Here is an overview of the four-phase, nine-step planning process presented in the textbook *Strategic Planning for Public Relations* (Smith, R.D. 2008, Routledge/Taylor & Francis). The steps are equally applicable to campaign planning in public relations, advertising and integrated communication.

The process of these steps is *deliberate*, and they must be *taken in sequence*. After identifying a problem, our tendency too often is to skip ahead to seeking solutions, leaping over research and analysis. This can result in unwarranted assumptions that later prove to be costly, counterproductive and embarrassing. Careful planning leads to programs that are *proactive and preventative*, rather than to activities that are *merely reactive and remedial*. At the same time, the steps in this process are *flexible* enough to allow for constant monitoring, testing and adjusting as needed.

Ask experienced communication managers, and you may find that they don't necessarily articulate their planning specifically along the lines of these nine steps. But talk with them about their work, and you are likely to find that they go through a process pretty much like the one being presented here, whether they identify "steps" or not.

A few practitioners may admit (somewhat guiltily) that they don't do much planning. If they are being honest, they'll tell you they know they've been lucky so far with their hunches. Perhaps they don't do formal planning because they don't have the time or because the environment is so unstable that all they can do is react. Some practitioners may tell you their bosses and clients want action rather than planning (though such shortsighted bosses and clients usually don't remain in business very long). If you could observe how professionals work, however, you'd probably find that effective communication managers do plan. The good ones have learned how to build the research and planning components into their work and "sell" it to their clients and bosses.

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**Strategic Planning for Public Relations & Integrated Communication**

**Phase One: Formative Research**

- Step 1: Analyzing the Situation
- Step 2: Analyzing the Organization
- Step 3: Analyzing the Publics

**Phase Two: Strategy**

- Step 4: Establishing Goals and Objectives
- Step 5: Formulating Action and Response Strategies
- Step 6: Designing Effective Communication

**Phase Three: Tactics**

- Step 7: Selecting Communication Tactics
- Step 8: Implementing the Strategic Plan

**Phase Four: Evaluative Research**

- Step 9: Evaluating the Strategic Plan
Formative Research

During the first phase of the nine steps, Formative Research, the focus is on the preliminary work of communication planning, which is the need to gather information and analyze the situation. In three steps, the planner draws on existing information available to the organization and, at the same time, creates a research program for gaining additional information needed to drive the decisions that will come later in the planning process.

Step 1: Analyzing the Situation. Your analysis of the situation is the crucial beginning to the process. It is imperative that all involved—planner, clients, supervisors, key colleagues and the ultimate decision makers—are in solid agreement about the nature of the opportunity or obstacle to be addressed in this program. Worksheet for Step 1

Step 2: Analyzing the Organization. This step involves a careful and candid look at three aspects of the organization: (1) its internal environment (mission, performance and resources), (2) its public perception (reputation) and (3) its external environment, (competitors and opponents, as well as supporters). Worksheet for Step 2

Step 3: Analyzing the Publics. In this step you identify and analyze your key publics—the various groups of people who interact with your organization on the issue at hand. Strategic Planning for Public Relations provides an objective technique for setting priorities among the various publics, helping you select those most important on the particular issue being dealt with. This step includes an analysis of each public in terms of their wants, needs and expectations about the issue, their relationship to the organization, their involvement in communication and with various media, and a variety of social, economic, political, cultural and technological trends that may affect them. Worksheet for Step 3

Strategy

The second phase of the planning process, Strategy, deals with the heart of planning: making decisions dealing with the expected impact of the communication, as well as the nature of the communication itself.

Step 4: Establishing Goals and Objectives. Step 4 focuses on the ultimate position being sought for the organization and for the product or service. This step helps you develop clear, specific and measurable objectives that identify the organization’s hoped-for impact on the awareness, acceptance and action of each key public. A good deal of attention is given to objectives dealing with acceptance of the message, because this is the most crucial area for public relations and marketing communication strategists. Worksheet for Step 4

Step 5: Formulating Action and Response Strategies. A range of actions is available to the organization, and in this step you consider what you might do in various situations. This section includes typologies of initiatives and responses. Worksheet for Step 5

Step 6: Designing Effective Communication. Step 6 deals with the various decisions about the message, such as the sources who will present the message to the key publics, the content of the message, its tone and style, verbal and nonverbal cues, and related issues. Lessons from research about persuasive communication and dialogue will be applied for the ultimate purpose of designing a message that reflects the information gained through Step 3. Worksheet for Step 6
**Tactics**

During the Tactics phase, various communication tools are considered and the visible elements of the communication plan are created.

**Step 7: Selecting Communication Tactics.** This inventory deals with the various communication options. Specifically, the planner considers four categories: (1) face-to-face communication and opportunities for personal involvement, (2) organizational media (sometimes called controlled media), (3) news media (uncontrolled media) and (4) advertising and promotional media (another form of controlled media). While all of these tools can be used by any organization, not every tool is appropriate for each issue. Following the menu review, the planner packages the tactics into a cohesive communication program. [Worksheet for Step 7](#)

**Step 8: Implementing the Strategic Plan.** In Step 8, you develop budgets and schedules and otherwise prepare to implement the communication program. This step turns the raw ingredients identified in the previous step into a recipe for successful public relations and marketing communication. [Worksheet for Step 8](#)

**Evaluative Research**

The final phase, Evaluative Research, deals with evaluation and assessment, enabling you to determine the degree to which the stated objectives have been met and thus to modify or continue the communication activities.

**Step 9: Evaluating the Strategic Plan.** This is the final planning element, indicating specific methods for measuring the effectiveness of each recommended tactic in meeting the stated objectives. [Worksheet for Step 9](#)