How to Organize and Write an Engaging Plain Language Article

It can be challenging to distill your research down into a quick, bite-sized snapshot. Answering key questions in plain language that accurately represents the core of your project will be effective for briefing end users, collaborators, partners and the public through newsletters, newspaper or magazine articles, or social media posts. The KM Core Team has generated the following checklist to reference and build on when writing an article for non-academic audiences. Feel free to contact any member of the KM Core Team for assistance in writing, editing, and reviewing.

1. Succinct, catchy title that addresses the key element of your article and pulls your reader in. Everyone loves a good pun!
2. One-liner sub-title that summarizes the who, when, where, what, why, and how.
   > For example: "German climate researchers recently used computer simulations to conclude that the development of managed forests to reduce harmful carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere is inadequate for solving climate change."
3. "Who" is involved in the research?
   a. Full name of the main researcher and any important contributors.
   b. Is there a collaboration or partnership that is essential or unique?
   c. How many students and young professionals are being trained though the project and in what fields?
   d. What is their main mission – what has the team set out do?
   e. Credibility-adding details such as distinctions, memberships or titles. What makes this researcher, team, or collaboration especially qualified to take on this task?
4. "What" have they discovered or are attempting to advance?
   a. What makes this work interesting to non-scientists?
   b. Include a basic scientific description of the project.
5. "Where" is the researching taking place?
   a. What makes the place special or unique – is it a place of social or biological importance, like a national park?
6. "How" have they approached the problem?
   a. Include only the most important methods of investigation, described in as non-technical terms as possible.
   b. What is innovative and cutting edge about the research?
7. Implications ("Why?")
   a. What will the effect of the research be on society? How will it solve or contribute to advancing a real-world problem?
   b. How is it advancing the science or leading the field?
   c. What local, regional, or national programs, policies, or regulations can the research contribute to?
   d. How will society benefit – what is the "hook"?
   e. Who will use this new information or tools? Have they already?
8. What's next?
   a) What is the future of the research or what's next in the project?
   b) Are there barriers or challenges to application of the research?
   c) Are there untapped opportunities that exist in the scientific advancement or application?
9. Funding of the project and contact information for further inquiries.