

## #KM Rules

Want to get better at knowledge management? Want more people to learn from your experience? Based on CARE's experiences in Knowledge Management, here are 12 actionable steps that any staff member can take to make knowledge more useable and increase the chances that we're learning from what we are doing—and all of that work doesn't end with the project.



- 1) **Make it short enough to read RIGHT NOW:** This doesn't mean it can be fluff. Do your

Make it Short  
Enough to  
Read NOW

homework and make sure the details are right. Add links to where people can learn more; flesh out the complexity in a longer report; perform statistical validity tests to your heart's content. But if you want people to be interested in any of it; you have to make the first touch (e-mail, blog post, website description) short enough to read now—before it goes into the dreaded “I should probably read this later” pile.

- 2) **Be useful:** Create content that is based on a user saying, “you know what I need?” instead of an expert saying, “here's what I have.” Content that people can put into practice or use to solve a problem now is much more successful. Don't know what people need? Ask!

Be Useful

Go Where the  
Eyes Are

- 3) **Go where the eyes are:** Find active communities where you can be part of the conversation. Setting up new communities is hard and slow, and competition is fierce. People already pay attention to particular spaces (especially donor-hosted ones), so take advantage of it and post there.

- 4) **Consolidate effort:** everyone creating content thinks they need a slightly separate set of tools, tags, and platforms. Users are desperate to minimize the number of things they need to check and special code words they need to remember to find things. Before you invent your own anything, check if there is something that does 75% of what you want. If so, use that instead. More people will use your content if its popping up in places they already go.

Consolidate  
Effort

No jargon

- 5) **No jargon:** We invent new terms, acronyms, and concepts all the time. People do not have time to learn them all. Sometimes the process of inventing them helps us clarify our thinking. But if you can't say it in one sentence with no jargon—your idea isn't ready yet.

- 6) **Frequent beats perfect:** Research on internet communities shows that the most influential people are judged more by how often they post relevant content (happily, relevant is still a factor) than if every post is completely correct. Get decent content out often instead of perfect content out 1-2 times a year. Consistency—in both presence and relevance—is key. Don't have a new product of your own to put out? Read someone else's work and comment on it!

Frequent  
Beats Perfect

Conversation,  
Not  
Monologue

7) **This is a conversation, not a monologue:** We often focus on the supply side of KM and put out reams of “here’s what I have to say.” Metrics are about how many documents we produce and how many people read our work. That matters, but what about what we learn from others? My work gets better, smarter, and more useful when I join a conversation instead of just focusing on what I want to say.

- 8) **Feedback matters:** One of the biggest motivators in anyone’s life is feedback. The act of someone else saying “I saw this” or “I liked this” or best of all “this helped me” increases motivation to do more of the thing that works. Applied judiciously, “here’s what could help more” and “this didn’t really work” are also incredibly useful comments. No one wants to spend time creating things that don’t work.

Feedback  
Matters

Give Credit  
Where it’s  
Due

9) **Give credit where it’s due:** It’s just ethically correct. As a bonus, people really like to see how their work influences others. Most of us are motivated by the idea that what we’re doing makes a difference. So let other people see where they’ve made a difference for you.

- 10) **Lower barriers:** length, complexity, language, bad formatting—those all make it harder for someone to engage. Make it easy for people to understand what you’re saying and to do what you’re asking. If what you’re asking is hard to do, all the more reason to make your product easy to follow. Beautiful, clear, and compelling content is the most successful.

Lower  
Barriers

Links are Your  
Friends

11) **Links are your friends:** Always leave the door open for people to learn more. Links to more documents, videos, or other evidence help build your credibility, and give people a chance to explore your data for themselves. Be restrained—no more than 5 links in a 1-page document. Integrate links into your text or make them very short so you don’t clutter the space, but give people space to dig deeper.

- 12) **Maximize your mileage:** Once you’ve gone to the effort of distilling some key learnings, use them as much as you can. People learn in different ways—so create a powerpoint, and infographic, and a blog post with the same ideas. That allows you to target different audiences, and reinforce the message in a lot of different ways. Maybe you need a longer think piece and an infographic.

Maximize  
Your Mileage