



HOW-TO GUIDE FOR IABC AWARDS

The Midas Touch

How to prepare an IABC Gold Quill Award entry for:

Division 2: Communication Research



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IABC AWARDS

IABC's awards programs are symbols of excellence in strategic communication recognizing smart thinking, flawless execution and proven results. Whether policy-based or marketing-driven, award winners deliver meaningful work that contributes to business results and aligns to [IABC's Global Standard](#) to ensure consistency and credibility resulting in building the reputation of the communication profession.

The **Global Standard** is defined by communication professionals around the world embracing a shared career purpose and six core principles as the building blocks of their work. Informed by a passion for engaging audiences with strategic communication, the purpose and Principles focus our work and form a global standard. Applying that standard enables us to cross all borders, align with diverse cultures and effectively serve organizations of all types and sizes.

Reaching across the globe, IABC Gold Quill Awards seek the best of the best.

This How-To Guide shares what evaluators look for in an award-winning entry and how to complete an award-winning entry. With this guide, you'll be able to match your work against the criteria used by our trained evaluators.

The Basics

You can enter your work in one of four divisions and 28 categories. The Quill Award divisions include:

- Communication Research Management
- Communication Management
- Communication Education and Training
- Communication Skills

You may enter work in multiple divisions and categories; however, each work plan must be customized to the category description. Please read these descriptions carefully to determine which category or categories best fit your project.

The work plan reviews six sections of IABC's strategic communication planning model against IABC'S Global Seven-point Scale of Excellence:

- Business need/opportunity
- Stakeholder analysis
- Goals and objectives
- Solution overview
- Implementation and challenges
- Measurement and evaluation

Each entry consists of two components: The work plan and the work samples.

- **Work Plan**
 - A work plan is like an executive summary of your communication strategy. This is your opportunity to tell your story and point out the strengths of your work



- The work plan must be presented using the major headings found in the score sheet. You are allowed up to four (4) pages for the work plans.
 - Margins must be at least half an inch (1.27 cm) on all sides, and fonts may be no smaller than 10 points. Work plans exceeding the maximum length will be disqualified.
 - Make sure to follow the directions and answer all questions clearly and concisely.
 - Complete the required information including your name and organization, the division and category that you're entering, and the title and time period of the entry. A short description of the project must also appear. These elements are not scored, but evaluators keep them in mind when considering the context of the project.
 - See the work plan template on gq.iabc.com to see formatting requirements. It is a good idea to use this template as your starting point.
- **Work Sample**
 - For all divisions, the entry must include at least one and up to 5 (five) work samples that are a representative copy of the materials that support your project.
 - If no work samples were included, the entry will be disqualified.
 - Make sure to organize/label your work samples to help evaluators know what project elements they are reviewing.
- **Scoring**
 - A score of 4 is professionally sound and appropriate work for a communicator.
 - To achieve a score of 5, the work must truly stand above average.
 - To achieve a score of 6 the work must be innovative and achieve significant business results.
 - To achieve a score of 7, the work must be extraordinary, something that resets the bar for the highest level of communication.
 - Within this Guide **you'll find rubrics for each section**. The performance dimensions on the rubrics represent the IABC Seven-point Scale of Excellence and are by which the evaluators base their scoring. The rubrics explain what criteria is needed to achieve each of the Seven-points.



Eligibility

Any work done for IABC at the international level is not eligible.

All entries must align with IABC's [Code of Ethics](#).

You must have direct involvement in the work that you're submitting.

Why Enter the Awards Program?

Whether you win an award or not, the program offers an array of benefits to all entrants:

- Gain international peer recognition for excellence in communications.
- Profile industry innovation and best practice.
- Open up speaking and publishing opportunities.
- Build your personal reputation as a thought leader.
- Enhance the reputation of your team and organization, both internally and externally.
- Build a business case to fund a key initiative.
- Inspire your team. Bring them together to produce show-stopping work and share the glory when it's complete.
- Challenge yourself to new heights of innovation, creativity and strategic thinking.
- Build a portfolio of work that opens doors to new opportunities.
- Get feedback from highly qualified communicators from around the world.

Questions? Please email recognition@iabc.com for answers.



MEET THE SEVEN-POINT SCALE OF EXCELLENCE

IABC sets the award scoring criteria based on the IABC standards of excellence. Performance dimensions within each criterion represented by a question are assigned to a point on the IABC Seven-Point Scale of Excellence. The criteria and performance dimensions align to the domains, tasks and knowledge used in the Global Communication Council's [certification program](#).

7	Outstanding: An extraordinary or insightful approach or result.
6	Significantly better than average: Demonstrates an innovative, strategic approach, takes all elements into account and delivers significant results.
5	Better than average: Demonstrates a strategic approach and aligns the communication solution with the business need to deliver meaningful results.
4	Average: Competent approach or results, professionally sound and appropriate.
3	Somewhat less than satisfactory: Several key elements that are critical to the strategy or execution are missing, incorrect or underrepresented.
2	An inadequate approach or result: A significant number of critical elements are missing.
1	Poor: Work that is wrong or inappropriate.

The awards score sheet provides information about how scores are weighted for each section. Go to gg.iabc.com to check it out.



DIVISION 2 COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Entries in this division recognize the importance of research and measurement as a foundation for strategic communication work and a competency that's integral to success throughout the career of a communication professional. A clear understanding of why the research was needed demonstrates its strategic value to an organization.

Communication research often focuses on formative research conducted during the initial stages of the strategic communication planning process that benchmarks internal audience opinions or behaviors, profiles the marketplace or internal communication environment in which the organization operates, aligns best practices against organizational needs or informs strategic direction for internal communication programs.

Entries may include any research that informs actions or decision making within the communication field. This could be audience analysis, competitive benchmarking, program or product test markets, reputation or brand studies, communication audits, content audits, usability studies, readership or effectiveness studies.

The IABC award work plan format is arranged to allow for a strategic explanation of the project being submitted. The work plan sections correspond directly to the sections on the evaluator scoring sheet.

HOW TO PREPARE A WORK PLAN

SECTION 1: The Business Need or Opportunity

Research serves as a foundation for strategic communication work. It enables an accurate and objective understanding of the situation critical to business communication decision making.

A strategic communication opportunity flows from the business need. It answers the question "How can communication help the organization meet this need?" To close the knowledge gap here, research questions provide direction for the research project.

Evaluators need context to assess whether the communication research supports business needs and the aligned communication opportunity. Without the relevant background information, it's difficult to determine whether the research addresses the right issues and audiences. A good description of the business need sets the stage for the rest of the work plan sections including describing stakeholders, objectives and solution(s).



Evaluator questions

How well does the entrant explain the context for the entry by clearly establishing the business need, the related communication opportunity and the research purpose? To what extent does the entrant:

- Align the communication opportunity and the business need by explaining how the project helped the organization?
- Explain how the research informs the direction of the communication project, the Actions that may be taken or decisions that may be made as a result of the research?
- Explain the questions the research helps to answer?

How this section is scored

- Evaluators look for the entrant to show a clear understanding of the business needs and organizational mandate.
- It should be clear why the research was carried out.
- The entry explains how the research helps to positively influence business performance, now or in the future.

A professionally competent entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- Clearly define and demonstrate an understanding of the business need.
- Speak to how the research opportunity was identified and why it matters to the business.
- Address the research questions.
- Provide enough context about the organization and its environment so it's clear how the program contributes to business success.

Entries are scored up for:

- A clear explanation of specific changes or challenges demonstrating the urgency of the business need.
- A multi-faceted explanation of the strategic alignment and why the research matters to the business or how it will make a difference on the business need.
- Including additional primary or secondary research, such as data mining of HR or Marketing/Sales numbers, industry research, research about other organizations in similar situations, academic research related to the current issue, etc.

Entries are scored down if:

- There isn't an explanation of how the research will help the organization.
- The business need is assumed, generalized, or vague.
- There isn't enough information about the organization and its business goals to allow evaluators to fairly evaluate the solution.



Tips from evaluators:

- Describe what has changed that brought about the business need to demonstrate the urgency or why the work is needed now. This could be related to an industry issue, the business climate, regulatory issues, etc.
- A superior entry explains the business need at the highest level. For example, rather than stating there is a cost-cutting initiative or reputation building, it explains why the cost-cutting initiative or reputation building is needed.
- A strategically written Section 1 would include a business need description tied to the organization's external environment followed with an explanation of how the communication opportunity and research can help the organization meet the business need.
- Tell a story – how does the research link to the communication opportunity and how does the communication opportunity link to the business need.
- Evaluators are looking to understand how the research informs decisions that positively impact the organization.



Section 1: Business Need and Communication Opportunity

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Insightful, outstanding results	Innovative, significant results	Aligned, meaningful results	Professionally competent execution and results	Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	Inadequate, significant elements missing	Poor, wrong
<p>Multi-faceted explanation of how the need is strategically aligned to the business, why research matters to business and how it will make a difference on business need</p> <p>The data supporting the need comes from more than one source</p> <p>Thorough research of business need includes history, current situation, size and scope show significant understanding of situation and how to proceed with solution(s)</p>	<p>Superior explanation of the current business state including challenges and urgency driving the communication opportunity</p> <p>Superior explanation of how the opportunity addresses the need</p> <p>Includes additional primary or secondary research, such as data mining of HR or Marketing/Sales numbers, industry research, research about other organizations in similar situations, academic research related to the current issue, etc.</p>	<p>A clear explanation of specific changes or challenges demonstrate the urgency of the business need</p> <p>The business needs are clear and strategically defined based on mission, values, goals, and brand</p> <p>Business need and research aligns to the organization's strategic direction, key performance indicators and business need</p> <p>Clear explanation of how research positively impacts business performance now or in the future</p> <p>Challenges facing the business are explained</p>	<p>The business needs are clearly defined and demonstrate an understanding of what they mean to the business</p> <p>Speaks to how the research opportunity was defined and why it matters to the business</p> <p>The research questions are addressed</p> <p>It's clear how the program will contribute to business success</p>	<p>The business need is not well defined</p> <p>It is not clear why the project was undertaken</p> <p>Not clear how need and research questions were defined</p> <p>No explanation of how the research will help the organization</p> <p>Opportunity is generalized or vague such as management thought it would be a good idea</p>	<p>There is no background on the organization and its business goals to set the context</p> <p>The business need is assumed</p>	<p>No explanation of the business need</p> <p>No explanation of the research</p>



SECTION 2: Stakeholder Analysis

Effective research results begin with appropriate targeting and understanding of the audience to be studied. It is also important to understand the audience the research will be presented to so they will take action or make decisions based on the research. The work plan must demonstrate an understanding of both of these audiences. If the entrant doesn't explore the audience size, location, preferences, attitudes, demographics, psychographics or other characteristics, it's difficult to determine whether the objectives, approach, or methodology are appropriate.

Evaluators look for entrants to show that they understand which audience to target to result in meaningful research results. Demonstrate that the research and its presentation take the audience's needs, wants, preferences, opinions and behaviors into account and that they use the information to design the research and presentations.

Evaluator questions

How well does the entrant define, segment, and analyze the critical characteristics of the audience(s) in relations to the research? To what extent does the entrant:

- Include appropriate audiences that are subjects of the research?
- Include audiences hearing/consuming the research results to make decisions or take actions based on the results?
- Share relevant audience characteristics such as prior knowledge, education, geography, demographics, psychographics, preferences, attitudes, opinion, motivations, etc.?

How this section is scored

- It must be clear that the audience targeted for the research can deliver results.
- The entrant must show that they've taken the audiences' needs, wants, preferences, opinions, and behaviors into account and that they have used this information to design the research and research presentation.

A professionally competent entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- List research subject audience(s) and describe the characteristics, preferences, and needs in enough detail to show how your understanding led to choices of methodology, channels, strategy and tactics.
- List audience(s) who will hear the research results and describe the characteristics, preferences, and needs in enough detail to show how your understanding led to choices in how the research was presented.

Entries are scored up for:

- A discussion that shows how the audience is linked to strategy, methodology and tactic choices.
- Explanations of how audience characteristics influence the research project.
- Including additional primary or secondary research related to stakeholders.

Entries are scored down if:

- The audience(s) aren't defined.
- Broad audiences such as employees, the general public, or customers are listed without



defining needs or characteristics.

- Audiences are listed but no analysis is provided.
- An opportunity to segment and target specific audience groups is missed.
- An obvious audience in relation to the research purpose is missed without explanation.
- The research target audience is unlikely to provide data related to the research purpose or business need.
- There are vague, unsupported assumptions about audience needs.

Tips from evaluators:

- Describe your subject audiences' online access if you are using an online survey tool to demonstrate an appropriate survey tool choice.
- Explain the preferences of the audience hearing the research results and how this helped you to determine your approach.
- Avoid making vague assumptions such as "We thought they might like..."



Section 2: Stakeholder Analysis

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Insightful, outstanding results	Innovative, significant results	Aligned, meaningful results	Professionally competent execution and results	Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	Inadequate, significant elements missing	Poor, wrong
Thorough explanation of how audience research drives research project decisions <u>and</u> what they mean to each audience segment	<p>Audience segmentation clearly separates groups and identifies appropriate characteristics</p> <p>Includes additional primary or secondary research related to stakeholders</p>	<p>Superior explanation of how characteristics influences research project</p> <p>A description demonstrates how the audience is linked to strategy and tactics</p> <p>Informal or secondary research defines audience characteristics and needs</p> <p>Audiences segmented in way that influences solution</p>	<p>Lists research subject audience(s) and describes the characteristics, preferences, and needs in enough detail to understand how they lead to choices of methodology, channels, strategy and tactics</p> <p>Lists audience(s) who will hear the research results and describe the characteristics, preferences, and needs in enough detail to understand how they lead to choices in how the research was presented</p> <p>Speaks to how audience(s) and characteristics identified</p> <p>Appropriate research methodology</p>	<p>Audiences are listed with vague, unsupported assumptions about characteristics</p> <p>Characteristics included are irrelevant to the project or audience</p> <p>Misses an obvious audience in relation to identified need</p> <p>Inappropriate research methodology</p> <p>The audience targeted for research is unlikely to provide data related to research purpose</p>	<p>Broad publics or stakeholder groups listed without defining needs or characteristics</p> <p>Wrong audience identified based on need</p> <p>No mention of audience research</p>	Audiences not listed



SECTION 3: Goals and Objectives

The ability to set meaningful, measurable, objectives that are relevant to the business need is critical to measure the success of any communication program. Effective work that delivers results helps to create value and build credibility of communication as a primary business driver. **Appropriate goals and objectives are critical to an entry because poor objectives will lower the score in other parts of the evaluation.**

Research goals and objectives focus a study and help to organize the solution including the areas of methodology, data collection, analyzing, interpreting and using the data. Understanding the margin of error and the appropriate survey size are important to an efficient research project resulting in a survey that reflects the views of the total population. Margin of error calculators are available on many sites online including Survey Monkey.

Evaluator questions

How well does the entrant set measurable objectives relevant to the business need/research purpose and measure the effect of strategic communication to the business? To what extent does the entrant:

- Distinguish between goals, objectives, and tactics?
- Establish measurable, relevant objectives?
- Align objectives with the stakeholder analysis and the business need?
- Ensure that the objectives will produce an effect on the stated business need?

How this section is scored

- Evaluators look primarily for an explanation of the goal of the research and for objectives that measure the research project's outcome. This can be represented in an entry by demonstrating what kinds of actions will be taken because of the research and then measuring if those decisions were made.
- Output-based objectives such as targeted response rates show the evaluator a thoughtful approach was used in designing the research project.
- Goals and objectives must be aligned with the business needs identified and the purpose of the research.

Goals generally describe what you want to accomplish in a broad sense. Objectives clearly define the desired outcome, or what success will look like. More detail on communication goals and objectives can be found in the Division 1 Communication Management section of this document.

Avoid stating objectives:

- That aren't aligned to the goals, the business need, or research purpose.
- Are vague, irrelevant or not measurable.
- Are task-based or process-based rather than based on the research results.

A professionally competent entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- State an overall big picture goal(s) that doesn't need to be stated in measurable terms.
- State specific measurable, meaningful objectives demonstrating the results of the research project.
- State research objectives providing focus for the study.



- Include data on audience size and targeted response rates.

Entries are scored up for:

- A clear explanation of how the research results are used to help the organization.
- Clearly stated research goals linked to the business need and research purpose.
- Explaining the desired margin of error to be achieved and why that margin is appropriate for the project.
- Objectives that are stated in terms of impact on the business.
- Insightful approaches to measuring the success of the research project.
- Thorough explanation of the strategic nature of the research.

Entries are scored down for:

- Objectives are production or deadline-focused, or based on process or tactics.
- Objectives are not related to the business need or research purpose.
- There are no measurable objectives.

Tips from evaluators:

- Use comparisons to other similar organizations as benchmarks.
- A professionally competent entry includes objectives that determine what types of actions will be taken because of the research and measure if the decisions were made.
- Explain how the actions or decisions made because of the research will help the organization.



A note on Communication Research objectives

A strategic research program must help the organization meet its business needs. **Look to the business need and communication opportunity to set relevant, measurable objectives.**

If the research informs a communication project, the measurement of success would be the objectives set for the communication project as a whole. A strategically written entry would include those objectives and an explanation of how the research results support the project.

If the research purpose is to determine an action or for decision-making, the measurement of success would be hitting the target for any improvements or changes the research supports. A strategically written entry would include measurable objectives setting the target for the improvements and an explanation of how the research results informed the actions or decisions. Research objectives generally summarize what is to be achieved by the study.

Examples

Some examples of research goals, objectives and results:

Research informing communication project.

- *Communication project measurable objective:* Increase customer satisfaction with technical manual from x% to x% in 2017.
- *Research goal:* Identify changes that would make the technical manual easier to use.
- *Research objective:* To determine at least one actionable recommendation for each research question.
- *Research result:* Recommendations approved for implementation and how research supports changes.

Research to determine an action or decision.

- *Research goal:* Allocate resources based on communication effectiveness.
- *Research objective:* To determine the effectiveness of individual elements of a communication program for potential resource allocation.
- *Research result:* A description of how resource allocation changed or remained the same based on research results.

- *Research goal:* Determine areas for consolidation or elimination to reduce departmental budget by X%.
- *Research objective:* To determine ROI of existing communication strategies.
- *Research result:* Showing where the budget was cut and how the research supported the changes.

Research goal: Identify current baselines to create and monitor progress on key performance indicators (KPIs) for a department or its individuals.

Research objective: To determine existing benchmarks for xxx as a KPI.

Research result: Establishing measurable KPIs established using the baselines.



Section 3: Goals and Objectives

7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
<p>A thoroughly explained <u>and</u> insightful approach to setting strategic goals and objectives leading to outstanding business results</p>	<p>Thorough explanation of the strategic nature of the research</p> <p>Insightful approaches to measuring the success of the research project</p>	<p>Clear explanation of how the research results help the organization</p> <p>Clearly stated research goals linked to the business need and research purpose</p> <p>Explains the desired margin of error to be achieved and why that margin is appropriate for the project</p> <p>Objectives stated in terms of impact on the business</p> <p>Objectives are outcome-based <u>and</u> likely to deliver meaningful business results</p> <p>Goals are clearly linked to the organizations mission, values, goals, strategic direction and brand</p>	<p>States overall big picture goal(s) – do not need to be measurable.</p> <p>State specific measurable, meaningful objectives demonstrating the results of the research project.</p> <p>State research objectives providing focus for the study</p> <p>Includes data on audience size and targeted response rates</p>	<p>Understanding of goals, objectives and tactics not demonstrated</p> <p>Objectives production, deadline-focused, or based on tactics</p> <p>Objectives all output-based</p> <p>Objectives do not include preset targets to indicate success</p> <p>Objectives not realistic or achievable</p>	<p>Objectives not measureable</p> <p>Section 1: Business need and communication opportunity doesn't provide any detail to evaluate if goals and objectives are appropriate</p> <p>Objectives do not focus on the identified goal(s) or business need</p>	<p>No goals or objectives</p>



SECTION 4: The Solution Overview

The solution offers insight into how you approached the research project. The appropriate research methodology affects the conclusions and applications of the research. The validity and reliability of the research is important when results are used for decision making or as benchmarks for communications initiatives. Sound methodology and planning improves the communicator's credibility.

Evaluator questions

How effective is the research approach? To what extent does the entrant:

- Demonstrate an appropriate research methodology?
- Demonstrate an effective approach to selecting and sampling the audience?
- Connect with research participants to encourage participation?
- Explain how the research methodologies align with the business need, audience and objectives?
- Explain the presentation of the research?
- Provide an executive summary or tactical plan for the research project?

How this section is scored

- Evaluators seek to understand the planning of the research project.
- It should be clear how the business need, communication opportunity, and audience analysis informed the research methodology.
- Evaluators look for appropriate communication to engage participants.
- The research methodology, sampling, channels and tools are clearly explained.
- A well-thought out project schedule and plan are included.
- Evaluators will look for an intentional, planned presentation of the research results.

A professionally competent entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- Describe how the research plan was developed.
- Explain the rationale and strategic thinking.
- Explain how the sample was selected.
- Explain how research results will be presented.
- Include a high-level tactical implementation plan.
- Be aligned to the business need, research purpose and audiences.

Entries are marked up for:

- Well explained rationale linking audiences and objectives to channels and tactics.
- Sound explanation supporting choices, which may include evaluating other options.
- Discussion of links to business needs.
- A thorough explanation of when, where and how the research was done.
- An explanation of how the margin of error impacted decisions.
- Highly creative approach to presentation of research results.
- An explanation of any incentives used to motivate increased participation and why they are appropriate to your audience(s).



- An explanation of how selections were made for sample locations to conduct interviews, focus groups to mirror the entire audience accurately, or for comparator organizations in a benchmarking study and why selections provide the best results.
- A summary of the tactical implementation plan listing the audience, key messages, tactics, channels and timeline.

Entries are marked down for:

- Failing to explain what was done or why.
- The plan doesn't address the business need or research purpose.
- The tactical implementation plan is sparse or missing.
- Not providing an explanation of when, where or how the research was done.

Tips from evaluators:

- Explain why the research methodology was selected and why it is appropriate.
- Include data on the audience size, sampling approach and margin of error.
- Explain how your solution choice was impacted by your analysis of the audience hearing/consuming the research to make decisions or take actions based on the results.
- Explain any incentives used to motivate increased participation and why they are appropriate to your audience(s).



Section 4: Solution Overview

7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
<p>Solution increases the highest level of professional standards of creativity, innovation or resource utilization</p> <p>Thorough explanation of potential for outstanding results</p> <p>An effective communication research solution not heard of before</p>	<p>Unique and effective approach to meet business need</p> <p>Sound explanation supporting choices, which may include evaluating other options</p> <p>Demonstrates innovative approach to collaboration or facilitation</p> <p>Why sample locations, groups or comparative organizations chosen is explained with how they influence best results</p> <p>Addresses solutions for potential ethical issues</p> <p>An explanation of how the margin of error impacted decisions</p> <p>Highly creative approach to presentation of research results</p>	<p>Well explained rationale linking audiences and objectives to channels and tactics</p> <p>Explanation of how solution links to business needs</p> <p>A thorough explanation of when, where and how the research was done</p> <p>Stakeholder input included</p> <p>Solution is highly likely to achieve stated objectives</p> <p>Summary of tactical plan lists audience, tactics</p> <p>Explains appropriate rationale and strategic thinking</p> <p>Potential ethical issues identified</p> <p>Use of incentives explained with link to audience</p>	<p>Describes how the research plan developed</p> <p>Entrants role explained</p> <p>Explains how the sample was selected</p> <p>Explains how the research will be presented</p> <p>Demonstrates collaboration with key stakeholders</p> <p>Solution aligned with business need, research purpose and audience analysis</p> <p>Includes a high-level tactical implementation plan</p>	<p>Solution doesn't address business need or research purpose</p> <p>Tactical plan sparse</p> <p>Solution not likely to meet stated objectives</p> <p>Rationale clearly inappropriate for business need or audience</p>	<p>Doesn't explain when, where or how research was done</p> <p>Tactical plan missing</p> <p>Entrant did not play a key role in the project</p> <p>Does not address obvious ethical issues</p>	<p>No explanation of solution</p>



SECTION 5: Implementation and Challenges

Implementing a written strategic plan demonstrates necessary project management skills required by professional communicators. A communicator demonstrates value to the organization by how well the project moves from plan approval to project completion. In research, implementing the plan precisely can also affect the quality of the results. Budget management is a critical skill of a communicator when implementing a plan. And, communicators must often navigate through a variety of challenges such as tight deadlines, small budgets, stubborn decision makers and staff turnover which when managed right show management capabilities.

Evaluator questions

How well was the plan managed through implementation? To what extent did the entrant:

- Demonstrate that time, money, labor, and other resources were used effectively.
- Outline any challenges faced and demonstrate that they were effectively managed.
- Demonstrate consultation with stakeholders.
- Appropriately analyze the research results.
- Explain the approach to presenting the research findings to decision makers.
- Explain how the research subjects were informed of the results.

How this section is scored

- Evaluators look to see how the entrant gained approval for the plan and consulted stakeholders.
- Evaluators look for how budget, time, labor and other resources were used. While an exact budget figure is not required, evidence of resources available and how they were wisely used must be included.
- Evaluators take into account efforts to successfully manage challenges when scoring an entry since this speaks to a communicator's project management skills.

A professionally competent entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- Discuss how the project was managed, including stakeholder collaboration and involvement, if appropriate.
- Provide a reasonable explanation of the resources available and used including budget, time, staff, consultants, etc.
- Note challenges encountered and how they were overcome.
- Explain how the research findings were presented to decision makers.
- Explain how the plan was sold to management, client or other stakeholders.
- Include a description of your role in the project.



Entries are scored up for:

- A clever approach to selling the project or presenting the research results.
- Good use of budget including effective use of a limited budget.
- Effective and appropriate use of internal and external resources.
- Innovative solutions to challenges leading to exceeding expectations of project.
- An explanation of how research subjects were informed of the results.
- Work achieved under difficult deadlines or conditions.

Entries are scored down if:

- Budget or resource information is not addressed.
- Use of resources seems wasteful or inappropriate.
- There's no explanation of how the project was implemented.
- Deadlines are missed or budget exceeded without a reasonable explanation.
- Work clearly wasn't worth the time, effort or money.

Tips from evaluators:

- Explain the budget figure for the research project, including staff time, and how you effectively managed it.
- Tell us why the implementation of the plan was above expectations.
- Evaluators don't score down if there were no challenges. If you expected potential problems or challenges during the planning stage, describe how you prevented them from occurring.



Section 5: Implementation and Challenges

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Insightful, outstanding results	Innovative, significant results	Aligned, meaningful results	Professionally competent execution and results	Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	Inadequate, significant elements missing	Poor, wrong
A truly unique and creative approach to implementing the solution and delivering outstanding results that raises the professional standard	<p>An innovative solution to challenges resulting in exceeding objectives that demonstrate the impact of communication on the business</p> <p>Thorough explanation of an innovative way to consult with audience members resulting in exceeding objectives significantly</p> <p>A thorough explanation of how effective use of limited resource(s) resulting in project that exceeds objectives</p> <p>Clever approach to presenting results or selling the project to achieve approval or support</p>	<p>Explains the effective use of budget – got a lot done with few resources</p> <p>Demonstrates collaboration with stakeholders</p> <p>Plan implemented under difficult deadlines</p> <p>Effectively manages challenges enabling meeting objectives</p> <p>Work achieved under tight deadlines or budgets</p> <p>An explanation of how research subjects were informed of the results</p>	<p>Explains how project was managed</p> <p>Reasonable explanation of project budget and resources described</p> <p>Effective and appropriate use of internal and external resources</p> <p>Objectives met within budget</p> <p>Implementation plan met or reasonable explanation provided</p> <p>Explains how the plan was sold to management, client or other stakeholders</p>	<p>Resource description not complete, some resources not included</p> <p>Inappropriate use of resources</p> <p>Missed deadlines or budget exceeded without reasonable explanation</p>	<p>No budget or resource discussion</p> <p>Excessive use of resources without proper justification</p> <p>Work is clearly not worth the time, effort or money</p>	No budget or implementation plan



SECTION 6: Measurement and Evaluation

Strategic communication planning and implementation is a vital business process. **That's why it's critical to set measurable objectives aligned with the business needs and then to measure progress against them.**

When communicators can show management the value of their work in measurable terms, senior executives take notice, and the reputation of communication as a critical contributor to organization success increases.

Evaluator questions

How well were the communications objectives met? To what extent did the entrant:

- Align measurement with valid objectives?
- Demonstrate output and outcome-based results?
- Explain how the results of the research was used to make decisions, answer questions, or improve results?
- Provide a thorough evaluation that supports the results?

How this section is scored

Evaluators look to see that the entrant tracked results against the same objectives set in the entry's Section 3 Goals and Objectives. These results or measurements should be objective, clearly explained and appropriate for the project. The results should show the relationship between the objectives that were set and the results that were achieved. They should be thorough and convincing. Entries with poor or no measurable objectives set in Section 3, will score lower in this section.

Avoid:

- Results that don't address the business need.
- Overly positive results that don't seem possible given the project description.
- Vague results or generalizations.
- Providing only highlights that don't tell the whole result story.

A professionally competent entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- Demonstrate appropriate measurement methodology.
- Measure against the original benchmarks or targets used to set objectives.
- Show credible results that support the business need and research purpose.
- Prove that objectives were met through evaluation.
- Provide results that demonstrate the research has helped the organization.



Entries are scored up for:

- Thorough evaluation and documentation of results.
- Credible measurement of intangibles.
- An executive summary is included in a work sample.
- Outcome-based results that positively influence business results.

Entries are scored down if:

- The results are not reported against the stated objectives.
- Only output-based results are reported.
- Results aren't statistically valid.
- There is a mismatch between objectives and results.
- The results show only anecdotal evaluation.
- Results aren't statistically meaningful to the business.

Tips from evaluators:

- Tell us how the research has been a success.
- Report on each objective and then provide a short paragraph explaining the project's success.
- Don't rely only subjective results based on hearsay without documented evidence, yet anecdotal feedback along with quantitative measures often helps tell the story.



Section 6: Measurement and Evaluation

7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
<p>Thorough and insightful explanation of measurement and evaluation that explains a significant positive impact this research project had on the organization</p> <p>A truly unique and creative approach to delivering outstanding results that raises the professional standard</p>	<p>Measurement encompasses multiple appropriate methodologies to thoroughly explain success</p> <p>Credible measurement of appropriate intangibles such as a reputation index, or loyalty</p>	<p>Results exceed objectives that have meaningful impact on business need</p> <p>Multiple outcomes measured that influence progress toward business goals</p> <p>A work sample includes executive summary of formal evaluation that supports the results</p> <p>Provides recommendations for improvement</p>	<p>Demonstrates appropriate measurement methodology</p> <p>Measurements against original benchmarks or targets</p> <p>Rationale speaks to objectives that weren't met</p> <p>Credible results support the business need and research purpose</p> <p>Proof provided that objectives were met through evaluation</p> <p>Demonstrates the research helped the organization</p>	<p>Results reported on only outputs</p> <p>Results measure only if tactic completed</p> <p>Results don't address business need or relate to audience</p> <p>Results generalized, vague, or anecdotal</p> <p>Results not statistically valid</p> <p>Misinterpretation of survey data</p> <p>Results aren't statistically meaningful to business</p> <p>No measure for every objective</p>	<p>Results not reported against stated objectives</p> <p>Subjective results based on hearsay without documented evidence</p> <p>Results not meaningful to business</p>	<p>No measurement or evaluation</p>



HOW TO PREPARE WORK SAMPLES (at least one and a maximum of five)

For Division 2 Communication Research

What to include in the work sample

The elements of the work samples should be representative of the project—you need not include every item produced for the project. The elements you include should demonstrate skill in both strategic planning and implementation. The overall work sample(s) should represent the research instrument, analysis and reporting of findings, and recommendations based on the findings that flow from the research. Materials should be organized and presented in the same order as the work plan format. Referencing the samples in the work plan or including notes of explanation on each work sample provides additional context for the evaluators to understand your work.

IABC awards programs allow you to upload a maximum of five work samples.

In this division, work samples might include your communication plan, research plan, and communication requesting participation, incentives, and survey tools such as questionnaires, interview guides, focus group reports, research reports, research presentations and research recommendations.

The work sample scoring counts for 50 percent of the entry score in Division 2 Communication Research.

The work sample scoring is split equally into four sections:

1. Stakeholder alignment and impact
2. Alignment with objectives and strategy
3. Professional execution
4. Overall quality

Evaluators look to the work samples to demonstrate that the plan was implemented effectively and professionally. All the samples combined are scored separately from the work plan, but it's hard for samples to get a high score if the work plan didn't score well. Evaluators review the work samples as objectively as possible through the eyes of your intended audience, and take the overall strategy into account.



SECTION 7: Stakeholder Alignment and Influence

Connecting with the audience in a meaningful and memorable way is an important competency in communication work. Strategic planning is only part of this equation. Messages, vehicles and channels must be aligned with audience needs and preferences because if the audience doesn't get the message in a clear, consistent, convincing, and creative way, it might not be heard. If the audience is not moved to action, your response rates may suffer. If your language is not aligned to your audience, your survey, interviews or focus groups may receive inappropriate responses.

Evaluator questions

How well do the work samples reflect the audience characteristics, needs and preferences? To what extent did the entrant:

- Demonstrate good choices of messages, mediums, media, channels, and methodology that align with the audience analysis?
- Include messages that engage the audience and influence behaviors?
- Utilize language aligned to the audience analysis?

How this section is scored

Evaluators look for a match between the way the audience was described and the way the program was implemented based on the following guidelines:

- Is the language level appropriate for the audience?
- For an audience that has little time, is the copy concise?
- Does the channel choice match the audience's needs?
- Is the research methodology selected available to the audience?
- Are the messages clear, concise, credible, consistent, convincing, and creative?

If the audience analysis was not adequately defined, it will be tough to score well in this section.

A professionally competent entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- Demonstrate choices appropriate to the audience aligning with the work plan.
- Use clear and consistent language.
- Be well written and produced.
- Reflect a clear understanding of audience characteristics and needs.
- Communicate in a way that is likely to resonate with the audience.

Entries are scored up for:

- Particularly good choices matching audience characteristics.
- Messages that clearly impact the audience.
- Strong writing and execution likely to connect emotionally with the audience.
- Integrated channels, tools, and vehicles.
- Creative thinking, imagination, or innovative approaches certain to engage audiences and influence behavior.

Entries are scored down if:

- Language, graphics or design is too complex or inappropriate for the audience.
- Messages patronize or insult the audience.
- Messages are not clear.



- Work samples are unlikely to gain audience attention.

Tips from evaluators:

- Select representative work samples that connect with the audience.
- Add notes to each work sample to explain how project choices were made based on the audience analysis.



Section 7: Stakeholder Alignment and Influence

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Insightful, outstanding results	Innovative, significant results	Aligned, meaningful results	Professionally competent execution and results	Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	Inadequate, significant elements missing	Poor, wrong
Extraordinary example of connecting to audience in meaningful way that impacts the business positively	Smart thinking that shows the audience perspective Demonstrates creative thinking, imagination or an innovative approach certain to engage audience emotionally	Particularly good choices matching audience characteristics (language, font size, vehicle choice, channels) The contents of the work samples are highly likely to capture audience attention and engage them Strong writing and execution likely to connect with the audience Integrated channels, tools and vehicles	Demonstrates choices appropriate to audiences (language, font size, vehicle choice, channels) Uses clear, consistent language. Reflects an understanding of audience characteristics and needs Communicates in a way likely to resonate with audience Communicates with sensitivity to cultural values and beliefs	Choices inappropriate to audience (language, font size, vehicle choice, channels) Audience unlikely to respond to messages, vehicles, channels Work sample elements are bland and likely to get lost in clutter	Insults audience It's not clear how audience is to respond Material clearly insensitive to cultural values and beliefs	All work sample elements clearly not appropriate for audience as describe



SECTION 8: Alignment with Objectives and Strategy

A project implemented and represented by your work sample(s) must support the objectives stated in the work plan. Strategic execution supports the needs of the business, connects with the audience, and makes an impact. This should be clear and consistent in all elements of a communication research project.

Evaluator questions

How well are the work samples aligned with the objectives stated in the work plan? To what extent did the entrant:

- Provide evidence that the project is on strategy and is consistent with business needs?
- Provide clear, consistent work sample elements that are communicated in a powerful way?
- Reflect the research objectives, research questions, and strategic thinking in the work sample(s)?
- Provide clear evidence that the work samples have the desired effect on the audience and business needs?

How this section is scored

- Evaluators will look for choices in research approach, instruments, and reporting documents that support the objectives.
- Communication to the audience being studied should be engaging and likely to deliver on the stated objectives.

A professionally competent entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- Reflect the objectives set out in the work plan.
- Demonstrate choices that support the needs of the business, purpose of the research, and the questions the research was intended to answer.
- Align with the business needs to support the achievement of goals and objectives.

Entries are scored up if:

- The work samples are designed and produced to achieve the research project objectives.
- Support material and design elements are aligned to the organization, business need, and brand identity.
- The work is clear, consistent and communicates in a powerful way.
- The sample fully reflects the objectives and strategic thinking presented in the plan.
- The work is an extraordinary example of a research approach.

Entries are scored down if:

- The work is not aligned to the organization's brand, unless there's an explanation.
- Messaging isn't consistent.
- The work sample elements contain extra elements that distract from the research objectives, purpose of the research, or questions the research was intended to answer.
- The work samples don't show what was done.
- The samples are incomplete, confusing, poorly presented or inadequately explained.
- There is an obvious mismatch, such as an emphasis on executive egos and not enough on the research objectives and purpose.



Tips from evaluators:

- Add notes to the work samples explaining how they deliver on the research objectives.
- Include the communications or a research plan as a work sample to demonstrate strategic planning.



Section 8: Alignment with Objectives and Strategy

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Insightful, outstanding results	Innovative, significant results	Aligned, meaningful results	Professionally competent execution and results	Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	Inadequate, significant elements missing	Poor, wrong
Extraordinary example of research approach meeting business needs and stated objectives in meaningful and memorable way that impacts the business positively	Likely to significantly exceed stated objectives based on work samples Creative elements of work samples strategically aligned to business need and research project objectives	Work samples designed and produced to achieve the research project objectives Work samples likely to exceed stated objectives and drive business success Work is clear, consistent and clever, communicating in powerful way Sample fully explains and reflects the objectives and strategic thinking presented in the work plan	Work samples demonstrate the implementation of the plan Reflects the stated objectives in the work plan Demonstrates choices that support business needs, purpose of the research, and the questions the research was intended to answer Aligns with business needs to support achieving goals and objectives	Messaging is not consistent Work is out of sync with the organization's brand without explanation Messages aren't consistent Extra elements in the samples distract from the research objectives, purpose of the research, or questions the research was intended to answer	Samples don't show what was done Samples are incomplete, confusing, or poorly presented or explained	Samples will clearly not accomplish stated objectives



SECTION 9: Professional Execution

For research to serve as a foundation for strategic communication work there must be confidence in the approach taken to obtain, interpret, and analyze data. Well-designed and implemented research projects following industry accepted practices earn credibility and influence decisions that improve an organization's success. Paying attention to industry standards and keeping up with leading edge thinking, processes, and production demonstrates commitment to effective communication.

Evaluator questions

Given the budget and resources, how well do the work samples measure up to professional standards? To what extent did the entrant:

- Provide well-crafted work sample elements?
- Align to accepted research practices?
- Demonstrate appropriate data analysis, interpretation of results, and presentation of recommendations?
- Demonstrate high-quality writing and production?
- Demonstrate consistency between what was presented in the work plan and what was delivered?

How this section is scored

- Evaluators take note of innovative approaches to valid and reliable research.
- They watch for clear, consistent, error-free writing, well-crafted questionnaires, and convincing communications.
- Evaluators look to see the extent to which the research instrument is appropriate in language, question design, response options, and ease of administration.
- They look for an appropriate analysis of the research data with an accurate and engaging presentation of results that lead to decisions.
- Evaluators will review how accurately reporting documents represent results and make it easy for the decision-making individuals to understand what was learned and the implications.
- Reports need to adhere to professional standards of how numbers were analyzed.
- There is appropriate weighting of any survey results needed to match the actual audience.
- Charts must effectively show results and correctly visualize the findings.
- Includes both an executive summary for executives and a detailed report for the communicators to use in action planning by subgroup of the target audience.



A professionally competent entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- Provide accurate analysis and reporting of the data throughout.
- Contain quality production values appropriate to the media and the budget.
- Reflect professional standards of ethics and research practices.
- Contain work samples demonstrating the ability to answer the research questions.
- Demonstrate clear, consistent use of language, visuals, and other elements that support the brand, research objectives, and audience.
- Demonstrate a fairly standard approach that is well implemented.

Entries are scored up for:

- Well-crafted questionnaires, surveys or messages that lead directly to improved results.
- Logical and accurate interpretation of data leading to recommendations of action.
- High-quality writing and superior production values.
- Work that influences decisions to make a positive contribution to the organization.
- Thorough documentation supporting the description of the project from the work plan.
- Clever, strategic work that's appropriate for the audience.
- Work that increases the professional standards for the channels selected.

Entries are scored down for:

- Poorly crafted questionnaires, surveys or messages.
- Obvious misinterpretations of data.
- Errors in research presentation.
- Amateur work or dated approach unless supported by strategy.
- Poor technical production.
- Excess spending not likely to achieve results.

Tips from evaluators:

- Explain the choices made and the superior professional execution of the work sample elements.
- Include the scenario for the research presentation, i.e., number of people involved, arrangements, etc.



Section 9: Professional Execution

7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
<p>An example that increases professional standards of innovation or use of resources</p> <p>An novel and effective approach aligned to the business, stakeholders, industry/profession, and community</p>	<p>Thorough documentation that supports the description of the project in the work plan</p> <p>Clever approach to communication that is appropriate for audience</p> <p>Stands out among others</p> <p>Work that influences decisions to make a significant positive contribution to the organization</p>	<p>High quality writing superior production values</p> <p>Well-crafted questionnaires, surveys or messages leading directly to improving the organization's results</p> <p>Logical and accurate interpretations of data with recommendations as to actions needed</p> <p>Work that clearly explains the emotional connection made with the audience</p> <p>Professionally executed with scarce resources</p>	<p>Good production values appropriate to media and budget</p> <p>Provides accurate analysis and reporting of data throughout</p> <p>Professional standards of ethics and good taste</p> <p>Work samples demonstrate the ability to answer the research questions</p> <p>Clear, consistent use of language, visuals and other elements</p> <p>Consistent use of language, visuals and other elements</p> <p>A fairly standard approach that is well executed</p>	<p>Poorly crafted questionnaire, surveys or messages</p> <p>Errors in research presentation</p> <p>Poor technical production</p> <p>A few spelling, grammar or structure errors</p> <p>Resources not defined</p>	<p>Obvious misinterpretations of data</p> <p>Images, writing tone or style that doesn't match business or audience need</p> <p>An approach that clearly will not work</p> <p>Work insults the audience</p> <p>Several spelling, grammar or structure errors</p>	<p>An approach that clearly will not work</p>



SECTION 10: Overall Quality

Entries receiving IABC awards signify strategic communication and the ability of communication to positively influence business results. Entries are evaluated by trained IABC members. Their ability to evaluate the entry properly is impacted by how well the entry is organized and written. They look for alignment between the work plan and work samples to demonstrate planning and implementation abilities.

Evaluator questions

Given the interdependence among all sections, to what degree is the entry a strong blueprint for strategic planning and communication? To what extent does the entrant:

- Provide a well-written and produced entry that's easy to understand?
- Provide a representative sample of all the elements described in the work plan including the research instrument, analysis and reporting of findings, and recommendation based on the findings that flow from the research?
- Demonstrate strategic and creative thinking that reflects the audience and business needs?
- Demonstrate the ability of research to serve as a foundation for communication and to influence valid business results?

How this section is scored

- Evaluators look for a strong connection between the work plan and the work samples.
- The work samples should be organized and strategic containing the elements referred to in the work plan including the research instrument, analysis and reporting of findings, and recommendation based on the findings that flow from the research.
- The work samples are not excessively long, yet include a reasonable amount of work sample elements representing the research project.

A professionally competent entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- Be organized and strategic containing the elements referred to in the work plan including the research instrument, analysis and reporting of findings, and recommendation based on the findings that flow from the research.
- The work plan and work sample elements have few errors in spelling or grammar.
- The work sample elements represent a successful research project.

Entries are scored up if:

- Work sample elements are included representing most or all of the work plan.
- The entry demonstrates excellence in strategic planning and execution throughout.
- The entry demonstrates innovative or resourceful planning or execution.
- The entry clearly conveys the success of the project.



Entries are scored down if:

- The work samples don't match or is inconsistent to the work plan.
- The entry demonstrates poor work including errors, lack of proofreading, or obvious missing items.
- The work samples are excessively long.
- Work plan doesn't follow IABC format.

Tips from evaluators:

- Label the work sample elements with easy to identify file names, i.e., Communications Plan; Questionnaire, Report, Presentation...
- Reference the elements of the work samples within the work plan.
- The entry should tell a story of your success. Include enough information and explanation for the evaluator to understand the strategic alignment, professional execution and how the project helped your organization.
- Include photos of events (with explanations) as work samples to show evaluators the people involved.



Section 10: Overall Quality

7 Insightful, outstanding results	6 Innovative, significant results	5 Aligned, meaningful results	4 Professionally competent execution and results	3 Less than satisfactory, several key elements missing	2 Inadequate, significant elements missing	1 Poor, wrong
<p>Demonstrates an outstanding example of a unique, innovative and highly effective approach to communication with a thorough explanation of how it influences business results</p>	<p>Thorough explanation of what was done</p> <p>Demonstrates excellence in strategic planning and execution</p> <p>Explains significant business results</p> <p>Highly innovative approach</p>	<p>Comprehensive and representative sample reflecting a successful research project</p> <p>Demonstrates and explains a meaningful business result</p>	<p>Work samples match description in work plan</p> <p>Clearly shows what was done for the project</p> <p>Reinforces work plan</p> <p>Provides evidence of care and attention to delivering the tactical elements of the plan</p> <p>Contributes to overall quality of entry</p>	<p>Work sample doesn't match the plan</p> <p>Work sample doesn't reflect the business or audience needs</p> <p>Work sample elements are extremely long showing entire project rather than representing the project</p> <p>Work plan doesn't follow IABC format</p> <p>Work sample elements demonstrate poor work including errors, lack of proofreading or missing obvious items</p>	<p>The work sample is significantly different from the work plan</p>	<p>No work sample included.</p>