

CIRCLE U. COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION STRATEGY

SUPPORTING THE JOURNEY TOWARDS 2030

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1 FOREWORD

Entering a new phase, it is essential to update the communication and dissemination strategy of Circle U. taking into consideration the achievements, challenges and lessons learnt from the pilot phase. This updated strategy shall also reflect the recent and expected developments of the alliance and embrace our renewed ambition towards 2030.

The strategy is built on the one developed in the pilot phase (2020-2023). While the strategy remains deeply rooted in the various projects' objectives, tasks, activities, milestones and deliverables, the ultimate goal is to contribute to the fulfilment of Circle U.'s vision and mission.

Two main developments have been considered in revising the strategy. While dedicating additional resources to communication and dissemination at each university, partners also agree to hire a communication officer for the alliance (and thus working directly at the Circle U. office under the supervision of the Secretary General). Secondly, beyond the project dynamic, partner universities are committed to strengthen and further develop the joint ecosystem of the alliance. Our various platforms are thus expected to develop more activities that are not necessarily anticipated in the work programme of the ongoing projects.

Communication and dissemination are carried out at both the alliance level and partner universities level. As a considerable part of the communication and dissemination is carried out directly by partner universities, the primary goal of this strategy is to establish overarching principles and guidelines that will support the nine partner universities in the individual and collective efforts to communication and disseminate Circle U. By outlining these principles and guidelines, we agree on a common approach and a joint communication and dissemination framework, including goals, target groups, communication channels and key messages.

This document will be supplemented by a communication and dissemination operations and processes document, and a development roadmap for our shared tools and channels.

The revised strategy was elaborated and agreed by the communication officers in February 2024 and then endorsed by the Management Board. This strategy should be seen as a living document and will thus be updated on a regular basis.

2 OBJECTIVES

To raise the visibility and assert the credibility of Circle U. as an open, vivid and leading alliance among our communities and other relevant stakeholders in Europe and beyond, the communication and dissemination aims at the following objectives:

- 1 Raise the awareness about Circle U. – inform our respective communities, current and future associated partners, and the general public about Circle U.'s mission, initiatives and activities.
- 2 Foster engagement with Circle U. – encourage and support our respective communities, current and future associate partners, and the general public, when relevant to participate in Circle U.'s initiatives and activities.
- 3 Integrate Circle U. within universities – contribute to making Circle U. an integral and embedded part of partner universities and their communities.
- 4 Establish Circle U. as a role model – engage meaningfully with other alliances, higher education institutions and higher education and research stakeholders as well as regional, national and European policy-makers.

3 PRINCIPLES

To achieve these objectives, partner universities agree on the following core principles that guide us in developing specific communication and dissemination activities.

1 User-orientation

All our communication and dissemination efforts shall be user-oriented. It ensures that content is presented in a way that primarily meets the needs, interests, expectations of identified target groups. When planning and designing our communication and dissemination activities, we focus on target groups by consistently addressing the questions of what they can gain from the information shared or the initiatives and activities offered. This also implies carefully considering the importance of a local approach to communication and dissemination. The added value that the alliance can provide to their target groups might differ from university to university.

2 Complementarity

Communication and dissemination efforts at alliance and university level should be complementary and support each other. Alliance communications will typically focus on overarching collaborative initiatives and activities and how they are contributing to the alliance vision and mission and how they benefit all partner universities. In contrast, communications at each university will emphasize concrete implementation and achievements as well as potential impacts, specific to each university. Adopting a “local” approach is crucial to resonate with diverse target groups, culture, ownership and address specific needs and expectations at individual universities.

3 Shared responsibility and commitment

Partner universities share the responsibility for developing and implementing this strategy, based on agreed principles and coordination elements. Partner universities are committed to integrating Circle U. in their own communication and dissemination strategies and ensure complementary communication and dissemination efforts made at both alliance and university levels.

4 LEVEL OF COMMUNICATION & TARGET GROUPS

The following table identifies priority target groups of our communication and dissemination activities.

TARGET GROUPS	LEVEL OF COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION	
	Circle U.	Partner universities
Students, academics, researchers, administrative and technical staff members at partner universities	•	•
Other European University alliances	•	
European university networks and associations (e.g. EUA, The Guild, Coimbra Group, etc.)	•	
National/regional university networks and associations (e.g. rectors’ conference)		•
European policy-makers	•	

National/regional policy-makers		•
Associated partners	•	•
General public	•	•

As described in the previous sections, communication and dissemination is a shared responsibility of Circle U. as an alliance, and all CU partner universities. Each CU partner university will primarily reach out to their own communities and partners while Circle U. as alliance will target European partners and stakeholders.

5 COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION TOOLS AND CHANNELS

To implement the strategy, we mostly use digital tools and channels. The main channels are the Circle U. website, monthly newsletter, social media and events.

The types of content shared on communication channels are in line with the objectives set. The Communication Group notably highlights the outputs of activities and initiatives run by Circle U as well as relevant papers and reports produced by the alliance.

5.1 WEBSITE

The Circle U. website (www.circle-u.eu) is the prime source of information for internal and external stakeholders on the development of our alliance. The content is continuously updated, focusing mainly on opportunities for our target groups, such as research collaborations, mobility offers, challenges, workshops, events etc. When possible and relevant, the content is linked to the host institution's website to provide more detailed information.

5.2 NEWSLETTER

Circle U. publishes a monthly newsletter, which is sent to its subscribers. The newsletter highlights recent developments in the alliance, focusing especially on opportunities and impact for our target groups. The aim of the newsletter is to inform of what happens in the alliance and help recruit participants to its activities (workshops, seminars, courses, conferences, other events). The newsletter is closely coordinated with the content on the website.

5.3 SOCIAL MEDIA

Circle U. is currently using three social media channels: LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter) and YouTube. Of these, the LinkedIn page is the most used, the X account second and the YouTube third.

1. LinkedIn is used mainly to target internal and external stakeholders, so to reach them in their professional capacities within their organisations.
2. X (formerly Twitter) is used to engage with internal and external stakeholders. We communicate on our events, projects, activities and results, we disseminate those produced by each partner university, and we engage and contribute to general discussion on higher education and research development.

- The YouTube channel is mainly used as a “repository” for all videos produced by individual partner universities linked to events, projects and activities linked to our alliance. There is no designated target group for this channel, and its content is mainly promoted via articles on the website and/or the newsletter.

The main purposes of social media channels are to help us inform, reach, raise awareness and engage with specific target groups in a more customised manner.

When promoting a specific activity, the content of the different social media channels will be coordinated with the content on the Circle U. website.

5.4. EVENTS

Many events are organised both online and onsite at the member universities, and they are essential communication channels. For these events and for communication purposes, universities can decide to produce Circle U merchandise, but we recommend choosing sustainable options and carefully evaluating the impact of printed products or goodies.

When events, papers or activities receive funding from the European Union (namely through Erasmus+ CU2030 agreement or ERIA agreements), communications around them should acknowledge EU support and display the European emblem and funding statement. This acknowledgement ensures the visibility of EU funding, set out in EU rules and guidelines.

6 MONITORING AND EVALUATING IMPACT

Communication and dissemination is monitored and evaluated both at university and alliance level on a regular basis, e.g. every six months. Evaluation at university level will offer insights on the outreach within the university’s communities and ecosystem. Each university is free to design its own internal communication and evaluation strategy, in the way that best fits the institution’s reality and communication culture. The Communication Group will act as a forum for the exchange of these practices.

With regard to the Circle U. media channels, as they are open to the wide public (that is, beyond Circle U. constituent universities), evaluation and analytics will likely offer insights at a European level.

For each of the Circle U. communication and dissemination tools and channels, key performance indicators are identified; potential indicators are listed in the table below. It is important to note that while monitoring digital performance based on these indicators is important, the communication group will also monitor the impact of their communications based on enrolment in activities (such as summer schools...) as well as through some qualitative methodologies (such as the Circle U. Ambassadors programme). Additionally, the 20% increase on average for year for the indicators listed below is the target value of the indicators and whether Circle U. meets this target, and the reasons for why they were or weren’t reached, are a crucial role of the MEL strategy in the Communication and Dissemination strategy.

TOOLS	INDICATORS	BASELINE (= DECEMBER 2023)	TARGET VALUE (2027)
Website	Web analytics: visitors, page view duration, visit/session, bounce rate, click path, etc.	230,000 unique visitors to CU website.	20% increase on

Newsletter	Subscribers, clicks, frequency of campaigns, etc.	1,400 subscribers to CU newsletter	average per year.
Social media – LinkedIn	Social media analytics: followers, visitors, clicks, search appearances, employee advocacy, etc.	2,600 followers on CU LinkedIn account	
Social media – X (formerly Twitter)	Social media analytics: followers, tweets, retweets, etc.	1,400 followers on X account	
Social media – YouTube	Social media analytics: number of videos, views, etc.	49 followers	

The information is compiled by the coordinator of Work Package 7 and the Circle U. Communication Officer and is central to the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning strategy of the alliance. In collaboration with the Circle U. MEL Officer, the monitoring and evaluation processes will allow the alliance to gauge its impact on raising the availability, and asserting the credibility, of Circle U. as an open, vivid and leading alliance in Europe and beyond.

7 DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

The following actors play a key role in developing and implementing the communication and dissemination strategy. Considering the shared responsibility for the strategy, it is not relevant to define exclusive areas of responsibilities. In all efforts developed, these key actors will cooperate to ensure our objectives are achieved.

1 “Local” communication officers and Circle U. communication officer

Generally referred as the Communications Group (and *de facto* Work Package 7 of the Erasmus+ project “Circle U. 2030”), communication officers are responsible for developing, managing, implementing the actual communication and dissemination activities.

While the “local” communication officers will coordinate the activities in their own university and ensure the complementarity with the alliance strategy, the Circle U. communication officer will coordinate the communications at the alliance level – of course, in close cooperation with the “local” officers. This cooperation means that local communication officers and the Circle U. communication officer will share information and feed one another.

In the framework of the Erasmus+ project “Circle U. 2030”, the Work Package 7 coordinator has a specific role and responsibility for coordinating the performance and progress of the Work Package and ultimately ensure that the objectives, tasks, deliverables and milestones defined in the project are achieved.

2 Circle U. Secretary General

Considering the role and responsibility of the Secretary General in supporting the strategic and long-term development of the alliance, the Secretary General is ultimately accountable towards the Management Board and the General Assembly for the development and implementation of the strategy – in close cooperation with the “local” officers.

3 Other stakeholders in Circle U.

All stakeholders contributing to the development of Circle U. – including the Circle U. coordinators, Work Packages coordinators and members, academic directors and chairs, members of the governing

bodies, etc. – are also contributing to the development and implementation of the strategy. “Local” communication officers are therefore a key resource for these stakeholders and should be involved in all communication and dissemination activities towards Circle U.’s target groups.