

DRAFT
OxLEP communications and engagement strategy
April 2022 to March 2024

Introduction and context:

This strategy aims to outline a communications and engagement approach for the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) Ltd from April 2022 through to March 2024, creating a clear framework around what priorities and key areas we will communicate to identified key stakeholders and audiences.

Where possible, this strategy aims to align with the organisation's corporate plan through to 2024, supporting its key objectives to be communicated effectively too.

The 'business landscape' has changed significantly following the COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020 – with this in mind, it is vital that our communications strategy recognises the need to deliver effective communications that embraces the channels that our identified stakeholders interact most effectively with.

In addition, the strategy should identify any areas in which our organisation can be more efficient in its delivery to better reach those audiences. This strategy aims to direct a culture within our communications function that embraces all varieties of communications, delivered with our core objectives at the centre.

In terms of classification of activity, this will be built around five core strands. This is further outlined later in this paper.

The five strands are:

- Economic recovery
- Sustainability
- Innovation
- Opportunities
- Effectiveness

In addition, as one of 37 local enterprise partnerships operating in England, it is important that communications activity supports the remit of OxLEP set by our funders which is broadly built upon the principles of:

- Supporting the development of an economy that benefits Oxfordshire businesses and Oxfordshire communities.
- Supporting the development of an economy that delivers for the wider UK economy, both nationally and internationally.

This strategy is not in a position to provide a detailed plan of activity. This will be developed independently – but aligned with – this strategy and will be based against agreed organisational priorities.

Aim:

To support the delivery of this strategy, an overarching aim has been created for it, sat alongside a vision that we have for the Oxfordshire economy, as well as our own mission as an organisation.

The aim of this strategy is:

‘To position OxLEP as a considered, trusted and forward-thinking organisation that both promotes and supports the Oxfordshire economy and its ongoing potential.’

This aim also aligns with the organisation’s own vision for the Oxfordshire economy, which continues to be to support a: ***‘Vibrant, sustainable, inclusive, world-leading economy, driven by innovation, enterprise and research excellence.’***

The aim of the communications strategy also aligns with our own mission as an organisation, being: ***‘The purpose of OxLEP is to inspire and support business, to secure investment and drive opportunities for economic prosperity across our communities.’***

Objectives:

As stated previously in this document, the communications strategy aims to align as best as possible with the overall 2021 to 2024 corporate plan for the organisation.

Within the corporate plan, a number of clear aspirations and priorities relating to OxLEP’s delivery is outlined – these include the following areas:

- **Reskilling people;** relating to the jobs, skills and mental/physical health of Oxfordshire residents.
- **Resilient businesses;** across the spectrum of our firms’ sizes and their sectoral specialisms.
- **Reviving places;** reviving and reimaging Oxfordshire’s city, towns, villages and rural areas.
- **Rebuilding connectivity;** ensuring we have the infrastructure to link our people, places and assets, both digitally and physically.

Taking this into consideration, the communications strategy will aim to ensure that the considerable level of activity delivered by our in-house team, outsourced communications support – or through any partner communications work – should consider these aspirations.

Working outside of these ‘parameters’ potentially will a) create confusion as to what OxLEP is here to deliver and support, and b) stretch the communications resource.

To support these corporate aspirations, the communications strategy will be built around the below objectives – all communications activity during this period in time should consider these objectives:

- To build 'retained' and ongoing business engagement to OxLEP through our communications work.
- To ensure OxLEP's corporate aspirations (listed above) – are communicated authoritatively across relevant channels that connect with our identified key audiences.
- To ensure OxLEP has at least an equal voice when communicating the success of our work.
- To lead the organisation in developing a collaborative, joined-up approach with regards to communications – both internally and with external partners.
- To protect OxLEP from threats to its reputation and improve the organisation's ability to manage issues and to handle a crisis event.

Wider 'Oxfordshire' objectives:

- To demonstrate that Oxfordshire's history of delivering pioneering solutions to the world's greatest issues can be mobilised via OxLEP's role and work.
- To underline that Oxfordshire is inspiring young minds and entrepreneurs to understand that we are the location 'of choice' when it comes to opportunities.
- To showcase Oxfordshire's innovation ecosystem is delivering successful, global successes.

Audiences:

To ensure that this strategy is successfully-implemented, we will need to engage with a range of audiences. This strategy acknowledges that requirement and the need for our messaging to be tailored to give the best 'return on investment'.

This strategy splits our key audiences into two main groups; primary audiences and secondary audiences – primary audiences are those we aim to reach directly; secondary audiences allow us to connect with our primary audiences.

Primary audiences:

The business community:

- Businesses based both inside the county and outside the county – from sole traders to multinationals, including businesses currently based in the Oxfordshire, and those considering being based here. This also includes those businesses with the ability to be key influencers to drive forward our delivery across all identified areas.

'Local' communities and residents in Oxfordshire:

- All those living and/or working in Oxfordshire, as well as those being educated or educating people in the county.

Government (both national and local):

- Key politicians at a national level (MPs, departments – particularly BEIS – sector champions and civil servants) and a local level (councillors and officers).

Secondary audiences (including – but not exclusively limited to):

- Partner organisations (private sector, business parks, other LEPs and the LEP Network)
- The media and other influencers
- OxLEP Board and sub-group members
- OxLEP staff

Delivery and messaging:

Delivery:

As outlined in the introduction to this strategy, all communications work will be tactically-aligned with the following five themes, or strands of work:

- Economic recovery
- Sustainability
- Innovation
- Opportunities
- Effectiveness

An activity plan (more below) will be drawn out that positions activity within one of these five themes:

Theme	Primarily aligns with which corporate priorities	Rationale for theme
Economic recovery	Reskilling people; resilient businesses; reviving places; and rebuilding connectivity.	To reflect OxLEP's ability to lead elements of and support Oxfordshire's economic recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic.
Sustainability	Resilient businesses; reviving places; and rebuilding connectivity.	To reflect OxLEP's commitment to supporting a zero-carbon future – this includes supporting our

		businesses to be more sustainable, as well as championing Oxfordshire's sector strengths in these areas.
Innovation	Reskilling people; resilient businesses; reviving places; and rebuilding connectivity.	To champion Oxfordshire's ability and culture of embracing innovation across our economy.
Opportunities	Reskilling people and resilient businesses.	To highlight Oxfordshire's economy as a significant force to generate and nurture opportunities.

The final theme, **effectiveness**, will be implemented to ensure that communications activity demonstrates the role, delivery and effectiveness of OxLEP and our ability and commitment to delivering a successful Oxfordshire business community.

To support these themes, an annual activity plan will be produced and give broad direction as to what the communications function will deliver and focus on during the period of this strategy.

The activity plan will be based against the resource available to the communications function and will not stretch that level of resource, unless negotiated otherwise.

In addition, where substantial activity is outlined with the activity plan, a separate campaign plan will be created outlining respective aims and objectives of activity – these campaign plans will be socialised with sponsoring OxLEP colleagues and partner organisations (as appropriate) for input and sign-off.

All activity will be assessed as to what the best communication channel(s) and tactics are to deliver a campaign or activity, but will consider:

- Media relations
- Digital marketing – including digitally-optimised content
- Digital advertising – including social media advertising
- Website communications
- Social media
- Events
- Public affairs/advocacy
- Partnership communications

Messaging:

Depending on the type of engagement required, key messaging will be developed according to activity – however, to enhance OxLEP’s reputation and corporate objectives – the following messaging should be included where possible:

- OxLEP is determined to play our role in ensuring that the county’s businesses are able to run as efficiently as possible and remain productive during this time.
- OxLEP continues to champion the county’s largest sectors and those with the greatest potential for recovery and growth.
- OxLEP continues to evaluate our own delivery to ensure that we can also best support the county’s businesses.

OxLEP Skills-related:

- OxLEP Skills enables opportunities across Oxfordshire, through building meaningful relationships between business and education.

OxLEP Business-related:

- OxLEP Business supports companies to start-up, grow and locate in Oxfordshire

Statistics relating to our work:

- Since our launch in 2011, OxLEP – with its partners – have secured around £1bn-worth of investment for the Oxfordshire economy.
- In total, OxLEP oversees a £3.1bn growth programme for Oxfordshire.
- In the 12 months following the COVID-19 outbreak, OxLEP supported over 2,000 Oxfordshire-based businesses with COVID-specific issues and provided almost £2million-worth of advice and mentoring
- Following the COVID-19 outbreak, OxLEP administered in-excess of £5million-worth of direct funding into businesses across multiple sectors.

Resourcing:

To support the delivery of this communications strategy, a level of resource is required across this two-year period and primarily, the strategy is supported by a delivery budget, which is agreed prior to each financial year (this does not take into consideration operational budget costs).

This budget is further broken down into the following strands and is managed by the in-house communications manager. It is profiled prior to the commencement of each financial year, with the scope to adjust as/should priorities alter:

- External support
- Marketing activity
- Events and seminars

- Website maintenance
- Website hosting

In addition to this centralised budget, programme-related activity should add communications resource to its overall costs to support the delivery of those programmes' objectives.

New programmes acquired/bid for by OxLEP:

As is the nature of OxLEP's work, there is recognition that further additions to our delivery can and will continue to happen.

It is important that communications resource is considered as part of how these programmes might be acquired and delivered and avoid being 'absorbed' as part of a structure that is already delivering previously signed-off activity.

New programmes should consider the following:

- The type of output/outcome required and, in turn, the skills required to deliver that output/outcome – for example; if a digital engagement is required, support and skills delivering that output should be factored in. If a public affairs-related engagement is required, a different approach should be considered.
- The length of time that activity is required to take place across – will this conflict with other delivery commitments?
- Are the level of outputs/outcomes reasonable, given the communications resource available to OxLEP (including procured support)?

Ongoing support and governance of the strategy:

Though the OxLEP communications function will deliver this strategy, it is recognised that there are significant interdependencies relating to it both internally and externally – with this in mind, it's important that the communications strategy and function embraces the shared importance of communications strategy.

Therefore, to support the ongoing governance and delivery of the strategy, the following processes will be put in-place:

- **Creation of a Communications Steering Group:** Upon sign-off of this strategy, a steering group – made up of members of the in-house team and invited members of the Board and sub-groups (ideally, with communications-related roles away from OxLEP) – will be created to regularly monitor the success of the strategy. The regularity of this meeting will be confirmed.
- **Board meeting scrutiny:** Ensure that a communications agenda item is added to at least TWO Board meetings per annum, to be led by the in-house communications manager.

Desired impact of our communications strategy:

Ongoing measurements analysing this strategy will be key to track how successfully we have engaged with our identified key audiences.

With this in mind, we have created a number of measurements, listed below, that will continue to be analysed and used by the steering group to benchmark the strategy's overall success.

These will include:

Type of measurement:	Specific approach:
Website engagement (primarily, clicks)	Through targeted content profiled on OxLEP websites, analyse the number of clicks and subsequent engagements across our websites.
Event engagement	Record the number of sign-ups to physical and digital events, and track future engagement with OxLEP.
CRM data growth	Through targeted e-marketing promotions, build and retain contacts with key, identified audiences and track future engagement with OxLEP.
Social media following growth	Analyse social media growth in followers (ensuring that specified, key audience demographics are growing most).
'Organic search' appearances	Generate content to ensure key initiatives score highly on internet search engines.
Media coverage	Generate coverage within key titles that best connect us with our identified audiences.
Public affairs engagement	Create meaningful engagement opportunities with identified elected officials who can further communicate our successes.
Digital advertising (cost per lead)	For digital advertising campaigns, aimed at generating new leads to programmes, analyse total marketing spend divided by the total number of new leads.

Further information:

For further details and to discuss this communications strategy, please contact:

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