

Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society (AICS)

**External Communications and Outreach**

**Policy and Procedures Manual**

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Table of Contents

1. [Introduction 2](#_Toc7926565)

[About Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society](#_Toc7926566)

[Why this policy reference manual?](#_Toc7926567)

[Copyright](#_Toc7926568)

[Purpose of this policy reference manual](#_Toc7926569)

1. [Chapter 1: Civil Society Organizations and External Communications 4](#_Toc7926570)

[1.1 CSOs and external communications](#_Toc7926571)

[1.2 What is external communications in a civil society organization context?](#_Toc7926572)

1. [Chapter 2: Establishing the External Communications Baseline 5](#_Toc7926573)

[2.1 How to establish an external communications baseline](#_Toc7926574)

1. [Chapter 3: Establishing External Communications Frameworks 6](#_Toc7926575)

[3.1 Introduction](#_Toc7926576)

[3.2 Mediums of External Communications](#_Toc7926577)

[3.3 Exploring Mainstream Media and Methodologies of Interaction](#_Toc7926578)

[3.4 Using Mainstream Media for External Communication](#_Toc7926579)

[3.5 Harnessing Social Media](#_Toc7926580)

1. [Chapter 4: Outreach 11](#_Toc7926581)

[4.1 What is outreach?](#_Toc7926582)

[4.2 Outreach programs](#_Toc7926583)

1. [Conclusion 13](#_Toc7926584)
2. [Bibliography 14](#_Toc7926585)

# **Introduction**

## About Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society (AICS) is a concept that has been incubating for several years amongst Afghanistan’s civil society community, following the 2007 Enabling Environment conference convened by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Aga Khan Development Network, in partnership with the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program and the Asia Development Bank. One of the key recommendations from the conference was to establish independent certification bodies for civil society organizations (CSOs) that are recognized by Government, the private sector, donor agencies and civil society. The AICS establishment program was launched by AKF-A in January 2014 through a partnership between AKF and Counterpart International under a wider USAID funded Afghanistan Civic Engagement Program (ACEP) with the long-term goal of enabling CSOs to realize their potential in support of the development of Afghanistan. Behind this initiative are key CSO networks, civil society professionals, and representatives from national and international CSOs with an interest in Afghanistan.

**Mandate of AICS**

The mandate of AICS is to support a credible and competent civil society sector in Afghanistan by linking CSOs, donors, government and capacity building services through culturally appropriate certification schemes. The Institute will encourage the growth of a vibrant civil society, promoting pluralism and participatory, non-discriminatory development in Afghanistan.

**Objectives of AICS**

* Raise credibility of the civil society sector by certifying local organizations against locally defined and internationally recognized standards;
* Systematize capacity building efforts of local organizations by coordinating initiatives against measurable performance indicators;
* Strengthen the role of civil society in Afghanistan’s development through collective efforts of policy dialogue and active engagement with government, donors, the private sector and the broader civil society sector; and
* Provide a channel for resources for civil society by strengthening philanthropic and corporate social responsibility efforts.

**AICS’s Certification Program:**

AICS’ certification program is the organization’s flagship program, which raises the effectiveness and credibility of the civil society sector by certifying CSOs against locally defined and internationally recognized standards. The certification program enables CSOs to align their policies, processes, structure, programs and activities in accordance with the international best practices, contributing to the growth of a competent, transparent and effective civil society sector.

The CSOs’ performance is assessed against five broad sets of parameters as follow:

* Internal Governance and Strategic Planning;
* Project Management and Program Delivery;
* Financial Management;
* External Relations, Communications and Outreach; and
* Human Resources

This reference manual is one of several generic manuals developed with support of AICS to aid CSO’s under the certification program to adapt and adopt, and customize these manuals and internalize them as part of their policies. Apart from this manual, other generic reference manuals developed to support CSOs in this regard include: **Financial Management policy reference manual; Procurement Management Policy Reference Manual; Project Management Policy Reference Manual; Human Resources Policy Reference Manual; Monitoring and Evaluation and Advocacy Policy Reference Manual; and CSO Governance Handbook**.

##

## Why this policy reference manual?

Recent analysis of strengths of CSOs done through AICS’s Certification Program, revealed that while CSOs under its program had some external communications and outreach processes in place but some were struggling in developing and institutionalizing external communications and outreach practices and policies.

Thus, this policy reference manual is informed by the foregoing issues and the realization that for CSOs to succeed they need a framework and policy for external communications and outreach for the organizations regardless of their size to effectively communicate their activities and impact they are making in communities.

##

## Copyright

This generic policy reference manual is offered to Afghan CSO’s as a public good. CSOs under the AICS certification program and beyond are free to copy, adapt, customize and adopt this manual for their own organization in a manner they deem appropriate. CSOs that develop their policies out of this reference manual, must take this just as a guide and template. What is important is for the CSOs to develop out of this reference manual, policy documents that apply to their organization’s mandate and size and take ownership of the policy manual they develop out of this and internalize and operationalize the same.

##

## Purpose of this policy reference manual

This document is a general policy for {Name of CSO} external communications and outreach. This policy document sets out a normative framework for communications and outreach for {Name of CSO}. It sets out the general principles, guidelines and protocols regarding external communications {Name of CSO} has committed to follow.

This policy reference manuals covers four chapters as follows:

* Civil Society Organizations and External Communications;
* Establishing External Communications Baseline;
* Establishing External Communications Framework; and
* Outreach

# **Chapter 1: Civil Society Organizations and External Communications**

## 1.1 CSOs and external communications

Civil Society Organizations tend to take a back role in their approach to their external communications as they relate to their public identity or branding. In some cases CSOs are of the view that their humanitarian or human rights work will eventually speak for itself, or be followed up by the mainstream media as a result of the same. The significance of external communications strategies for CSOs is therefore with regard to their own ability to communicate to external audiences without an intermediary (mainstream media or outsourced media/communications company.

## 1.2 What is external communications in a civil society organization context?

External communications refer to messages and messaging from {Insert Name of your CSO} to an external audience.[[2]](#footnote-2) The latter can be a specifically targeted external audience (for example: potential stakeholders such as government officials, private businesses, religious leaders, young people, donors, International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), coordination networks of NGOs and bodies etc.) or the general public. These messages can be multi-themed in order to meet the specificities of the target audience’s preferences or to influence them to join or support a specific cause or campaign as determined by {Insert Name of your CSO}.

# **Chapter 2: Establishing the External Communications Baseline**

## 2.1 How to establish an external communications baseline

In order for {Insert Name of your CSO} to have a specific external communications strategy, it must first crosscheck an often overlooked element. This being its internal communications framework and how it prepares it for its external messaging.

This would entail the following:

1. Board members, employees/staff, members of {Insert Name of your CSO} are all in sync and knowledgeable about the vision, mission, values and objectives of the organization.
2. That there are internal rules of communication within {Insert Name of your CSO}. These are as they relate to internal (board, members, staff) meetings and their frequency, an internal communications system such as email, mobile and fixed telephony, storage and recording mechanisms of internal documents or resolutions and internal communications mechanisms for dispute resolution.
3. Establishing, if necessary, a staff unit or internal expertise to handle, store and record internal communications.

The baseline for external communications strategies is to have an internal communications strategy that is cogent and reflects the vision, mission, and values and ensures that there are clear mechanisms of communication between structures/ departments of {Insert Name of your CSO}. For example, a membership based CSO must establish mechanisms of communications between members that enable the organization to better achieve its vision, mission and values.

Where {Insert Name of your CSO} is certain of the latter it is better able to navigate the terrain of externally communicating the same.

# **Chapter 3: Establishing External Communications Frameworks**

## 3.1 Introduction

Based on the full knowledge the {Insert Name of your CSO} has of its work (vision, mission values, objectives) as outlined above and in tandem with having an effective internal communications strategy or infrastructure, it is then imperative that it begins to enable its effective external communications.

In order to be able to tell the outside world what {Insert Name of your CSO} is about, it needs to be clear on at least two issues. These being the mediums of external communications that it will use, and to aggregate the target audience according to the same.

## 3.2 Mediums of External Communications

In contemporary communications the main mediums of the same are as follows:

1. The mainstream news media (radio, television, newspapers, fixed telephony); and
2. New Media (the internet, mobile telephony and social media).

## 3.3 Exploring Mainstream Media and Methodologies of Interaction

The mainstream media is still very important for external communications of {Insert Name of your CSO}. In order to engage the mainstream media, {Insert Name of your CSO} has to engage different methodologies to maximum effect.

These can be outlined as follow:

1. **Television and Radio:** For these mediums of external communication, it is important to have approaches that reflect their news-cycles.

**Radio:** This is still globally the most ubiquitous form of media that can be used. It has a more regular news cycle and requires messaging that is more tuned to the ear (audio) than to the eye visual. It is also a medium that can be used for advertisements and short audio- documentaries though at cost. According to Internews 73 percent of Afghans own a radio and of these 52 percent are in the rural areas and use the radio daily[[3]](#footnote-3). With over 170 radio stations, radio is still an important source of news and entertainment in the country though it’s losing its popularity to other sources such as the television[[4]](#footnote-4).

**Television:** This medium for external communications has a much slower news cycle than radio but is highly effective because it is audio-visual. It is also a medium that goes beyond a news cycle approach to communication in that it can distribute content such as documentaries, advertisements and short edutainment films. Television is one of the most important source of news and entertainment with over 200 local and international television stations in the country, 96 in Kabul and 107 in other provinces[[5]](#footnote-5).

1. **Social Media and the Internet**: This is by a long shot the most dynamic and evolving of media platforms that are available for use by CSOs including {Insert Name of your CSO}. Encompassing websites, electronic mail and popular social media applications such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, it is a medium that is designed for high speed multi-media content. It is exceedingly popular with young audiences but is also however rapacious in its desire for content, and regularly so. It is increasingly integral to any external communications strategy for CSOs. Afghanistan has over 80 percent mobile phone penetration[[6]](#footnote-6), though internet users are still below 18 percent[[7]](#footnote-7). Understanding the limitations of internet usage also helps {Insert Name of your CSO} set realistic targets for social media reach of its information and outreach products.

## 3.4 Using Mainstream Media for External Communication[[8]](#footnote-8)

In order to place external communications content on mainstream media platforms such as newspapers, radio and television, there are specific tactics and methodologies that are deemed to be best practices. Mainstream media basically accepts the following practices as means through which to disseminate news and content:

1. **Press Statements**: Press statements are brief summaries of events, activities that {Insert Name of your CSO} is undertaking. These are for the consumption of mainstream media. They are basic outlines that follow the journalistic practice of ‘four W’s and an H’ i.e. who, what, when, why and how. They must also within the context of {Insert Name of your CSO}’s work briefly explains what happens next.
2. **Press Conferences:** A press conference is a platform through which {Insert Name of your CSO} can invite journalists of the mainstream media to a venue to give a live briefing of its activities or issue on the basis of urgency and importance. These press conferences are preceded by an invitation or written message to the media that explains who is calling them together and informing them about the issue. In order to do this effectively, {Insert Name of your CSO} must have all the contact details of all mainstream media houses in its area of operation as well as building a reputation for professionalism, punctuality and ethical behavior with the mainstream electronic and print media.
3. **Media Interviews:** {Insert Name of your CSO} can also utilize mainstream media by regularly availing its Board, staff and program participants for interviews on issues that they are experts on. For all interviews, {Insert Name of your CSO} representatives must be well prepared by practicing how to respond to specific questions as well as how to be succinct and on point in their messaging.
4. **Advertisements**: Not all media houses will carry or publish a story of {Insert Name of your CSO}. Editorial decisions on the importance or newsworthiness of a press statement or conference are beyond the ethical control {Insert Name of your CSO}. Despite this and across all media platforms (radio, television, and print newspapers) there is scope for advertising the {Insert Name of your CSO}’s agenda. It can come at great cost but it helps put {Insert Name of your CSO}’s agenda in the public domain. The key is to select the most impactful media in which to advertise in order to reach a larger target audience. In most cases advertising on radio is the most effective because of its reach. Television advertising is the most expensive because of the nature of audio-visual content required.
5. **Documentaries/Edutainment**: For radio and television it is important for {Insert Name of your CSO} to create its own content that can be published on mainstream media. Documentaries that are professionally done on specific issues that {Insert Name of your CSO} tackles which are of public concern are one such way to utilize mainstream media platforms. {Insert Name of your CSO} may not have the capacity to produce such documentaries professionally and may therefore require a partnership with content creation experts. Documentaries can also be done in partnership with a mainstream media house. In the same vein, {Insert Name of your CSO} can sponsor entertainment programs such as soap operas with themes that are relevant to their work. With so many television stations soap operas, mainly from India (such as Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*[[9]](#footnote-9)*) and Turkey (such as Valley of the Wolves[[10]](#footnote-10)) have been popular [[11]](#footnote-11)

## 3.5 Harnessing Social Media[[12]](#footnote-12)

Social media is comprised of websites and applications found on the internet or world wide web that allow users to interact via new technologies such as computers/laptops and more significantly mobile telephony. Social media has changed the way human beings communicate and work to the extent of blurring the difference between the virtual and the real. For {Insert Name of your CSO} social media is the equivalent of the new frontier, i.e. unexplored communications territory in relation to development work. It is therefore important for {Insert Name of your CSO} to harness the power of social media in their external communications strategies.

In order to do so, {Insert Name of your CSO} must strategically consider the following:

1. **Understanding social media for CSOs**: Social media is essentially a personal/individual experience. It is therefore imperative that {Insert Name of your CSO} begin by building its social media identity which is clear and succinct about who they are, their mission, vision and objectives, and to prioritize their social media platforms depending on their target audiences. This means that {Insert Name of your CSO} must disaggregate its priority social media platform depending on the impact {Insert Name of your CSO} intends to make. It can be Twitter, Facebook or WhatsApp.
2. **{Insert Name of your CSO}’s messaging for Social Media**: Social media platforms are different from press statements or press conference. They are designed in such a way as to be interactive, and with a great sense of immediacy. {Insert Name of your CSO} therefore, in utilizing its preferred social media platforms, must be aware of the fact that social media requires regular content for consumption by its targeted audiences. Such content must essentially be multi-media (no one is going to read an annual report on Facebook or Twitter) and to the point. Once a frequency of such content is established, it must be maintained. What is of paramount importance is that {Insert Name of your CSO}’s preferred social media account must never be dormant for long. Content is king/queen, and so is interaction and feedback with the targeted audience.
3. **Measuring Impact of {Insert Name of your CSO}’s Social Media Presence**: Social media platforms have mechanisms to measure their impact on target audiences. Depending on the intention of **{Insert Name of your CSO}’s** social media accounts (i.e. to reach a greater number of people, to motivate on the ground action, to draw the attention of public officials), measurement of the impact of social media should essentially be organic to the vision, mission, values and objectives of **{Insert Name of your CSO}’s**. In other words, big numbers of likes may not matter as much as the policy impact of social media posts.
4. **Engaging social media experts/staff:** Managing social media platforms is not an easy task. It requires expertise and knowledge of how social media works in contemporary times. It is therefore important for **{Insert Name of your CSO}** to ensure that they have staff or experts that are dedicated to keeping their social media accounts active and interactive. These experts will keep **{Insert Name of your CSO}** relevant and engaging on specific development issues that the organization is tackling.
5. **Safety and Security on Social Media**: Social media is basically a new window through which **{Insert Name of your CSO}’s** imparts and receive information. It is also a window through which the state and adversaries can view the organization’s activities and issues. It is therefore important to ensure that there are security guidelines as to how social media operates on behalf of **{Insert Name of your CSO}**. This would include ensuring the protection of passwords to social media accounts, encryption of specific data sent to members, utilization of virtual private networks (VPNs) in the event of an internet shut down, and two-step authentication of social media accounts.

# **Chapter 4: Outreach**

## 4.1 What is outreach?

Outreach for CSOs refers to the latter’s ability to undertake activities outside of the confines of its own offices or its own internal communications processes. It is also a strategy for the {Insert Name of your CSO}to create its own media and content for its own external activities.[[13]](#footnote-13)

It is linked to what {Insert Name of your CSO} it does in order to read its wider target audience outside of its interaction with the mainstream media.

## 4.2 Outreach programs

Outreach programs are essentially designed in order to publicize the organization’s vision, mission and objectives as well as its activities. They can be participatory i.e. geared toward using internal membership structures and staff to directly carry out activities in aid of the public branding of the organization. Or they can be outsourced to a professional organization that will focus mainly on external communications and publicity as outlined in section 2 above.

It is therefore characterized by the following:

1. **Branding**: A branding of {Insert Name of your CSO}that relates to its desired public identity. That is its logo, mission statement and outlining of its vision and objectives. It is the external persona to the public.
2. **Projects and Programs**: Program or project specific activities that are in tandem with the broader objectives, mission, and vision of the organization. Each program/project will therefore have its own specific branding and messaging that promotes the activities as they relate to their implementation and documentation/recording for public consumption.
3. **Enabling outreach**: The mechanics of outreach by {Insert Name of your CSO}are reliant on its internal structures and their ability to carry out their mandate or agenda. These structures include the employees, memberships and board members of {Insert Name of your CSO}. All of these members have a part to play in the outreach of the organization’s programs. These include the holding of public meetings, distribution of organizational promotion flyers and paraphernalia such as t-shirts and caps. Depending on the structure of the CSO, outreach programs are run by a dedicated team and can be campaign of specific issue in relation to a project or the general vision and mission of the organization.
4. **Outreach as Advocacy:** Outreach programs are basically part of advocacy strategies for {Insert Name of your CSO}.[[14]](#footnote-14) Advocacy is policy lobbying work of {Insert Name of your CSO}where it engages with government, parliament and the public to push for democratic or other reforms.

This outreach process would normally involve the following aspects:

1. Understanding the vision, mission and objectives of {Insert Name of your CSO}or its specific project/program;
2. Understanding the problem that {Insert Name of your CSO}seeks to address and those who would be most affected or mapping of key stakeholders who would be able to solve the problem. Or mobilize in order to get a responsible authority to effect policy changes that will help to solve the problem;
3. Planning effective activities by {Insert Name of your CSO}’s internal structures on addressing the problem, for example public meetings, petitions and civic education programs;
4. Establishing a media and publicity campaign for the outreach/advocacy campaign which is directly linked to the external communications strategy (press conferences/statements, social media presence, websites and campaign paraphernalia (t-shirts, flyers, caps, advertisements); and
5. Periodically monitoring and evaluating the impact of the campaign as it progresses and deciding on how to proceed with the outreach/campaign.

# **Conclusion**

External Communications and Outreach are always directly interlinked. The brand of the organization begins with the process of establishing internal communications structures of the {Insert Name of your CSO}, which in turn comes up with external communications strategies for the {Insert Name of your CSO}’s projects and programs as aligned to its vision, mission and objectives.

Outreach then also emanates from sound internal and external communications strategies. It is, however, more reliant on the internal objectives of {Insert Name of your CSO}per project or holistically in relation to its vision, mission and objectives. The key, however, is to keep communications and outreach programs as simple and straightforward as possible, and to also ensure that they measure up to a local context and organizational values, vision, mission and objectives.

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