## Case studies of the subgroup SAIs (as of 31.12.2017)

**European Court of Auditors**

The European Court of Auditors (ECA) is the external audit institution of the European Union (EU), the political and economic union of 28 Member States. This creates some specific conditions for communication: there are 24 official EU languages, and audit reports as well as press releases are translated into 23 of these (except Irish). The ECA’s communication team currently includes 12 people including spokesperson, press officer, and communication officers working on social media, digital content, audio-visuals & graphic design, and media monitoring. In addition, the Institutional Relations Team comprises four staff dealing with relations with the European parliament, the Council, the Commission and the national parliaments in the Member States.

Communication is firmly rooted in the ECA’s strategy for 2018-2020: One strategic goal is to get clear messages across to the ECA’s audiences. This includes making better use of relationships with partners both at the EU and Member State level, making the reports more timely, formulating consistent key messages based on findings in many areas, and also making reports clearer for citizens.

***Communicating about performance audits***

The ECA publishes around 30 performance audits (special reports) a year. The procedure and the timeline of media activity is the same for audits on the environment and other topics.

*Press releases*

The press release is the single most important document for communication since the majority of journalists will base their stories on it. As journalists get a plethora of press releases every day, the release needs to be short (around 550 words), clear and interesting. Usually the press team writes the first draft for consideration by the reporting Member’s private office and the audit team.

*Press and stakeholder briefings*

Press releases are issued for all audits, but additional communication depends on the audit topic. This means that the likely level of interest in the topic determines the media approach. For instance, a press briefing is not organised for every single audit.

Even though the ECA is located in Luxembourg, most press briefings take place in Brussels, “the capital” of the EU. They are informal events where the reporting Member and audit team sits around a table to discuss the report with journalists. Increasingly often, the ECA organizes a briefing for stakeholders after meeting the press. Environmental audits are particularly appropriate for such briefings since environmental stakeholders are often interested and many environmental NGOs have offices in Brussels. On selected cases, press briefings can also take place in an individual Member States. As an example, a briefing about the ECA’s audit on the eutrophication of the Baltic Sea was organised in Poland. Building relationships with national media is an increasing priority for the ECA as well as maintaining contact with EU correspondents.

Mapping the media world and stakeholders has helped identify who might be interested in the report. The ECA has developed an online database of stakeholder contacts, the stakeholder management system (SMS). The database contains over 18 000 contacts, but communication is tailored according to the topic. The ECA’s communication team has found that it is wiser to target communications rather than sending everything to everyone and risk the “spamming” effect. All communications are planned in close cooperation with the audits teams.

*Conferences*

The ECA sometimes organizes a conference as a part of audit publication. In such cases, the planning starts four months before the event. As an example, in the context of publication of the ECA’s landscape review on EU action on energy and climate change, a conference was organised in Brussels. Invited speakers addressed challenges identified in the landscape review in two panel discussions. As a conference usually takes place after the publication, it serves a purpose beyond attracting media attention; it is more a way to reach stakeholders and expert audiences.

As well as its own conferences, the ECA finds it beneficial to participate in conferences organized by others. In the case of the landscape review mentioned above, the ECA participated in the UN Climate Change Conference COP23 side-event in Bonn and presented its audit work in the area of energy and climate change. Access to conferences is relatively easy in the environmental field because it is rich in such events.

*Social media*

The ECA publishes its audit reports on the internet and on social media. Social media allows people to comment, respond and react to the ECA’s work and reach various audiences. The ECA is active in Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. Each has a slightly different profile: Facebook is more for people interested in the EU and LinkedIn for professionals, while Twitter reaches journalists, institutional and industry stakeholders and other interested parties (e.g. lobbyists) and is very fast. Environmental audits attract wide attention in both traditional media and social media, generally on or above par with other audit topics. But sometimes – when the audit topic might be particularly popular – they might generate even more engagement: for example, one of the most retweeted ECA tweets was about the European nature protection network Natura 2000.

Future developments could include live connections to press briefings, livestreamed presentations or technologically-supported interactive presentations. This all requires resources, however, especially since the ECA works in so many languages.

Because of the growing importance of social media, the ECA has recently hired a social media manager. Social media management requires constant attention to the online dialogue generated and care that the messages are not “hijacked” and misinterpreted or distorted.

***Communicating about ongoing audits***

Traditionally, the ECA’s communication has concentrated on finalised audit reports, but a new development is communicating better on planned work and work in progress. There is a pilot project on Background Papers, which are made of high priority audits. They are based on the preliminary audit work and they aim to provide information on a policy area where an audit is about to take place. As an example, air pollution is frequently discussed in the media and the Background Paper on an air quality audit contributed to awareness of this topic.

The ECA also publishes its annual work plan in advance. This allows an advance explanation to be given to stakeholders, media and public.

After the publication of the audit report, it is presented in due course to the European Parliament and to the Council. This is where the Institutional Relations Team of ECA takes responsibility. Increasing attention has focused on communication to the national administrations and Parliaments of the EU Member States. One finding in the follow-up of institutional communication is that decision makers prefer face-to-face contacts and live presentations. Social media can also be useful when the ECA communicates about how its reports are received in the decision-making bodies.

***Media monitoring***

The ECA monitors media coverage by using of external contractors. Reports are delivered by the ECA communications team in the form of a daily press review to the ECA Members and management, but also to the staff on the Intranet. They provide graphs and heat maps and analyses about trending themes and topics covered. One issue has been the interpretation of sentiment scores: a negative statement does not necessarily mean negative statement about the ECA, but reflects the fact that ECA has concluded something critical in its audit. Thus, it is important that communication experts are closely involved in monitoring.

***Specific features of environmental audits***

A general rule is that environmental audits get always attention, and usually from all EU countries. People care about the environment and environment attracts broader attention than e.g. financial mechanisms. Recent examples of significant media attention were audits on the nature protection network Natura 2000, climate and energy policy, the greening provisions in the Common Agricultural Policy and nuclear decommissioning. In addition, topical problems such as migration receive a lot of attention.

Environment is an ideal field for communication in that sense that there is a wealth of good pictures, illustrations, videos and maps available.

One relatively underexplored area of communication is cooperation between the 28 national SAIs in the EU. Especially in environmental field, journalists’ interest might cross borders in the same way as environmental problems and generate interest in neighbouring countries. Recently the ECA and the SAI of Poland announced their audits on air quality together and made the audiences of both institutions aware of their intentions.

***Concluding tips***

The SAIs, including the ECA, have a major role to play in providing fact-based and reliable information in a world that is moving faster and faster, where data-manipulation is widespread and where misinformation has become commonplace (e.g. fake news) . SAIs reach the citizens via the press, but they need to adapt to the changing media contexts. They need to be present on social media and provide short and concise information - increasingly in the format of single charts or graphs or short videos. But the basic principles, such as writing audit titles that are easy to understand, are still relevant.

**SAI New Zealand**

The SAI of New Zealand audits all public sector entities (about 3,600 entities) and also reports to Parliament on sector- based audit results, performance audits and inquiries. The SAI also publishes good practice guidance from time to time, and manages a steady stream of correspondence with citizens.

***Communication in general***

The main elements of the SAI’s communications strategy are:

* **Planning for impact** is at the heart of the communications strategy to ensure that efforts are focused and give a good return on investment.
* **The Office Strategy** requires a more strategic, purposeful, and integrated approach to communications throughout the Office.
* **Digital communications** reflects global and domestic trends in communications and supports our intention to ‘publish more, print less’ and be our own media organisation (meaning we will not rely solely on traditional media to write about and promote our work, but also producing videos, blog posts and articles, and use social media.
* **Engagement** to be more in touch with the people who receive public services and to make the most of our relationships and partnerships with a full range of stakeholders. , and developing a stakeholder engagement framework and engagement plans for our priority stakeholders (individuals and groups).

*Staff capability* The SAI engages an external public affairs agency to assist with training staff in giving presentations and media interviews. This includes our Staff as Ambassadors training programme, which aims to equip staff with presentation skills and the ability to speak about the Office and its work in formal and informal settings.

*Communicating about some other topics than audits* The SAI has a blog where staff post about matters related to their work but not necessarily related to audits – see https://blog.oag.govt.nz. The SAI also posts photos of staff at external events on social media channels (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram) – for example, at conferences and university prize-giving ceremonies.

***Communicating about audits***

*Planning the communication of audits*

Financial audits are carried out with set expectations for when and how audit findings are communicated to the entity audited, its management team, and its governing body. For performance audits, there is a templated communications plan that audit team leaders are expected to fill in and maintain during the entire “life cycle” of the audit, including (where appropriate) plans to communicate during the audit and after it is completed (see Annex III).

*Communicating about audits before they are finalised, e.g. when they are planned or conducted*

We seek feedback on our draft work programme and invite the public and Parliament to comment. We also use our blog to help to manage expectations about the final audit product. We use this tactic when we are auditing a sensitive topic and know that people might expect more of us than our mandate and/or resources will allow. For our water management programme of work (primarily carried out during 2017/18), we published a report about the programme before any audits were finalised (see <https://www.oag.govt.nz/2017/water-management>). The purpose of the report is primarily to manage external expectations. Water is an emotive and contentious topic, and we need people to understand the limits and scope of our role and our work.

*Communicating audit results*

For financial audits, there is a draft and final management letter as well as the final audit report.

For performance audits, the activities are many and varied:

* Parliament is formally advised about the forthcoming report, if the report is to be presented to the House of Representatives (some reports are published only on our website).
* The OAG sector manager for that entity will offer a briefing on the report to the responsible **Minister**, the day before or day of presenting the report in Parliament.
* The **audited entity** is made aware of the likely presentation (or website publishing) date.
* The audit team might offer a briefing to the **entity’s audit and risk committee**, as appropriate.
* The Reports and Communications team will upload all reports to our website, usually in at least three different formats (HTML, PDF, and epub) and with a 1-2 page summary, then send email links to all subscribers to the email alert service. That email includes a brief summary of the report’s focus and findings. The subscribers include the **media**, interested members of the **public**, and **public servants**.
* The Reports and Communications team will inform **all staff** of the SAI about the report.
* The Reports and Communications team will use social media (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) to broadcast the publishing of all reports.
* The Reports and Communications team might publish a blog post about the work, to reach a different audience. The timing of that could be before, concurrent with, or after the report is released.
* Every three months, all **contracted audit providers** of the SAI receive an emailed newsletter, and it contains links to all reports (and blog posts) published in the quarter.

*Primary or secondary target groups for communication*

Primary and secondary audiences are identified for every performance audit, including for environmental audits. The primary audience depends on the audit and the groups or individuals identified as most likely to bring about the improvement that the SAI has identified as necessary or who would have an interest in the topic. Sometimes the primary audience is a Parliamentary committee, in other instances the primary audience might be the leadership team in the audited entity, or a sector as a whole (for example, all local government bodies).

***Tools and tips***

*Communication methods, tools, and fora*

* Email subscription service on our main website.
* RSS feeds on all of our websites.
* Speech and presentation opportunities at conferences and seminars.
* Intranet and emails to staff.
* Quarterly electronic newsletter emailed to all audit service providers.
* Blog posts.
* Social media – includes posts about our reports and videos of staff talking about the findings of our reports.
* Articles submitted to industry and sector print and online magazines.
* Media liaison.
* Feedback form on our website.

*Most successful tools for increasing visibility*

The majority of visitors to our website following the publication of a report are directed from our email subscription service (we use custom URLs to track visitors who click through from these emails).

At the time of writing, we had about 910 subscribers over four lists. About 40% of the general New Zealand list is made up of public sector employees. We also have separate lists for overseas subscribers, media, and Members of Parliament.

One of most successful “tools” in increasing visibility of our work is our staff. We encourage staff (with the proper preparation and support) to find opportunities to speak in public about our work. Our reflections reports (which provide an overview of each year’s work programme theme, bringing together findings and lesson from all projects completed under that theme) have been used as the basis for training for our Staff as Ambassadors programme, which aims to equip all staff to be able to talk about the work of the Office.

Based on the success of our reflections reports, we are now producing “foundation” reports to introduce each theme. Our first was for the *Water* work programme; and the second for our 2018/19 *Procurement* work programme. The benefit of having a foundation report is the earlier visibility we can get for our work programme. It can also be used as the basis for engagement throughout the life of each work programme.

*Cases where communication was less successful, and reasons*

There is no evidence to suggest that there are cases where communication has been unsuccessful. Certainly, there are times when a report might not have received any media coverage. Conversely, there have been times when reports that have garnered much more media attention than anticipated.

Our work is still useful even if it doesn’t garner media coverage and/or public interest. We have other channels (such as meeting with entities, tabling reports in Parliament, and appearing before select committees) to ensure that key messages are conveyed to those who need to know them.

*New developments*

We have refreshed our main website (oag.govt.nz) by consolidating it with our blog site (blog.oag.govt.nz) and schools resources site (auditor-general.parliament.nz). As part of this project, we arel also exploring new ways to engage and interact with citizens through our website.

*Communication tips that are possibly applicable to other SAIs*

The essentials of communications practice are always applicable – any communication has to be appropriate for **and useful to** the intended audience and have a clear purpose. The answer “to inform” shouldn’t be sufficient, but followed up with more “why?” questions. Why do people need to be informed about a particular topic? Clarity about the change that is sought in terms of how people think, feel, and act is essential to effective communication.

***Visibility of audits***

*The audits that have received most attention in last five years, and reasons*

Of the environmental work that we’ve done, the most visible was our 2013 report on biosecurity (*Ministry for Primary Industries: Preparing for and responding to biosecurity incursions).* The risks to New Zealand’s economy were clearly stated early on the report, which was a factor in the report’s popularity and the attention it received. Two weeks after the publication of the report, Parliament held an urgent debate to address the issues raised in our report. (Urgent debates about our reports are rare.)

Our follow-up report, published in 2015, also received considerable attention.

Media will often look for a sensational angle to our reports and findings, but we take particular care with the language we use so that people don’t misunderstand our views/findings.

***Communicating about environmental topics***

If a journalist has contacted us before about an environmental issue, we ensure that they are notified of the publication of any relevant reports once they are published.

Our environmental audit reports tend to have higher visibility due to New Zealand’s level of interest in environmental issues.

*How SAIs could increase the visibility of environmental audits*

On our website we have categories that people can use to find/filter relevant topics. We’ve also added a dedicated section on *Water* because it is our current work programme theme. Our *Water* theme gives us the opportunity to draw more attention to our environmental audits when we talk about the individual components of the work programme as a whole.

We are encouraging our staff to blog more about our work as the projects progress. These blog posts are promoted through social media and we ensure that these posts direct traffic back to our main website and the relevant reports. We have also encouraged our performance audit teams to take photos and videos of their field work during the water audits. We could use such material initially to help make the audits more visible to staff. Senior staff doing speaking engagements mention the *Water and Procurement* themes as focus of our work.

***How we measure visibility***

We use Google analytics to measure views of our main website and our blog site. We also monitor the views and reach of social media posts through each platform’s native analytics functions. These statistics are reported to our Leadership Team on a monthly basis.

As well as measuring and reporting on visibility, we also report on **impact**, which is difficult to measure but forms the basis of each project’s communications plan. Impact can include evidence of change as a result of our audits (whether within an individual entity or across a sector), others sharing or discussing our work in a positive light, staff being invited to speak about our work/reports, or media coverage.

Website views can help us track which reports have the most visibility, particularly if they have attracted notable media attention. For example, our schools audit results received more than 7500 page views at the end of 2017. It became our most viewed 2017 report after just three weeks’ tracking. As a point of comparison, the next most-viewed 2017 report received 1785 page views after seven months’ tracking.

Based on the top 30 most-viewed reports in 2017, the average number of views was about 1039 (or about 800 if we exclude the schools audit results report, as it was an outlier).

**SAI Russia**

**1. General communication**

***Communication strategy and plan (external, not internal) in the organization***

Federal Law No. 41-FZ "On the Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation" (Article 4) dated April 5, 2013 stipulates that the Accounts Chamber exercises external public auditing/control based on the principles of legality, efficacy, objectivity, independence, openness, and transparency.

The 2013-2019 Strategy for the activities run by the Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation specifies the tasks for the communication relationship with the society:

* to maintain the information openness, increase the transparency and public accountability
* to continuously improve the mechanisms and procedures for the feedback from citizens and civic institutions
* to increase the proportion of social audits, as well as audits initiated by the Accounts Chamber in connection with communications from citizens
* to expand the cooperation with civic institutions
* to facilitate expanding the practice of the public assessment of the work by the public administration bodies in general.

The characteristics, rules and procedures for arranging and implementing the information activities in the Accounts Chamber are determined by the Standard for Arranging the Activities by the Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation SAA 5 "The Arrangement and Implementation of the Information Activities by the Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation" (hereinafter referred to as SAA 5).

***Its core elements***

The Press Service and Information Department provides information on the Accounts Chamber and its activities to the media and publishes on the official website press releases regarding the Accounts Chamber’s opinions on legislative proposals, the results of the federal budget auditing and the control and expert-analytical activities carried out by the Accounts Chamber.

In addition, the Department promptly prepares responses to requests from the media in relation to the Accounts Chamber’s audits that are of interest for them or to any other matters falling within the competence of the Accounts Chamber.

Press conferences of the Accounts Chamber’s Chairwoman are annually held to sum up the results of the activities of the supreme audit institution in the outgoing year.

The publications in the media, which contain information about the Accounts Chamber and its activities are daily monitored and reviewed in order to make decisions with regards to the Accounts Chamber’s public response to these publications and to understand the order of the day and the context of events.

In addition to the official website of our SAI, information on the outcomes of the Accounts Chamber’s activities is published on its official pages on the social networks including Facebook, Telegram, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, VKontakte, and Odnoklassniki. The written posts regarding the Accounts Chamber’s activities on Facebook, VKontakte and Odnoklassniki are accompanied by visual content (e.g., infographics, video and photos). These social platforms also actively boost communication with users and the administrator of the Accounts Chamber’s official pages on the social networks is quick to answer questions from users. The YouTube channel contains video reports based on the results of the audit activities held by the Accounts Chamber and video interviews of the Accounts Chamber’s Chairwoman with federal TV channels. On Twitter, events with the participation of the Accounts Chamber’s Chairwoman and leadership are covered in an online broadcast format.

The Department has arranged the production of infographics in line with the corporate style of the Accounts Chamber and photo and video materials about the Accounts Chamber. They are published to accompany the press releases on the Accounts Chamber’s website and the posts on its official pages on the social networks. On top of that, an online publication containing an annual report on the work by the Accounts Chamber is also made.

The Department publishes the Bulletins of the Accounts Chamber, which contain full-text reports on the results of the control and expert-analytical activities carried out by the Accounts Chamber. The e-bulletins are available online on the website of the Accounts Chamber.

***Involvement of professionals in the field of public relations / PR agents***

The general management of the information activities by the Accounts Chamber is executed by the Chairwoman of the Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation.

The Press Service and Information Department in cooperation with other units of the Accounts Chamber makes proposals on building the information policies, communicates with the media, runs the communication activities and provides literary editing and visualization of the Accounts Chamber’s materials. The Press Service Department includes three units: the Press Service, the Information and Publishing and the Telecentre Support Teams.

***Publishing of materials on topics other than those relating to the audit***

The Bulletins of the Accounts Chamber, as the official information publication of the Accounts Chamber, and the Accounts Chamber’s website publish reports on completed control and expert-analytical activities and expert opinions by the Accounts Chamber, methodological and analytical materials, information on the Accounts Chamber and its activities, as well as other materials on external public auditing/control.

**2. Audit-related communication**

***Communication of the audit results to the public or stakeholders***

In accordance with the Rules of the Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation, all reports on the results of control and expert-analytical activities are referred to the Chambers of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation.

Press releases on the results of completed control and expert-analytical activities are normally posted on the Accounts Chamber’s website, excluding those containing restricted access information. In addition, reports on the results of the control and expert-analytical activities are published in the Bulletins of the Accounts Chamber.

***Beginning of the communication planning for the audit***

The process of preparing press releases and the Bulletins of the Accounts Chamber is regulated by SAA 5. The Press Service and Information Department prepares press releases based on the reports on the results of the control and expert-analytical activities run by the Accounts Chamber not later than three business days from their approval by the Board of the Accounts Chamber. Press releases based on other sources are prepared by the Press Service and Information Department within the timeframes identified by the decisions of the Accounts Chamber’s Chairwoman.

The Bulletins of the Accounts Chamber are published monthly as an independent electronic publication in the Russian language and are posted on the website of the Accounts Chamber. Proposals as for the plan for the next issue of the Accounts Chamber Bulletin and the enclosed materials that are proposed to be included in the issue are submitted by the structural units of the Accounts Chamber to the Press Service and Information Department no later than the 30th day of each month.

Communication events (e.g., press conferences, briefings, interviews, etc.) are prepared within the timeframes set out by the Accounts Chamber’s Chairwoman.

***Communication about audits before they are finalized, e.g. when they are planned or conducted***

In some cases, based on the evaluation and social consequence of a public audit, as well as on its potential relevance for the media, its topic is announced either during its planning or at the running stage. For example, during the interview of the Accounts Chamber’s Chairwoman with the TASS news agency in January 2017, when answering the question about plans for the year, the forest fire check was mentioned among other audits. The interview with Russian Newspaper in January 2018 announced plans to audit the Clean Country priority project. Its main goal is to reduce the negative environmental impact and bring down environmental risks associated with the objects of the cumulative environmental harm.

***The standard procedure for communicating completed audit. Who are involved in the process?***

In accordance with SAA 5, the standard communication procedure for presenting the audit results (excluding those containing restricted access information) includes press releases and reports on the results of the control and expert-analytical activities published in the Bulletins of the Accounts Chamber.

Press releases are prepared by the Press Service and Information Department on the basis of reports on the results of the control and expert-analytical activities, as well as on information provided by structural units of the Accounts Chamber. Any press release prepared by the department is approved through the chain of subordination with the heads of structural units and the Chairwoman of the Accounts Chamber.

The Bulletins of the Accounts Chamber are released by the Press Service and Information Department, which collects materials, provides literary editing, the uniformity of illustrative and graphic content and layouts and places regular issues on the Accounts Chamber website.

Heads of structural units and the administration of the Accounts Chamber submit their proposals as for the plan for the next issue of the Accounts Chamber Bulletin and the enclosed materials that are proposed to be included in the Bulletin to the Press Service and Information Department.

The plan of the next issue of the Accounts Chamber Bulletin is approved by the Board of the Accounts Chamber. In parallel with the publication of the press release agreed, the Press Service and Information Department publishes a brief communication accompanied by a relevant video, infographic or a photo on the Accounts Chamber’s official pages on the social networks, which is linked to the full-text release published on the website.

***Primary or secondary target groups for communication. Special target groups in case the audit is on environmental matters***

The Accounts Chamber communicates with two target groups when carrying out its environmental audits. The first group includes experts such as parliamentarians, specialists of audited entities, government authorities, accounting agencies in the regions and public experts. The second group includes representatives of the media and citizens of the Russian Federation.

Communication with the target groups when conducting environmental audits is in most cases maintained on the initiative of the groups’ representatives. For example, they might request an audit to be carried out by the Accounts Chamber or information to be provided on the results of the audits completed.

The dialogue with the target groups is held in various forms involving both direct communication and information technologies. For example, interaction with the regional accounts bodies is provided via the information system for publishing information on the public/municipal financial audits/control in the field of the budget legal relations (PIS USPFC). This system allows to increase the transparency of the public financial auditing by disclosing information about its conduct in Russia.

**3. Tools and tips**

***Methods, tools and formulas of communication***

The Accounts Chamber actively employs conventional methods of communication including reports on the results of the control and expert-analytical activities and annual reports on the work done by the Accounts Chamber, which are forwarded to the Chambers of the Federal Assembly; the publication containing annual reports on the work done by the Accounts Chamber; the publication of the Accounts Chamber Bulletin and press releases.

All communication activities are aimed at establishing public relations and ensuring that the activities by the Accounts Chamber are understandable to large audiences. In 2017 the Accounts Chamber circulated 271 press releases, and the Russian media, including on their basis, released about 66,000 materials on the SAI activities (an average of 157 reports per day).

Information about the Accounts Chamber and it’s activities is delivered through the website of the Accounts Chamber. The press releases on the results of the Accounts Chamber’s control and expert-analytical activities, federal budget auditing and opinions in respect of legal proposals are published on the official website under the News. The Bulletin of the Accounts Chamber that includes the full-text audit reports by the Accounts Chamber is also available online on the official website. In 2017 the Accounts Chamber website was visited by 1.64 million Internet users.

On top of that, all additional media inquiries on the Accounts Chamber’s relevant audits or on any matters within the competence of the Accounts Chamber are promptly handled by the Press Service and Information Department, which prepares and coordinates the responses through the chain of subordination with the heads of the structural units and the Chairwoman of the Accounts Chamber to be further forwarded to journalists.

In order that the work of the Press Service and Information Department can be arranged in line the order of the day, they monitor publications on the Accounts Chamber in the media that allows to understand which topics are most interesting to the public and are resonant in the public forum. Information about the Accounts Chamber is also rendered through the official pages of the Accounts Chamber on the social networks and other network resources.

The Accounts Chamber has accounts on VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, and YouTube social networks. 2,360 posts were made and 53 videoclips were produced based on the results of the audits on the social communities in 2017. The key events that involved the leadership of the Accounts Chamber received online coverage on Twitter and Instagram.

As a result of the activities of the Press Service and Information Department analytical reports are made to show the current public perception of the Accounts Chamber’s press releases including whether a topic was resonant or not, how the public and the expert community have responded, whether the representatives of the audited entities have acted in response, etc.

Information about the Accounts Chamber and it’s activities is also rendered through communication activities such as press conferences, briefings, interviews and other public events that involve the Accounts Chamber’s Chairwoman, Deputy Chairwoman, Auditors, Heads of the Departments and other employees.

***The most successful tools when it comes to increasing the visibility***

We find the forms of communication that provide the feedback from the public (i.e., citizens, public organizations, etc.) to be most outreaching. For example, more than 6.5 thousand questions and user comments were received in 2017 thanks to the presence of the Accounts Chamber on the social networks, with the total audience of all communities widened up to 204 thousand users.

***Unsuccessful examples of communication***

No failures occurred. The reports prepared by the Press Service and Information Department always resonate with the public to a greater or lesser extent.

***New developments in the future***

We will continue to further improve the questionnaire and the above mentioned public audit portals and to expand our presence on the social networks.

***Communication tips that we find particularly good and possibly applicable in other SAIs***

Since 2016, the “Polls” tool has been implemented on the PIS USPFC system, which opens for the participating audit institutions an opportunity to keep a dialogue with the community through surveying the population to obtain an independent public opinion on the quality of the audited entities’ public/municipal functions and services rendered to the population.

The tool is actively employed by the Accounts Chamber when conducting its control and expert-analytical activities. During its operation there have been arranged forty five polls in the system by the Accounts Chamber. The results obtained were used both in the planning and in direct conduct of the control and expert-analytical activities.

The main tasks that are addressed by the Accounts Chamber while using the tool in the course of its activity are:

* to define/clarify the subject of the control and auditing, that is, the effect on choosing the areas of activity to be controlled and assessed (obtaining information on the knottiest areas of activity);
* to identify of the entities to be audited (the array of organizations whose activities to be monitored and assessed);
* to evaluate and compare the results of the surveys conducted to those of the relevant control and expert-analytical activities;
* to receive public feedback in respect of any changes in the relevant areas of activity and the work of government bodies and organizations, based on the outcomes of the control and expert-analytical activities.

In addition, an effective form of communication is our presence on the social networks. The Accounts Chamber is present on VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, and YouTube social networks. The presence of the Accounts Chamber on these social media helped to establish a direct public outreach with no mass media intermediacy and to promptly respond to questions from the citizens on any relevant issue within the competence of the Accounts Chamber.

**4. Visibility of audits**

***Audit examples that have received most attention in last five years and why***

In the field of environmental protection, the most resonant audits were those for the issues related to the measures implemented to protect forests against fires. Two events were held in 2017, including the *Verification of the Completeness, Timeliness and Efficacy of Spending the Federal Budget Funds Transferred in 2015-2016 and in the Reporting Period of 2017 to Protect Forests against Fires under the 2013-2020 Forestry Development National Programme of the Russian Federation* and the *Assessment of the Measures Implemented in 2015-2016 and in the Reporting Period of 2017 under the 2013-2020 Forestry Development National Programme of the Russian Federation to Protect Forests against Fires*.

The control activity carried out in conjunction with the regional audit institutions in nine constituent entities of the Russian Federation included the audit of the federal budget funds that were allocated for the above purposes,

Expert-analytical activity in the field of forest protection against fires involved the assessment of the public administration. The effectiveness of fire safety and forest fire extinguishing measures was also assessed. Taking into account that the powers in the field of forestry in the Russian Federation were transferred from the federal to the regional level, all regions were covered by the control and expert-analytical activities, which made it possible to substantially deepen our research.

In addition, the activity also included an online survey with respondents in sixty regions engaged in order to study public opinion regarding the adequacy of the measures taken to fight forest fires. The results of this survey were taken into account when preparing the final report and also significantly improved the quality of our assessment.

Standard communication methods were used to inform the public about the results of these activities. At the same time, we think that the audits had many resonances due to the big social importance of the issue audited. In addition, the public-opinion poll arranged also increased the interest in the results of the examinations.

Another urgent issue, which always raises the public's attention, is the environmental protection and ensuring the environmental security. One of the latest relevant control measure is the *Verification of the Use of the Federal Budget Funds and Federal Property Intended to Ensure Biological Diversity and Eliminate the Effects of Pollution and Other Negative Environmental Impacts Resulting from Economic and Other Activities* conducted in 2017 (46 mass media publications).

The assessment of the effectiveness of using the federal budget funds under *Improving the Use and Development of the Fishery Resource Potential* Subprogramme 7 of the *Fisheries Development* Russian National Programme, in 2015 and the reporting period of 2016, received wide public response.

The sale of ten rare beluga whales to China caught the most attention of the media (142 mass media publications).

***Cases with low level of visibility and reasons for it***

If it is the press coverage indicator being meant, there are several reasons why the news about an audit is poorly responded. For example, the media and citizens do not see the news due to a considerable amount of hot-topic news stories. Sometimes an audit requires a professional understanding and is not particularly interesting to a wide audience, although without prejudice to its importance, and it plays a big role in a certain audited and faulty sector.

***Cases where the publicity went to a different direction that was intended and reasons for it***

When information on the results of audits is rendered using standard communication methods, there were cases when the public resonance turned out to be wider than expected. An example is the *Verification of the Use of the Federal Budget Funds and Federal Property Intended to Ensure Biological Diversity and Eliminate the Effects of Pollution and Other Negative Environmental Impacts Resulting from Economic and Other Activities* conducted in 2017.

The press release on the outcomes of the audit was posted on the website of the Accounts Chamber on July 5, 2017. The audit report was published in Bulletin of the Accounts Chamber No. 8 (236), 2017. Proposals and conclusions on the results of the verification were announced within the government hours at the Chambers of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation.The analysis showed that the importance and relevance of the topic contributed to a higher public attention to the audit results.

**5. *Communication on environmental topics***

***Special elements related to communicating on environmental audits***

The Accounts Chamber brings information about environmental auditing to the public in accordance with the Accounts Chamber's Rules and SAA 5. These documents do not provide for special procedures regarding the transparency of environmental audits.

***Our vision on the visibility of environmental audits in compared to other audit topics***

The issues of preserving the environment are of a high social importance, which must be taken into account when communicating on the environmental topics, in contrast to the communication on other issues. For example, the examinations on the forest protection against fires and elimination of the damage accumulated in the past received a wide public response.

However, it should be emphasized that environmental problems are of a high relevance at the interstate level and not only within the framework of a separate country. For example, an independent working group on environmental auditing has been established within the framework of INTOSAI and it is engaged in conducting both bilateral and multilateral audits. The target communication groups for such audits include the audiences in multiple countries.

The Accounts Chamber, for instance, has been closely cooperating in the field of environmental auditing with the Office of the Auditor General of Norway for ten years. During this period, we have conducted bilateral audits on fisheries and conservation of aquatic biological resources of the Barents and Norwegian Seas and on ensuring radiation safety. The results of those activities were presented to the Parliaments of both Russia and Norway. In addition, information on parallel audits with the Norwegian SAI was posted on the website of the Accounts Chamber.

**How could SAIs increase the visibility of environmental audits?**

In our opinion, the most effective methods of communication to improve the audits’ visibility are those that allow public to give feedbacks. Involving the public in the discussion allows to receive information on the knottiest issues and to monitor changes occurring. It is the involvement/participation of the public in the discussion that increases the interest in the outcomes of the audits.

In this context, the Accounts Chamber intends to further develop the “Polls” tool on the PIS USPFC system when carrying out its control and expert-analytical activities.

**6. *How to measure visibility***

***How we measure the visibility of the audits***

The Press Service and Information Department monitors media publications that contain information about the Accounts Chamber and its activities to review the same and provide the Accounts Chamber’s relevant response in public. In this regard, the Department monitors media publications that contain information about the Accounts Chamber and its activities; prepares and submits daily press reviews, weekly reports on newscasts and information programmes that have appeared on the air on the Russian television channels with the mention of the Accounts Chamber’s activities.

***What results we have received and what measures we took based on that***

The results depend on the issues audited and the agenda of the day. The Press Service and Information Department evaluates the situation both on a daily and on a monthly basis, which results in performance conclusions and its own agenda as based on the results. Some audits are better understood if accompanied by videoclips or infographics. The social networks with information presented in a less formal style contribute to a better understanding.

***Methods which turned out to be helpful and which did not. Intentions to use the same methods in the future or plans to change them***

In our opining, the most beneficial method of assessing the public awareness is to count the number of mentions of a specific event in the media. The level of awareness is also evidenced by the “I like” mark to the Accounts Chamber’s publications on it’s official pages on the social networks, comments on the topics and views of the videoclips on the control activity results.

**SAI USA**

**Communication in general**

**Is there a communication strategy or plan (external, not internal) in the organisation?**

We recognize how dramatically communications are changing, including changes in how our audiences access and consume news, reports, and other information. So our focus is on keeping our work clear and accessible. Our strategy is to ensure that our reports are on the platforms our audiences use and, regardless of platform, that our reports are easy to access, read, and understand. We do the work so it will be shared and read, which is the only way to have an impact and fulfil our mission.

While we do not have a communications plan that lays out every step, we do have customary practices that we use, for both regular reports and higher profile initiatives, to increase the visibility and accessibility of our products.

**What are the main elements of it?**

These are the main elements of our communications strategy for the 800+ reports and testimonies we issue each year:

* We have a standard distribution form all staff follow to ensure the appropriate agency and congressional staff receive relevant reports via email.
* We make nearly all of our products publicly available on [www.GAO.gov](http://www.GAO.gov). The only exceptions are classified or otherwise restricted products.
* As soon as a new report appears on our website, we send an autotweet with the report’s title and a link to the product. We currently have more than 50,000 Twitter followers on our two feeds (@usgao and @usgaolegal).
* We feature one new report each day on both Facebook and LinkedIn, and include in those posts a link to all of the day’s new reports. You can see these posts at [www.facebook.com/usgao](http://www.facebook.com/usgao) and <https://www.linkedin.com/company/us-government/>
* We produce short, 5-6 minute podcasts for certain high-visibility reports or ones with a broader or consumer-oriented audience, such as on college financial aid, new sunscreens, and prescription opioids. You can see our podcasts here: <https://www.gao.gov/multimedia/podcast/>
* We produce report-related videos for topics that have good video footage, such as the status of naval shipyards. We also produce short, animated videos to illustrate the issues a report explored, such as the safety of meat and poultry workers. You can [see our videos on GAO.gov](https://www.gao.gov/multimedia/video/#video_id=688994) as well as on [our YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/user/usgao).
* We produce infographics for selected reports. You can see our [most recent ones on our Flickr page](https://www.flickr.com/photos/usgao/sets/72157641997238715), where we also post high-resolution versions of some of our more engaging graphics. We do this because Flickr makes it easier for our readers to search, share, and save our visuals as compared to the versions in the PDFs of our reports that will not, for example, appear in Google image search results.
* We have an agency-wide program (GAO PluggedIn) to inject our past work in to current conversations around breaking news. Staff throughout the agency suggest tweets to the Office of Public Affairs for the agency to post to the @usgao twitter feed. In 2017, this program generated more than 450 tweets, and these tweets are often the agency’s farthest reaching and most engaging.
* Recognizing the demands on our readers and the need to quickly and clearly communicate the bottom line of our reports, we launched “Fast Facts.” These are 650-character introductions to our work along with a visual element that are not part of the official audit product. We are currently piloting the program, and will require Fast Facts on all new GAO products in the near future, pending resources.
* For some high-visibility products, such as updates to our [High Risk List](http://www.gao.gov/highrisk/overview), we issue press releases and prepare individual social media plans on the platforms discussed above.
* We have provided resources to all staff on how they can share their publicly issued products with journalists and stakeholders. The resources include how to identify journalists by issue area through a subscription portal all staff can access, boilerplate email language, and instructions for personalizing and automating batches of emails.

**Do you employ specialized professionals working with communication/PR?**

Yes. GAO has an Office of Public Affairs with dedicated staff. All of our staff in this office have advanced degrees in writing, communication, or policy analysis, and/or have a background in journalism. Several staff are also former analysts who conducted audit work on behalf of the agency before transitioning to our Office of Public Affairs.

**Do you communicate also about some other topics than audits?**

Yes. We have Key Issues pages on GAO.gov that provide high-level findings across a range of audits on a particular topic. We have information about GAO itself, including job openings and how to apply. We also use the website and Twitter to announce bid protest decisions and appropriations law opinions.

We issue press releases for major events, such as being named one of the best places to work in the federal government or when we appoint new people to commissions. We run a 24-hour/7 days a week fraud hotline and provide information about reporting fraud, waste, abuse or mismanagement of federal funds. On GAO’s official blog, The WatchBlog, we write about working at GAO, the agency’s history, “explainers” about how certain programs work, and other aspects of GAO and its work. If you visit [www.GAO.gov](http://www.GAO.gov), you can see these and other examples, as well as links to all of our social media platforms.

**Communicating about audits**

**Do you always communicate the audit results to the public or stakeholders?**

Yes—both. Almost all of GAO’s reports, testimonies, or other products are publicly available on our website. In the case of sensitive or classified work, we communicate the results to the relevant agencies and congressional offices.

**When do you start planning the communication of an audit?**

Following data collection, teams hold “message agreement” meetings with all members of the audit team, as well as internal stakeholders, to determine the key findings and messages of an audit.

All audit teams attend an Engagement Review Meeting about 2-3 months prior to publishing their reports. These meetings are where we scrutinize draft titles, and select reports for podcasts or other multimedia based on congressional and consumer interest.

For teams involved in our Fast Facts pilot, teams begin drafting those introductions about 1-2 months before issuing.

**Do you communicate about audits already before they are finalised, e.g. when they are planned or conducted?**

Only to the agencies being audited and congressional stakeholders. Prior to finalizing an audit, congressional staff can access an online portal, Watchdog, to see the topics and planned issuance dates of our work.

If asked by the media, we provide high-level information about our work, including the audit’s scope and methods and estimated timeframes for reporting. We never discuss findings prior to a report’s public release.

**When an audit is completed, what is the standard procedure for communicating about it?  Who are involved in the process?**

We publish the report as a PDF on our website, [www.GAO.gov](http://www.GAO.gov). Each report has its own landing page which features the HTML version of the report’s Highlights page (a one-page summary of the report) for busy, online readers. For teams producing Fast Facts, those serve as the report’s landing page, and the report’s Highlights are also available online.

As soon as a report posts to our website, an automated tweet goes out on our twitter feed with the report title and a link to the report.

The Office of Public Affairs has given guidance to teams on how to share publicly issued work with journalists and stakeholders, including

* How to identify journalists by beat,
* Boilerplate email language to use when sending links to new reports along with instructions on using mail merge, and
* Details on tagging URLs to track results of outreach in Google Analytics.

**Are there primary or secondary target groups for communication? Which are they? Are there some special target groups if the audit is on environmental matters?**

Our primary audience is Congress. From usability tests and other outreach, we know that congressional members and their staff access information similarly to journalists, think tank staff, and even the general public so we generally have the same communication strategy across audiences.

In addition, teams are expected to maintain media outreach lists, and may also share publicly issued work with subject matter experts and relevant organizations interviewed as part of their audit.

**Tools and tips**

**What communication methods, tools, fora do you use?**

As discussed earlier, we post our publicly issued reports on our website, we post daily on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. We post to our blog typically twice each week. We also issue podcasts, infographics, interactive graphics, videos and other multimedia for select reports, which we share on the report’s landing page, as well as on our social media platforms. We also archive report-related and other videos on our YouTube channel, and upload selected photographs to Flickr.

We also have GAO PluggedIn, discussed earlier, for staff to suggest tweets for the agency to post to the @usgao twitter feed. Those tweets help tie previously issued work to current events.

**What have been the most successful tools when it comes to increasing the visibility?**

The most successful tools depend on the content and format of the product.

* We have found that sharing videos on Facebook increases their reach.
* The blog allows us to control the timing of posts and feature work that may not have gotten as much attention when first issued.
* On Twitter, we have the most followers of any of our social media platforms, so that is where we direct people who want to be alerted as soon as we issue a new product.

For high-profile work, we may also convene a journalist roundtable with key staff around an embargoed copy of the report.

Regardless of the product, we find clear writing and engaging visuals can increase visibility.

**Have there been some cases where the communication was not successful? What happened and why?**

We would always like more people to read and engage with our work. However, since we issue 800+ products each year, we cannot always do as much for each product as we might like.

**Are you considering developing something new?**

Always. We have an agency-wide committee where staff at all levels can suggest new ideas for sharing our work. The Product Line Steering Committee holds monthly meeting open to all staff where they can suggest their ideas to the two co-chairs: the Chief Quality Officer and the Managing Director of Public Affairs—and often task teams are created to bring new ideas to fruition. For example, staff suggested a blog for the agency, which resulted in our WatchBlog. While not all ideas are adopted—for example, we found we don’t have enough good visuals for Instagram and not appropriate videos for Snapchat—we believe we have been successful in our efforts because we involve newer and younger staff in our discussions around how best to communicate the results of our work.

We are also developing a new website that will be mobile-responsive—something our current site is not. We have been tracking mobile use on our site and, while it has steadily grown, we trail other federal agencies in the percent of mobile traffic. We believe a new, responsively designed site will improve the reach and impact of our work by making it easier for readers to find our work, read it on any device, and share it on almost any platform.

As mentioned above, some teams produce Fast Facts, a brief introduction to a product that is not part of the audit product. Based on an extensive analysis of this effort that involved, among other things, usability testing with journalists and analysis of Google Analytics data for GAO.gov, we are expanding the pilot and have been approved to have Fast Facts on all products, pending resources.

**Are there some communication tips that you find particularly good and possibly applicable in other SAIs?**

Given limited resources and the constantly evolving online environment, we strive to make data-driven decisions about what we post, when, and on what platforms. Data on sources of traffic to GAO.gov, levels of engagement with our social media content, and other insights can help SAIs identify the best communication practices for their audiences.

We also believe it is important to communicate in clear, direct ways that may be different than the format of an audit report.

**Visibility of audits**

**What are the audits that have received most attention in last five years? Have you analysed why?**

**Are there some cases where the visibility was particularly low? Have you analysed why?**

**Are there some cases where the publicity went to a different direction that was intended? Have you analysed why?**

In the past 5 years, we have issued more than 4,100 publicly available products on a range of topics, so there are many reports in that time period that received a lot of attention. Visitors to GAO.gov can see the currently trending reports at the bottom of the homepage. These are often either the most recently issued reports, or older ones linked to current events.

We provide quarterly and annual reports to staff on overall performance of GAO.gov, but not by issue area. For example, in our most recent report (FY17 Q4) we featured the 5 reports from that quarter that each had more than 1,500 online views, including reports on naval shipyards, animal welfare, and aviation security. Given the volume of audits we produce, we have given staff in all 13 issue-area teams access to the GAO.gov Google Analytics account and directions on how to track their teams’ reports.

Sometimes the return on our efforts to increase the visibility of our work is not as high as the investment—but it’s all about testing. We learned that posting videos natively/directly to Facebook increases their reach. We would not have learned that if we did not test it.

**Communicating about environmental topics**

**Are there some special elements related to communicating about environmental audits?**

**How do you see in general the visibility of environmental audits compared to other audit topics?**

**How could SAIs increase the visibility of environmental audits?**

Other than teams targeting their outreach efforts, we do not communicate the results of our audits differently based purely on their issue area.

However, this is where our PluggedIn program and the WatchBlog are particularly relevant. PluggedIn allows us to tweet our work around topical events, giving us the opportunity to connect to the real world, including on environmental issues. For example, we tweeted when news broke that a particular [bee was listed as endangered](https://twitter.com/USGAO/status/820065893812203521), when there was a [swine flu outbreak](https://twitter.com/USGAO/status/912410128434987008), and around coverage of [antibiotic resistance in farm animals](https://twitter.com/USGAO/status/926430009648087040).

Similarly, our blog allows us to set the agenda and discuss our work at times when most relevant. For example, we blogged on the [10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina](https://blog.gao.gov/2015/08/27/hurricane-katrina-10-years-after-the-storm/), for summer travel to [national parks](https://blog.gao.gov/2017/06/27/creature-comforts-in-the-great-outdoors/), and on the [75th anniversary of the Battle of Midway](https://blog.gao.gov/2017/06/05/75-years-after-the-battle-of-midway-a-tour-of-the-midway-atoll/).

**How to measure visibility?**

**How do you measure the visibility of the audits?**

**What results have you received? Have you taken some measures based on that?**

**Which methods turned out to be helpful and which not? Do you intend to use the same methods in the future or not? If you plan to change them, what are the reasons?**

* In July 2012, we installed Google Analytics on GAO.gov. This allows us to measure the number of online views, time on page, shares, and other key information about the visibility of our audits.
* Each week, we report to senior staff the reports that had 1,000+ views of their online landing page or 1,000+ PDF downloads.
* We have a Clippings service that provides daily citations of our work in broadcast, print, and online outlets. Teams may use this to maintain press about their particular reports.
* For our social media platforms, we use Sprout Social for posting as well as measuring reach and engagement. We also use our platforms’ native analytics.
* We have conducted usability tests of our website and certain products.
* Based on our data collection, we have developed new content for GAO.gov, revised the site’s landing page, redesigned content, and developed new products, including Fast Facts.

We plan to continue these methods while constantly evaluating them and adding new measures as they become available. To help in these efforts, we started an agency-wide committee on social media metrics. Members of this group analyze Google Analytics data for GAO.gov and share their findings and lessons-learned with the group. For example, an analyst in GAO’s Health Care team shared an analysis of health care work and how its views, time on page, and other metrics compare to GAO-wide ones. Another analyst developed and shared a framework for tracking bodies of work on GAO.gov, as opposed to individual reports. Each of these projects helps staff see the impact of their work—and think about ways to increase that impact by, for example, increased outreach efforts around a report’s release.