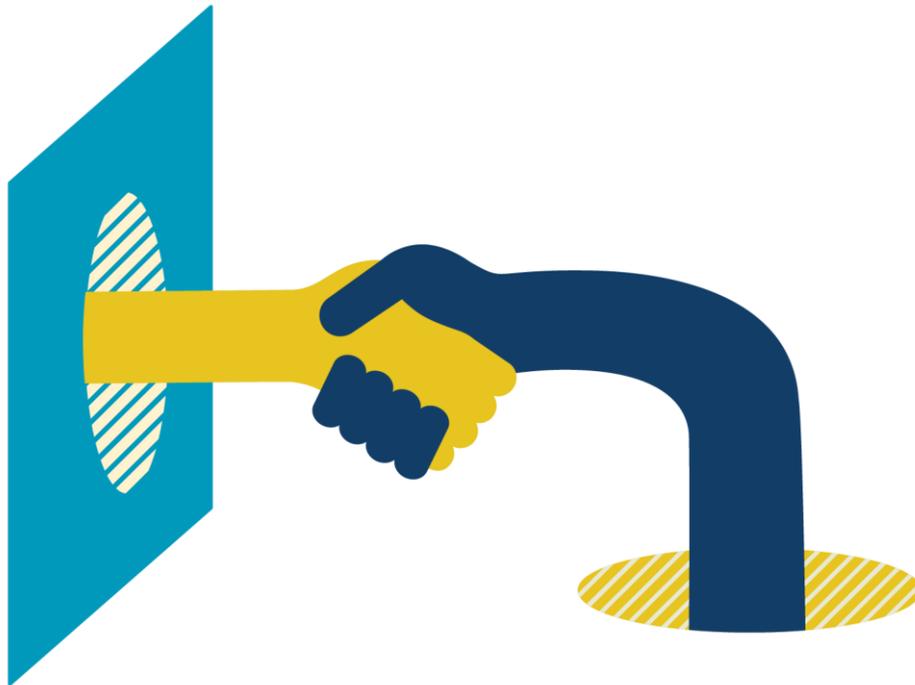




Interact IV Communication Strategy

v4 | December 2023



Disclaimer: Cooperation can be complex, and while Interact’s job is to make it easier, Interact cannot offer assurances on the accuracy of our pan-European information in any specific context.

Furthermore, understanding and knowledge evolves throughout the programming period. If you spot something out of date or inconsistent, please contact us at communication@interact.eu

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Publisher Interact Programme
Adopted 05.12.2023
Version date 23.10.2023
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Interact



**Co-funded by
the European Union**
Interreg

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1. Introduction

This document sets out the framework for the Communication of the Interact IV (2021-2027) Programme. It is intended as a practical guide at the starting point of the programme, not an exhaustive, literal or timeless guide on practical implementation.

Communication trends and techniques change rapidly, and the strategy seeks to provide a framework to enable responsive work. The priority of communication in Interact is to ensure we connect the right work, with the right people, at the right time.

The communication strategy summarises the overall approach of Interact IV to communication; The two personas that Interact shall use to communicate; How we identify target audiences; and how this evolves throughout the period.

The strategy also sets out the mediums and resources allocated to communication. It further sets out the ongoing monitoring of communication activities, and how the evaluation of communication shall be embedded in the wider work to evaluate the programme.

2. The two personas of Interact

2.1. Context

Interact communication has two distinct tasks.

The first is to promote the activities Interact undertakes. These activities are largely aimed at cooperation stakeholders and those already interested in cooperation.

The second task is to help place Interreg in the wider cooperation context, and the wider cohesion policy context.

In Interact III the singular Interact persona has performed the dual roles. This often created a more complicated communication for stakeholders who were not already familiar with the Interreg environment and created more confusion in who we were, and what we were presenting.

With this in mind, the solution in Interact IV is to provide two clearer personas to present these different pieces of work, and to help Interact more clearly and coherently place Interreg in the wider context.

2.2. Interact brand persona

The primary identity of Interact, shall be Interact. It is expressed through the logo set out in ARES(2021)5795894 – 22/02/2021.



Interact's logo, and Brand Design Manual set out the context for communication with this brand. Additional chapters of the manual have been drafted, compared to the previous manual, to provide more practical support on use of plain language, a brand voice chart, principles of design and web design and more.

This persona shall be used when Interact is working to make cooperation easier, and when work is targeted as supporting those already working in a cooperation context.

2.3. Interreg, by Interact

The alternative, when Interact is not working to make cooperation easier, or when it is targeting those outside the cooperation context, is Interreg by Interact.

This persona is used as an exception, rather than by default.

Examples of when this personality is preferred include:

- As part of joint campaigns (I.e. Project Slam)
- When targeting the wider public (I.e. Interreg Day)
- When sharing the collated achievements of Interreg (i.e. Thematic network outputs)

This persona is expressed through the general harmonised Interreg logo below.



To further support colleagues in expressing this identify in a harmonised way, a dedicated chapter of the Interact Brand Manual 'Interreg, by Interact' has been developed. Not only does this chapter create a common colour palette, structured around the Policy and Interreg Specific Objective branding.

While Interact does not want to confuse audiences in presenting two similar logos, even when using the Interreg, by Interact brand, a small attribution, either in logo form, or in written form small be included in a non-intrusive way.

2.4. How to use the two personas

Example of EU Regions Week 2023

At EU Regions Week 2023, Interact bid for, and were retained for three connected stands. We benefitted from excellent positioning and were able to tell a connected story to Regions Week attendees.

Interact stand (x1): Promoting HIT, Jems, the Interact Academy, Index, and projects which promote Interreg (Interreg Cooperation Day, Interreg Slam, Capitalisation)

Interreg stands (x2): Promoting external cooperation (NEXT, IPA, OMR) and promoting the Interreg Skills report

3. Approach to communication

The basis of Interact IV communication shall be an evolution rather than a revolution.

The main changes come in the form of the development of two personas to support communication. In addition, the strategy sets out a more rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluation, as well as seeking to formalise the development of prioritisation for a more transparent approach to communication.

3.1. Interact's mission

The mission of the Interact IV programme remains:

*Cooperation can be complex;
Our job is to make it easier*

3.2. Interact's values

The adopted value statement of Interact is:

*Through **cooperation**, and with **integrity**,
we deliver **service excellence** for Interreg and beyond*

The values of Interact will be continuously developed with the team, ensuring the statement and mission remain connected to our practices.

3.3. Communication is everyone's business

It shall remain the case that everyone is responsible for communicating Interact's work. More effective work to ensure this support is practical shall be developed. This includes more resources to support training for those who want, or need, it.

3.4. Interact's personality is not static

Depending, as Interact does, on the expertise of individuals to deliver its services, Interact's personality is a harmonised expression of our shared values. Interact's experts are unique individuals who share the value of cooperation. They are friendly, professional, open, inquisitive and interested. While they have expertise, they know they often do not have all the answers or direct experience themselves, but they know who to ask and to connect with in order to get the right information and to stay up to date with their topics of work.

Early brand work for Interact IV has started to develop a brand voice chart for Interact, which shall be further developed to help new colleagues to find the language and style of Interact quicker, and for more experienced colleagues to follow the evolution of the programme

3.5. Following technology

It is already the case, that effective digital media has moved beyond photos and into animation. This exists in the form of simple gifs as well as more sophisticated storytelling in the form of animated videos. This trend is driven in particular by new social media platforms, wider availability of mobile data as well as the rapid growth of video editing skills and software.

Furthermore, more and more AI tools are being developed to support communication in many forms. In the short term, an immediate revolution looks unlikely, but the general evolution of more and more AI tools should be carefully watched. Better video captioning tools, design tools and text generation tools could all be used to support Interact colleagues better communicate their work, if the technology works well.

4. Communication objectives

The objectives of Interact’s communication were set out in the Interact operational programme document, with some possibility for further definition if needed. The communication objectives, as set out in the Interact IV programme, are to:

- 1) Promote Interact and the use of key tools and services that support cooperation, including Interact’s Operations of Strategic Importance (OSI).
- 2) Support the wider dissemination of best practice and knowledge amongst target audiences.
- 3) Demonstrate that ‘Cooperation Works!’;
 - a. through the achievements of Interact.
 - b. through the collated achievements of Interreg.
 - c. through sharing knowledge with other cooperation actors.

4.1. Promoting key tools and OSIs

Interact sets out five Operations of Strategic Importance in Annex 3 of the Interact programme document. They are grouped into two themes, tools which promote ‘Harmonisation and Simplification’, such as HIT and Jems; and tools which promote ‘Communitation and Capitalisation’, such as Keep.eu; Interreg.eu; and our capitalisation networks. These projects, and the subsequent successor versions for 2028-35, define the activities of Interact.

As further projects are developed which could provide a programme defining service, or alter the way programmes work together, it can be added to the OSIs. All OSIs shall be supported by regular (quarterly) exchanges with Interact’s communication team and be reported to the Monitoring Committee at least annually, in line with the reporting requirements of OSIs.

The extent to which additional projects receive additional support is set out in Chapter 5. Prioritisation below.

4.2. Supporting wider dissemination work

All of Interact’s work needs to be promoted to help it reach the right target audiences – except ‘closed’ activities, such as standing working groups. General communication activities shall support the Interact team in securing the visibility of the breadth of Interact’s work to relevant audiences.

4.3. Demonstrating that cooperation works

This objective includes demonstrating and celebrating Interact's own successes and reaching out to new audiences in the cooperation context. Successes under this objective are not limited to Interact, but also include the work that promotes Interreg.

It is hoped that including this in the wider programme communication approach, greater harmony can be achieved than was secured with Interact III in developing consistent indicators, narratives, and priority based communication for this work.

5. Target audiences

Interact's target audiences are defined in section 2.1.1.3 of the Interact IV programme document. An overview of these groups is set out below, as well as the initial communication priorities. The Interact programme document should be consulted for a full description of these audiences and the nuances of the groups.

5.1. Interreg programme bodies

Specifically, the Managing Authorities, Joint Secretariats, National controllers, bodies responsible for Accounting functions, Audit Authorities and Representatives of Monitoring Committees.

5.2. National/ regional co-operation stakeholders

Such as IJG actors (national and regional programmes), National/Regional Coordination bodies, National contact persons/points, Macro-regional/Sea basin strategies' actors and other actors involved in cooperation instruments, EGTC, key cooperation partners on specific themes, CLLDs, ITIs and other territorial tools (ref. Article 22 CPR).

5.3. Wider policy actors

The wider policy actors audience is a 'catch-all' category for all other stakeholders of interest. It includes the European Commission, and DG REGIO specifically, as well as other DGs where Interact work has a direct connection, such as Audit, Evaluation. It also includes the 'citizens and wider public' who may be interesting in Interact's activities (to promote Interreg in particular).

5.4. Connecting the right information with the right persons

One of the main early challenges of the communication approach is to build a more robust targeting approach to better connect Interreg programme bodies with the specific services of interest to them. The development of a more 'user-centric' approach should enable Interact to effectively target communication to specific individuals and support Interact colleagues in easily finding relevant participants from the contact database (Customer Relationship Management).

Interact communication resources shall also be available to support Interact colleagues tasked to reach out to new audiences and engage them on the subject and importance of cooperation.

6. Prioritisation

It is not possible or desirable to attempt to rigidly define the priority for communication over a seven year period in year one. The priorities shall evolve and every years' work planning process shall offer a chance to assess where communication resources and activities can best support the programme.

6.1. Basic principles for prioritisation

The following are identified as aspects useful to identify priority items for Interact Communication.

- Operations of Strategic Importance, which need communication support in the corporate communication and visibility of the tool. Note, this separated from the day-to-day communication requirements of the tool for its functionality, which should be serviced by the project team.
- Corporate Interact requirements, in particular to promote Interact's work, operations and achievements
- Novelties and innovative work where the core audience is not yet defined.
- Impact moments of operations and projects matter most, support should follow at key moments, rather than at all times.

6.2. Support for non-priority items

It follows that with prioritisation, some aspects of Interact's work will not receive 'additional communication support'. In general, all activities should be promoted to some extent. The prioritisation approach is a way of transparently addressing what aspects of Interact's work merit specific attention.

Only events which are not open for registrations, such as working groups, shall not be promoted. Instead, the outputs of these working groups are important to disseminate, so the outcomes of these working group reach the wider audiences.

Support to the team, including training on how to communicate and use language shall be provided during the programme.

7. Channels of communication

Interact shall continue to assess the ways we reach our target audiences in the most effective manner. Our principle means of communicating with our audience is through an up-to-date and easy-to-navigate website.

In summer 2022, Interact conducted a short survey to explore which channels of communication were most useful for our audiences, and continuous work will help explore and manage the methods in which Interact reaches out.

7.1. New Interact website and Newsflashes

The current website shall be replaced with a more user-centric website that applies the three-click principle. The website shall be the delivery tool for the Newsflash. More work shall be done to map how to effectively deliver more targeted communication via email, both in the form of topical newsflashes and targeted emails.

7.2. Interact's social media accounts

Interact shall actively monitor the fast-moving developments associated with social media channels. It shall always consider which are useful and effective for Interact. Social media offers a low resource intensive way of reaching out and promoting activities, however, the platforms themselves are volatile, with some significant challenges (technical, political and financial) ahead.

Interact starts the 2021-2027 period with existing accounts on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, as well as a YouTube channel. The default handle for such accounts is InteractEU

7.3. Support to Interreg persona social media

Interact's corporate account shall also have a mind for the other accounts operated by Interact, and shall amplify them to wider audiences where relevant.

7.4. Notifications and an Event App

Interact has deployed instant notifications on the Interact III website. It enabled notifications to go to all users' phones when a new event was scheduled on a topic they were interested in. Early indications are, where it works, it is useful and non-intrusive. However, as the technological solution is dependent on third party software (browsers), users have reported frustration that it has not been possible to sign up, or that after having signed up, notifications do not arrive. It is important to note that many browsers (Edge in particular) have a hostile approach to such notifications.

The alternative to dependence on third party software would be the development of an Interact App. Such as tool would enable full control of the notification system. Combined with a useful

service orientation, such as direct access to event registrations and networking, it could offer a useful additional channel and means of communication.

This tool would only be developed if a low-cost solution could be found. Interact shall investigate these systems as part of the development of the Interact website, noting it is a 'nice to have' rather than a necessary feature.

8. Budget

The budget devoted to communication is €500,000 of external costs throughout the programming period.

This figure does not include the costs of the staff (2 FTEs) currently tasked to deliver Interact's communication. The increase in resources should enable Interact to deliver more in-house, and utilise external resources to deliver the most value-added activities.

8.1. Spending plan

Below, an approximate spending plan for Interact IV communication sets out how the budget is intended to be allocated between three principle communication tasks. The allocation is intended to be indicative of intent, and there may be variation between the lines responding to evolving needs and trends within communication.

External expertise and Equipment	Total cost	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
<i>Website and web services</i>	275,000	100,000	50,000	30,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	50,000
<i>Graphic design</i>	185,000	50,000	10,000	20,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	75,000
<i>Printed and other materials</i>	40,000	10,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Total cost	500,000	160,000	65,000	55,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	130,000

9. Monitoring and Evaluation

One of the more significant improvements in regards to communication is the increased importance of monitoring and reporting the communication and visibility measures, as well as the communication of Operations of Strategic Importance.

9.1. Monitoring of communication and visibility

In preparing for these changes, it is proposed that there are two fixed reports to the Monitoring Committee. The first would form part of the year ahead presentation alongside the presentation of the Work Plan. This would then be followed by a report on the activities undertaken, as part of the annual report element of a Monitoring Committee meeting

9.2. Ongoing evaluation of Interact communication

Interact has tested new indicators that will provide the basis of the ongoing evaluation of the programme throughout the period. While these measures could be repeated to measure movement, it is noted that the sample size is too small to be viewed in any way as representative.

These questions could either be asked on their own, or be included in the 'Use and Satisfaction' survey, or another similar survey.

9.2.1. Effectiveness of programme communication actions

Questions asked seek to understand the effectiveness of the programmes communication measures included:

- a) Interact shares information in a timely manner
- b) The information I get from Interact is relevant for my work
- c) I know how to contact Interact experts on topics I am interested in
- d) Interact's website is easy to navigate
- e) The Newsflash is a useful way to find relevant information

9.2.2. Knowledge and awareness of Interact's Operations of Strategic Importance

In seeking to understand the awareness of Interact Operations of Strategic Importance (note not their usefulness), respondents will be asked to define their awareness of each Operation of Strategic Importance as one of the following:

- a) Familiar with the details of it
- b) Aware of what it is and some basic information
- c) Heard of it, but don't know what it is
- d) Not heard of it

These questions were asked in June 2022, which establishes an approximate baseline for future surveys.

It is noted that not every one of Interact's OSIs are relevant for everyone working in Interreg. Furthermore, the importance of certain tools is tied to the programme life-cycle, and Interact's communication approach should reflect this.

9.3. Formal evaluation of Interact communication

In addition to Interact's internal monitoring and evaluation of its communication activities, an external evaluation shall be conducted. At the start of the programme, it is envisaged that Interact's communication activities shall be evaluated as part of the Operational Evaluation, which is expected to be in 2024 or 2025. Interact communication objective 3b, relating to the collective achievements of Interreg, would likely be evaluated separately.

10. Organisation elements and contact

Communication in Interact IV shall continue to be an activity conducted by Interact Office Vienna, on behalf of the Managing Authority.

Interact Office Vienna shall maintain a named communication officer for the programme. Details of the Communication Manager shall always be easily found on Interact's website, or contacted on communication@interact-eu.net.

Annex 1: List of abbreviations

ABB	Abbreviation
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
MA	Managing Authority

Annex 2: Communication Indicators

Summary of the results of the Communication Survey of June 2023.

The results of the below questions form the baseline for analysing the effectiveness of Interact Communication. Please note, the survey approach is used for ease and effectiveness, and as a complement to more formal external evaluation.

The results of each individual survey are not statistically reliable and cannot be easily compared to other surveys. What can be usefully compared is the extent to which knowledge of the different OSIs compares within each iteration – HIT was a priority in 2021, but is less important in the middle of the programming period.

Effectiveness of Interact Communication:

To what extent do you agree with the following statements:

Interact shares information in a timely manner	Total	%
1 - Strongly disagree	0	0%
2	1	1%
3	10	11%
4	17	19%
5	35	39%
6 - Strongly Agree	27	30%
Grand Total	90	

The information I get from Interact is relevant for my work	Total	%
1 - Strongly disagree	0	0%
2	0	0%
3	6	7%
4	19	21%
5	28	31%
6 - Strongly Agree	37	41%
Grand Total	90	

I know how to find and contact Interact experts on topics I am interested in	Total	%
1 - Strongly disagree	0	0%
2	4	4%
3	11	12%
4	15	17%
5	36	40%
6 - Strongly Agree	24	27%
Grand Total	90	

Interact's website is easy to navigate	Total	%
1 - Strongly disagree	3	3%
2	5	6%
3	16	18%
4	21	23%
5	30	33%
6 - Strongly Agree	15	17%
Grand Total	90	

I receive Interact's monthly email newsletter (Newsflash)	Total	%
No	3	3%
No but I want to	7	8%
Yes and I read it sometimes	50	56%
Yes and I read it always	30	33%
Grand Total	90	

The Newsflash is a useful way to find relevant information	Total	%
1 - Strongly disagree	0	0%
2	3	3%
3	4	4%
4	22	24%
5	25	28%
6 - Strongly Agree	36	40%
Grand Total	90	

Knowledge and awareness of Interact's Operations of Strategic Importance

To what extent are you familiar with the following Interact projects?

HIT	Total	%
Familiar with the details of it	29	32%
Aware of what it is and some basic information	39	43%
Heard of it, but don't know what it is	7	8%
Not heard of it	15	17%
Grand Total	90	

Jems	Total	%
Familiar with the details of it	28	31%
Aware of what it is and some basic information	43	48%
Heard of it, but don't know what it is	4	4%
Not heard of it	15	17%
Grand Total	90	

Interreg.eu	Total	%
Familiar with the details of it	28	31%
Aware of what it is and some basic information	47	52%
Heard of it, but don't know what it is	13	14%
Not heard of it	2	2%
Grand Total	90	

keep.eu	Total	%
Familiar with the details of it	35	39%
Aware of what it is and some basic information	36	40%
Heard of it, but don't know what it is	9	10%
Not heard of it	10	11%
Grand Total	90	

Capitalisation	Total	%
Familiar with the details of it	23	26%
Aware of what it is and some basic information	39	43%
Heard of it, but don't know what it is	16	18%
Not heard of it	12	13%
Grand Total	90	

How respondents communicate, and how they would like to receive communication

Which method(s) of sharing information and communication do you use in general?

Method(s)	Total	%
Website browsing	83	92
Email (Individual)	75	83
Email (Newsletter)	67	74
Facebook	33	37
LinkedIn	29	32
Twitter	19	21
Instagram	15	17
YouTube	14	16
TikTok	4	4
Other	3	3

Which communication methods should Interact use to share information with you?

Method(s)	Total	%
Email (Newsletter)	76	84
Website browsing	69	77
Email (Individual)	66	73
LinkedIn	26	29
Facebook	20	22
Twitter	15	17
YouTube	15	17
Instagram	8	9
TikTok	2	2
Other	1	1