative.***

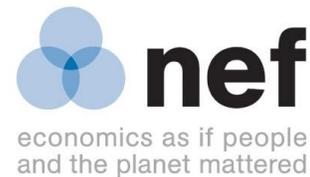
This publication has been produced by the Community Currencies in Action project (CCIA) through funding from the Interreg IVB NWE programme.

From capturing learning and knowledge from the CCIA partners, this guide is a starting point for others wanting to communicate a community currency project effectively. Here communication refers to a broad range of approaches such as publicising to end-users, contacting press and maintaining good face to face contact with stakeholders. The concrete examples given are taken directly from the CCIA program. Some are generic and apply to any other program or community currency initiative; some would need to be adapted to fit a specific set of objectives and context.

### **Why think about communications?**

Effectively communicating the message of your community currency (CC) is vital to its success. There are several groups to consider when planning how to publicise your project, such as journalists, policy makers and potential partners, but at the forefront of your strategy should be the currency users themselves.

Developing a clear message and timeline for milestones will help you to use media attention in your favour, too much publicity too soon could risk setting unachievable goals. There are numerous tools both online and offline to help get your message out.



## Target Audiences

When talking about effective communications the first thing to think about is the audience you intend to reach. For CCs the typical audiences are:

### Primary audience

- **'End-users' of the currency:** This includes the individuals, businesses and community organisations that will circulate the currency. As these are the people and groups who will determine success or failure of the project, this audience should be considered at the forefront of all communications planning.

### Secondary audiences

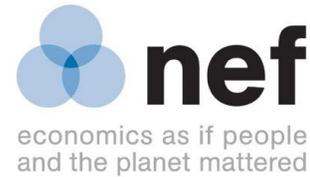
- **Local influencers:** Local figures and community organisers can act as champions of a currency. Communicate well to them and their affiliation can provide exposure for the project, as well as legitimating the currency through its association with these trusted voices.
- **Policy makers & local government:** Align your message with relevant policy documents to encourage support from those who are seeking measures to deliver on their social, economic and environmental objectives.

In the long term, the support from policy makers in local government will be crucial to eliminate regulatory and legal hurdles to the wider adoption and scaling of a CC. Local success and impact will be the precondition for this to happen.

- **The wider public:** People living outside of the reach of the currency might nevertheless engage with and disseminate stories of its developments and success. It is important that this group is considered *after* your direct currency users; if the currency users are engaged and well informed, spreading a positive message to wider audiences will be easier.

To reach a wide audience, traditional media channels such as TV, radio and national newspapers are indispensable. Working well with journalists and commentators is key to success here.

- **Academics, community currency experts and practitioners:** This group have a research interest in monetary systems, local economies, social capital or similar topics. Academics and those already working in the field of CCs can help bolster the research ground of your currency, providing evidence and legitimacy for the potential impact of a project.



## Key Messages

As a starting point it is helpful to develop a clear message about CCs in general, that embodies the values of your project and can be conveyed to a broad range of audiences. For example:

*“CCs are an exciting tool that can energise citizens and communities, making them more inclusive and prosperous, and local economies more resilient and environmentally sustainable.”*

From here you can develop tailored messages that are specific to your currency’s model and aims, aligning this with the interests of your target audiences.

## Which messages for whom?

Once you have drawn up your audience list, work out which aspects of your project will interest and appeal to each group. Think up ‘concrete examples’ that can accompany your message, for example:

### For local residents and other individual users

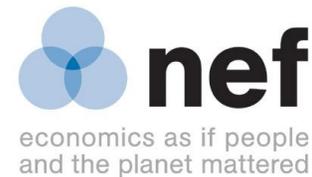
- Community currencies offer a practical and convenient way to do something positive for your local community. They improve community cohesion, prosperity and sustainability and can help preserve the cultural identity of an area.

*Concrete example: Using text-to-pay allows you to get to know the traders in your area on a first name basis.*

### For businesses and traders

- For small and medium size enterprises (SMEs), community currencies offer a practical and convenient way to gain market share and appeal to new customers.
- SMEs can gain access to extra liquidity and galvanise their operations during credit crunches.
- CCs provide a local economy grapevine through which more established businesses can support new enterprises and vice versa.
- The local economy gains a competitive advantage against large corporations.
- CCs can offer new resources such as I.T. facilities that are often cheaper and easier to use than regular accounting or e-payment technology.

*Concrete example: Small businesses can accept text-to-pay from customers where previously they were only able to accept cash.*



### For policymakers, decision-makers, and media commentators

- Spell out how community currencies relate to policy goals at all levels of government. Demonstrate the ways in which community currencies engage directly with the delivery of public services by municipalities to improve quality and sustainability, while meeting the need for controlling public expenditure.

### For academics and existing community currency practitioners

- Communicate evaluation stages of the currency focussing on projected and measured impacts of the scheme. Messages should aim to advance the conceptual and empirical knowledge of the currency field, as well as making the case for further research.

## Channels to get your message out

### Visual Communications

#### *Logo*

A well designed logo will prompt stakeholders and currency users to take ownership of the project and proudly promote it. The more the name or logo is meaningful to the currency and to the end-users, the more easily it will be remembered.

#### *Transaction Medium*

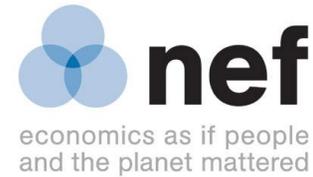
The design of a physical note, coin, swipe card, online platform or mobile app serve as powerful tools for people's first encounter with the CC. Physical notes and coins are handy for press photo opportunities and giveaways, and a good looking digital interface will ensure your CC website gets shared online. The design must reflect the brand well and appeal to the targeted currency users.

#### *Print Communications*

Fliers, brochures and posters produced should be designed to appeal to all stakeholders, from local residents, to currency partners, SMEs and policy makers. Try not to overload people with information, but print communications can instead spark an interest that leads readers to the website or to an event to find out more. Ensure digital versions are available for online dissemination.

#### *Promotional items*

The production of promotional items such as T-shirts and badges allow supporters to align themselves with the values of the currency and works particularly well with locally based currencies. However this communication route is not a priority; similar publicity can be carried out online using up less resources.



## Online

### Website

A website is the principal way to learn about a CC project. It should aim to be a go-to site appealing to all audiences. The site should be easy to use, a place where questions about the project can be answered, supporters can sign up for newsletters and digital currency users can access their accounts. For currencies with a digital accounting element for users, it is best to have a visually distinguished area of the site for the CC accounts, and for general information.

### Social Media

Communicating via social media is an inexpensive way to potentially reach huge audiences.

It's important to decide which is the best social media platform for each message – for example Facebook works well with images and videos and Twitter is good for striking up conversations with currency users. Take a tone that reflects the values of your currency and remember to *be human* – people are more likely to engage if your posts are not just self-promotional but offer honest, interesting and shareable content.

### Video and Audio Communications

Video interviews, podcasts and animations are an effective way of explaining the processes and mechanisms of a currency. They provide good content for the website and boost social media sharing amongst followers.

### Ongoing updates

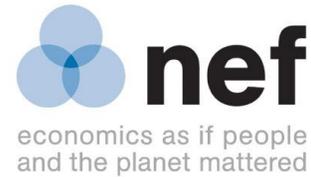
To keep interested parties engaged with and informed about your currency, regularly update your website. Send out email newsletters to subscribers, promoting milestones of the currency - manage the flow of these: too many will dilute your message and could put off recipients, too few could undersell the progress of the project.

## Press and Public Affairs

### Press Coverage

Local newspapers and neighbourhood circulars are good routes for alerting potential currency users to your project, as well appealing to local figures who may want to champion your scheme. National and international press coverage will give legitimacy to your currency and allow you to reach new audiences.

You can proactively attract media coverage by sending out press releases in advance of all milestones and events. Be careful not to attract too much media attention too soon; over exposure of the currency whilst still in early stages can give a false impression of its scope.



### *Political Lobbying*

Influence policy and gain publicity by engaging with politicians who have values and party goals that reflect those of your project. Local councillors will have a vested interest in the potential community benefits of the currency project and their attendance will raise the profile of events and provide photo opportunities.

It is not usually necessary to focus resources on winning support from politicians: once a currency gains backing from its community, politicians will be keen to engage as well.

### *Events*

Many people won't have heard about community currencies and may initially perceive them as a complicated topic. Conferences and workshops provide good publicity and a chance to educate and engage people actively in the values and aims of the CC.

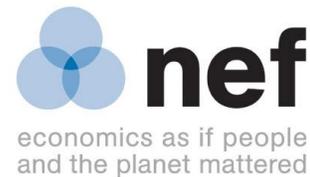
Capture feedback and contact details of participants where possible. This allows you to follow up to those interested with a summary of how the event went and details of future actions planned.

### *Face-to-face meetings*

Face-to-face meetings are a major part of communicating about community currencies. They foster trust and allow for strong relationships with stakeholders. Be aware of the context in which you are meeting the potential partner or supporter, for example, meetings with business people will benefit from a professional pitch focusing on the benefits to their trade, whereas meetings with a local government representative may require a broader presentation of the currency's long term aims.

## **Communications Stages**

Community currencies are founded on the people who use them. It is therefore crucial to develop a strong network of currency users and other stakeholders and keep them up to date with developments.



This ongoing communication requires substantial effort and resources, and needs to be carefully considered in project planning and budgeting. Integrating a communications strategy into your project implementation and management plan ensures there are enough resources for effective communications at all stages of your project.

## 1. Define your project

### 1.1 Be clear about your aims

- Plan what impact you believe the currency will have prior to any public communications. This allows you to decide on your key messages – people will want to know what changes you want to make.
- Engage prospective currency users at this stage to provide a sample of the types of things businesses or individuals expect from the project. Ask stakeholders what they want the currency will achieve, and what they think the currency can achieve - the answers can shape your communications campaign.
- This material can come out of holding a ‘Theory of Change’ workshop. See our handbook and resources for evaluation planning for CC projects: **No Small Change**

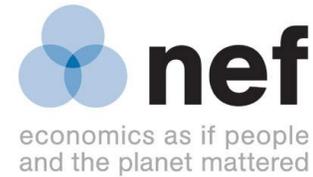
### 1.2 Fix your message

- Decide on a core message to disseminate across all stakeholders and currency end-users.
- Adapt this for strategic communications with different parties but be sure to maintain the core values throughout.

## 2. Getting people on board

### 2.1 Preparation

- Draw up a database of potential project partners and supporters categorised by what role they could play in your communications activities e.g. spokesperson, organisation to accept the currency for its services, business happy to act as a media case study, councillor with a network of local contacts.
- Your contacts database should be made up of a cross section of parties, ranging from, local groups, residents, businesses, the wider general public, policy makers and journalists.
- Draw up a strategy to decide which parties to contact at which stage, and via which communications route.



## 2.2 Communication to potential participants/stakeholders

- Carry out preliminary research before meeting with potential partners. For example if meeting a local business familiarise yourself with their clientele base and decide concretely what your currency could do for their particular trade.
- Be confident, open and listen. When first approaching interested parties it's important this takes the form of a conversation, showing where there is room for stakeholders' ideas to be incorporated. Currencies depend on the engagement of stakeholders and for this they must feel like they are listened to.
- When persuading people to join up, be transparent in your approach. Remind potential partners that you are not merely selling a product but a project with a set of values that they can align themselves with.
- Do not over claim! Manage the expectations of stakeholders, this is important to ensure that those involved are clear about what the project is able to achieve.

## 3. After canvassing

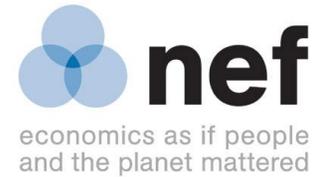
### 3.1 Refine relationships

- Be organised and keep a databases of those you have spoken to. Contacting participants repetitively or forgetting to follow up will make the project seem unprofessional.
- Invite key stakeholders to review publications you release and invite them to participate in events.
- Co-host activities where possible – a launch event co-hosted by the CC and a local business network for example, will help to grow your contacts database and give the project legitimacy with an extended network.
- Project champions can be key to the development of a scheme, whether a local councillor, high-street business or community leader. Form a network of key supporters and spokespeople who you can quote in press releases, making it more likely that your message will be picked up by the media.

## 4. Once the currency has launched

### 4.1 Maintain and grow your network

- Solidify the network you have built up in the canvassing stage by keeping contacts well informed and engaged with newsletters, social media updates and events.
- Link up with local projects and businesses who participate in the currency to celebrate each other's milestones with online content.



- Celebrate success! Keep up the morale of volunteer support workers giving regular thanks and recognition for their services in bringing the currency to life.
- Ask other organisations to share your news through their own media channels—those who share the values of the project will be happy to act as ambassadors.

### 3.2 Speak to your users

- Testimonials from your currency users can act as great educational and marketing material. By interviewing local residents or businesses involved in the scheme, the message of your project remains grounded in the real world. This is an effective way of conveying to journalists, potential partners and the wider public how the currency works and impacts on peoples' day to day lives.
- The process of encouraging feedback from currency users helps you stay connected to those 'on the ground' and keep up to date with how the reception of the project might develop and change over time.
- Capture testimonials as blog entries on your website. This keeps the content of your website fresh giving regular visitors new material to read.

### 3.3 Evaluate your communications

- Evaluation is a critical element of a communications campaign that is often overlooked
- Consider campaign evaluation at the earliest stages of planning. Objectives of your publicity can be set in a measurable way with the indicators of your success defined in advance. For example if you set yourself the target of informing local residents about your currency launch, decide which media routes will be most effective and evaluate afterwards whether this was accurate and whether you need to adjust your approach for effectively communicating the next milestone.