

A GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE
COMMUNICATION PLANNING

ESTABLISHING DIALOGUE: PLANNING FOR SUCCESSFUL ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Identify the Issue

Set Your Goals

Know the Issue, Audience and Constraints

Assess Audiences

Identify Messages and Methods

Implement Strategy

Evaluate, Debrief and Follow-Up

ESTABLISHING DIALOGUE:
PLANNING FOR SUCCESS
A Guide for Effective Communication Planning

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IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION PLANNING IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Successful implementation of public policy depends on agency credibility with citizens. Research shows that this credibility is built on three factors:

- Early two-way dialogue with citizens
- Information that is understandable and responsive to local needs
- Some form of citizen involvement in the overall management process

Planning for communication in conjunction with overall project management planning can assure that these factors are integrated at the onset of an effort and are maintained through to its resolution.

Early two-way dialogues establishes trust and builds a shared vision for the plan to address the problem. It is also here that agency staff learn what information is needed by citizens and how best to present that information to make it useful. Negative public perception can be avoided when citizens affected by agency policies see that their concerns and questions are being addressed and when the scientific and technical information they need is easily and readily available. When projects are implemented effectively, it is usually because two things happen: the public understands the issue, and internal resources are coordinated and directed to find ways to meet agency goals while addressing the concerns of external audiences.

The Communication Planning Process outlined in this workbook will help project managers with both internal coordination and external outreach and dialogue. Field tested in virtually all divisions of the department, this approach offers a step by step process to make project management more effective.

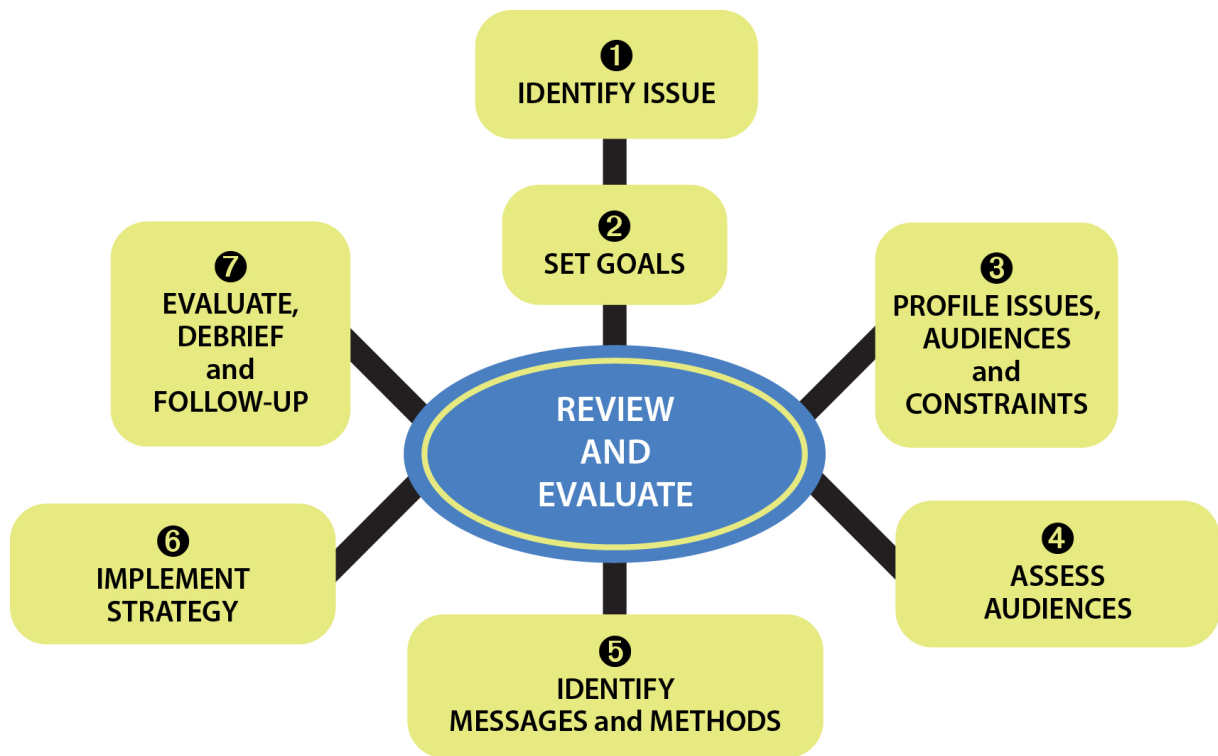
WHAT IS COMMUNICATION PLANNING?

Communication planning provides a mechanism to carry out four basic tenets of risk communication:

- ❶ Establish dialogues between the agency and the affected publics early, and continue them through to resolution.
- ❷ Include citizens in the decision making process.
- ❸ Present information clearly and make it accessible to citizens.
- ❹ Develop a context for the risk that will help audiences evaluate how to respond to the risk.

Adopting a process of planned communication predicated on sound scientific and technical information enables managers to meet problems and constraints of project management in a timely fashion and with a greater chance of success.

The following diagram illustrates the seven steps of effective communication planning. Beginning the moment an issue is identified, the process provides a set of check points to assure managers that agency and public concerns are considered throughout the project. The process insures that information is delivered consistently, and that everyone who needs to know the status of the project is informed. Problems that arise are dealt with before progress on the project is blocked.



This process allows you to take the time up front to learn how affected citizens or groups will respond to the issue. Social, political and economic concerns along with technical and scientific information are considered and integrated into the communication plan and used to decide how to manage the project. Internally, the lead program and a project working group oversee communication and use the feedback from outreach to plan a strategy that addresses both agency objectives and citizen concerns.

Each step of the planning process is described in detail in the corresponding sections of this workbook. It begins with the first internal meeting and concludes with a meeting to evaluate and finalize the effort.

You will want to consider how best to integrate the Communication Planning Process in your program. Most of the pilot tests using this process were cases where there was a lot of public opposition to agency action, or large populations were affected. In each case, the effectiveness of the communication effort depended on the degree of planning that took place *up front*, and the attention to process that was followed throughout the case.

STEP ONE: IDENTIFY THE ISSUE

Establish a Work Group and Select a Communication Coordinator

Communication planning begins when an issue of concern involving the agency and the public emerges. The manager identifies a coordinator or project manager and they meet to discuss the nature of the issue and the role and responsibilities of the coordinator. Together, the manager and the coordinator identify those people in the agency who may need to be involved in the case. Internal work groups can consist of people in your office, in other programs, the press office, or in other state agencies, depending on the case.

The coordinator oversees communication planning even when developing a communication strategy requires the effort of the entire group. The communication coordinator must know the issue, guide the planning process, suggest techniques to achieve communication goals, be at ease when dealing with the public, be free to raise difficult policy questions that the public will likely raise, and have the responsibility and authority to assign tasks to the appropriate staff. The tasks listed in Table 1 are the responsibilities of the communication coordinator. In complex cases the communication coordinator may need to share these tasks with other members of the work group or support staff.

TABLE 1: TASKS OF COMMUNICATION COORDINATION

- develop and track the communication strategy
- get approval from superior at each step
- coordinate information gathering
- participate in all internal and external meetings on the case
- assist in identifying the audiences for the issue
- suggest the best ways to establish dialogues with audiences
- provide avenues for audiences to obtain information on the case
- help technical staff present technical information clearly
- find ways to respond to citizen questions
- incorporate audience concerns into the process
- implement and evaluate the agreed upon strategy
- follow up on remaining citizen questions or concerns identified through evaluations

The actual time spent on a communication effort depends on the complexity and duration of the case. In some cases, the role of communication coordinator will be a full-time responsibility requiring the support of the group and the program manager. In less complicated cases, the role may be limited to oversight. Establishing a dialogue with audiences may require continuous involvement with citizens until the effort concludes in mutual satisfaction. Acknowledging this early prepares everyone for the responsibility that dialogues may extend beyond the initial outreach.

Organize a Planning Meeting

Once a work group has been assembled call a meeting to discuss the issue. The first work group meeting establishes a framework for the communication strategy. It is important to go through each step of the planning process during the first meeting even if information is incomplete for carrying out the task. Doing this ensures that the strategy develops in a consistent manner and that the success of the communication effort at reaching its goal can be measured at its conclusion. As the agenda in Table 2 illustrates, the work group must first review the issue and agree on a problem

definition. The way the problem is defined drives the communication plan, so it is very important that the group agree on this point. An issue can be defined as a program change, the discovery of contamination, siting of a waste facility, health effects from exposure to chemicals, a permit application, setting new standards, an open space/land use conflict, or a proposed agency rule.

The person who called the meeting shares information about the problem, then asks group members to contribute additional information. This **overview of the issue** often reveals the nature of the problem, the affected audiences and their history with the department, related technical or scientific data, what has happened to date, and how dialogues can be established with those affected. This information assists in developing goals and planning the initial communication strategy.

TABLE 2: AGENDA FOR THE PLANNING MEETING

- ① Present and clearly identify the issue
- ② Have group members share their knowledge of the issue
- ③ Decide if others should be part of the work group
- ④ Identify communication goals
- ⑤ Acknowledge program mandates and policies, establish an issue profile and identify constraints
- ⑥ Try to identify the audiences and assess their concerns
- ⑦ Discuss the messages you want to send to audiences
- ⑧ Discuss the best methods to send these messages
- ⑨ Decide who will coordinate communications
- ⑩ Assign whatever tasks you feel are needed at this time, with deadlines for doing them
- ⑪ Plan how you will evaluate whether the strategy achieved the goal

Issues of policy may arise and should be thoroughly discussed by the group to assure the continuity of the communication plan and to avoid problems in implementation. These issues may include:

- What is the program's obligation to citizens to provide **all** available information on a subject, and how can this obligation be honored?
- Will the public be allowed to recommend technologies or policies that address their needs and concerns, and will the agency seriously consider them?
- What should audiences know about program decision-making?
- What conflicts may arise with other programs and agencies, and how will they be resolved before communicating with the public?

If the case is simple, the planning process can be completed at the first meeting. If the case is controversial or complex, or if issues raised by the public affect program policies, the group may need to meet again. In most cases, this initial meeting sets the direction of the communication effort and later tasks are conducted by the communication coordinator through contacts with individual group members. A summary of the first meeting's discussion and group decisions should be prepared by the communication coordinator. If managers or other decision-makers are not present at this initial meeting, they should be told what happened.

Following the first meeting, the coordinator should participate in all future activities and discussions related to the case to assure consistency and dialogue, both internally and with the public. The coordinator should consult with group members frequently to get their comments on new information. Suggestions should be sought of other people in the agency who may need to be consulted on the issue. It is critical for the coordinator to cooperate closely with the technical staff to assure that the developing strategy addresses both the technical and social aspects of the case especially as citizen concerns are brought input into the planning process.

STEP TWO: SET GOALS

There are several **standard communication goals** that never vary from plan to plan and guide development of more specific goals. These standard communication goals fall into the universal, process, information and legal categories outlined in Table 3. As you develop the strategy, refer to these goals frequently to assure that the plan is on track to maintaining a dialogue with citizens, explaining the scientific/technical basis for decision-making, and taking into account citizens' needs and concerns.

There are also **case-specific communication goals**. These are to inform or alert people, mediate or negotiate a resolution to a problem, or solicit public comment. A clear case-specific communication goal helps you adapt the plan to the particulars of the case, so you can evaluate whether the plan succeeded. One technique for identifying the case-specific goal is to have each member of the work group list possible goals and narrow the combined list to the most important ones. Keep the other goals in mind during planning, in case opportunities arise to achieve them too.

As you learn more about the issue, the case-specific goal may need to be modified. For example, initially the goal may be to inform citizens about the technical solution to a problem. If, through dialogue, you discover citizens already understand this, but want more information on the health impacts of the problem, the goal should change. Remember, that the goal should fulfill both agency and citizen needs. Refer to the case-specific goal frequently to assure that the communication plan is on target. It is also critical to confirm the case-specific goal periodically with the work group and with affected audiences.

TABLE 3: STANDARD COMMUNICATION GOALS

Universal Goals

- establish and maintain dialogue with affected audiences
- build and maintain agency credibility with affected audiences
- coordinate actions within and between agencies so that governmental response is consistent and effective
- avoid unnecessary conflicts with the public

Process Goals

- involve affected parties as early as possible
- provide opportunities for public input, and involvement in the decision-making process where appropriate
- keep people informed throughout the process
- make promises that can be kept
- build personal relationships as well as bureaucratic ones with citizens

Information Goals

- give citizens the data they need to understand the issue
- say what the agency has done, is doing, and plans to do about the problem, and what it cannot do, and why
- answer audience questions and concerns

Legally Mandated Goals

- provide appropriate advance notice and explain the process for public input and agency response

(Adapted from Chess, Hance and Sandman)¹

SMART Goals

For case specific goals to be meaningful and useful, and ultimately have an impact that can be measured, they must be SMART – that is – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely. They must include a well-defined task that states how it will be achieved and how you will measure impact.

Specific means well-defined and clear to anyone who has knowledge of the project. Measurable means to know if the goal is obtainable and how far away completion is. Achievable means that you will be able to see an end result from your efforts. Realistic means that you can reach your goal based on any constraints that may exist such as your resources, capacity and support. Timely means that you can achieve the goal within the time you allot to complete your effort. The trick to a SMART goal is not to make it too complicated.

The steps to develop a SMART goal include:

- state or define the task(s)
- state how you will achieve it
- determine how you will measure it
- determine when it will be accomplished
- don't make it too complicated

If necessary break down goals into specific objectives with measurable results. Think short-term, mid-term and long-term intervals.

Goal example: I want to lose weight by the end of the year.

Goal made SMART: I will lose ten pounds by December 31 by cutting 200 calories per day and exercising vigorously four times per week.

REVIEW:

HOW WILL YOU EVALUATE WHETHER THE GOAL MET AGENCY AND CITIZEN NEEDS?

Once the goal has been identified, it is important to think about how you will evaluate whether the communication strategy achieved the goal. Therefore, in addition to identifying what you want to accomplish, identify how you will measure the success of the strategy in attaining the goal. Evaluation of the strategy selected to achieve the goal occurs throughout the planning process.

STEP THREE:

PROFILE ISSUE, AUDIENCE AND CONSTRAINTS

Profile Issue

The more familiar you are with the context of an issue, the more effectively you will be able to communicate. This context is provided by an issue profile, which establishes a case record, and identifies key audiences and constraints you may face in communicating effectively. It is important to recognize that the way the agency and citizens perceive a problem and its resolution may be different. All perspectives on the problem should be reflected in the profile.

A profile includes:

- what has happened so far, including both agency and others' actions;
 - all technical and scientific information the NJDEP has available on the issue;
 - what the department needs to find out;
 - what is unknown/uncertain about the issue that will affect communications;
 - how to obtain further information;
 - what information needs to be communicated;
 - what input from audiences is needed to achieve goals;
 - what scientific and health data will audiences need to properly respond to the situation;
 - what audience response is likely to be;
 - what audience concerns are known at the time of the first meeting and amend if necessary later when an audience assessment is conducted;
 - what is the proximity of audiences to the problem location; and
 - what is known about the community, if the communication is limited to one area.
- (Table 4 suggests the types of questions to consider in developing a community profile.)

The profile is critical to assuring the case-specific goal is appropriate. Each time new information is learned, return to the case-specific goal to see if it or the plan needs to be modified.

TABLE 4: COMMUNITY PROFILE QUESTIONS

- How big is the community?
- What is its economic base?
- What are its social networks?
- What is its political structure?
- What is its ethnic composition?
- Who are its key leaders?
- Who are the affected audiences?
- What are the priorities of key leaders?
- What are the concerns of residents?
- What groups or individuals are already involved?
- Who are their leaders?
- What other projects is DEP working on in the area?
- What environmental problems exist or occurred previously?
- How did the agency respond to these other problems?
- What was audience perception of how the agency responded?

Profile information at the first meeting may be limited to what is known by the person who called the meeting. If there is time prior to the meeting, enhance the discussion by gathering initial information about the problem, the area and the people with whom you will be communicating.

Identify Audiences

Key audiences are those people with whom you need to establish a dialogue and those who wish to talk with the department. They include those who are or must be made aware of the issue, those affected by the problem, those affected by the solution, and the media.

Communication efforts are often directed to the “general public,” but it is usually best to separate the public into audiences with discrete interests. This approach ensures that no affected audience is missed and that each receives the appropriate message. For example, communication about a fish advisory would target consumers, commercial and recreational fisherman, the media, health officers, and the general public. Identifying separate audiences also helps improve the validity of an evaluation of the communication’s success. Table 5 suggests ways to determine audiences. Table 6 illustrates the broad range of potential audiences that you may want to assess in developing your strategy.

TABLE 5: QUESTIONS TO IDENTIFY AUDIENCES

- Who is likely to be affected directly by agency action?
- Who was previously involved in this issue?
- Who might have important ideas, information or opinions?
- Has the agency heard the full range of opinions on the issue?
- Who wants to know what the agency is doing without commenting on agency proposals or actions?
- Who are important community leaders?
- Who is likely to be angry if not consulted or alerted to the issue?

(Adapted from Chess, Hance and Sandman)

TABLE 6: AUDIENCE TYPES

GOVERNMENT

- Your division
- Other divisions of your agency
- Other federal or state agencies
- County agencies
- Municipal agencies
- Federal, state, or local elected officials
- Sewerage authorities
- Regional planning commissions
- Emergency responders
- NJDEP advisory committees

ENVIRONMENTALISTS

- National groups
- Statewide groups
- County groups
- Municipal groups
- Groups for specific issues (e.g., Superfund, siting, hiking, fishing, watersheds, natural resources)
- Groups with specific functions (e.g., legal, research, lobbying, organizing)

EDUCATION

- Colleges
- Agricultural extension
- Public and private schools

GEOGRAPHICAL NEIGHBORS

- Local residents
- Local businesses
- Neighboring townships

CIVIC

- League of Women Voters
- Associations and clubs (e.g., Kiwanis, Elks)
- Environmental commissions
- Senior citizen groups
- Ethnic groups

PROFESSIONAL AND TRADE

- Health: health officers; doctors; and nurses
- Technical: laboratories; sanitarians; engineers; biologists; and chemists
- Business: realtors; planners; water purveyors; chamber of commerce; and industry and small business
- Agriculture

RELIGIOUS

MEDIA

- Press
- Radio
- TV/Cable

(Adapted from Chess, Hance and Sandman.)

Identify Constraints

Constraints are not reasons to abandon communication plan. They are opportunities to develop a strategy addressing agency and citizen needs within the limits of the constraints that can't be eliminated. The profile step helps the work group identify constraints and discuss possible solutions that still achieve the communication goal. Constraints can be internal or external. Internal constraints may include lack of internal consensus, legal mandates, limited time money, or staff, or a lack of data or solid conclusions to share with the public. External constraints include lack of knowledge of the issue by citizens, language barriers, education level, or limits on how receptive audiences will or can be to your messages. Each of these can and should be addressed as you plan your strategy.

The person usually responsible for identifying constraints and proposing solutions is the communication coordinator. The main objective of raising constraints and proposing solutions up front is to gain the support of management for the communication plan. Stress that constraints can be changed, avoided or reduced. Don't let constraints control your strategy. It is critical to explain:

- how the communication strategy reflects program goals;
- why delays in plan approval may hinder communications and issue resolution;
- why the agency should build dialogues with audiences;
- why it is important that statements and actions are consistent with the plan;
- why resources are needed to carry out the plan; and
- why communication is vital to management and program responsibilities.

REVIEW: IS THE PROFILE COMPLETE?

Each time the communication strategy is discussed with the work group, or new scientific or technical data are collected, communication goals should be reviewed to determine if the strategy should be modified. This review step assures that the goal and the developing strategy address both citizen and agency needs identified in the profile. Questions that should be asked at this stage are:

- ❶ Is the goal still appropriate for this case?
- ❷ Is there consensus from the group that this goal meets agency needs?
- ❸ Has the group identified everyone in the agency who should be involved in the case?
- ❹ Has all available and pertinent scientific and demographic information been compiled?
- ❺ Are there other audiences who need to be identified and contacted for this case?
- ❻ Are we considering the standard communication goals (see Table 3) as we develop the strategy?

If the communication coordinator believes there is no consensus on the goal, the group must review the issue and agree on a goal. If profile information indicates the goal should be modified so that the communication strategy responds to citizen and agency concerns, the group should review the issue and modify the goal. The group should take into account how the strategy will be evaluated to determine if the goal is met.

STEP FOUR: ASSESS AUDIENCES

Audience assessments determine how citizens perceive an issue, what information they want, what information the agency needs to provide, and what local communication systems can be used for a continuing dialogue.

Audience assessment usually occurs as soon after the first meeting, unless an initial assessment can be done beforehand. Either way, the communication coordinator should continue contacting audiences as the communication strategy is planned. Audience assessment is important to help the department integrate audience concerns into the planning process. Table 7 shows several standard means to identify public perceptions.

The complexity of an audience assessment is determined by the nature of the case. At minimum, call five key audience members who represent different perspectives to get a cross-section of opinion and information about the issue. For all communication cases in a community, calls should include the mayor and/or the town administrator, and the local health officer. Other calls might include a local environmental group, a local business organization, or a local minister or school principal. If a more extensive audience assessment is called for, hold informal meetings with citizen groups or public information sessions. Direct contacts are usually more effective in helping you learn about the people in your audiences, how they perceive the issue, how much information they have about it, how they feel about the department, and how they would like to be involved in resolving the problem. Citizens may also provide site-specific information (e.g., on chronically flooded areas or children's play locations, activities, or behavior) that will improve design and technical solutions, risk assessments and environmental management decisions.

To assist your efforts in gathering information from audiences, prepare questions in advance. Table 8 suggests questions that are helpful in audience assessment. Some of these can be developed at the first work group meeting; others may occur to the communication coordinator, group members and managers as their understanding of the issue increases. Contact may need to occur more than once to adequately reflect audience concerns in the plan. It is also important to give your name, telephone number and address to contacts, so they can reach you with questions and comments.

TABLE 7: WAYS TO IDENTIFY AUDIENCE CONCERNS

Do Always

- Review newspaper clippings.
- Discuss expected audience concerns (which may or may not be actual concerns) with management team.
- Make a few targeted or random phone calls.

Do At Least One

- Meet informally with affected citizens and citizen groups.
- Survey citizens for their questions and concerns.
- At meetings, ask citizens to write questions on index cards you distribute.

(Adapted from Chess, Hance and Sandman)

Once audiences start answering your questions, they may have a few of their own, as shown in Table 9. However, for various reasons they may be shy about asking them, so you may want to raise three questions to ensure a complete issue profile.

TABLE 9: QUESTIONS TO ASK AUDIENCES

- What type of interaction would you like with the agency?
- How do you feel about interactions so far?
- What answers do you want?
- What technical information do you need?
- Do you have comments for the record?
- How can the agency respond better to your concerns?
- How do you get your information?
- What kind of risks do you think you are exposed to?
- What health and lifestyle concerns do you have?
- What questions about the data do you have?
- What information on agency procedures do you need?
- What information about risk management do you need?

(Adapted from Chess, Hance and Sandman.)

TABLE 10: QUESTIONS AUDIENCES MAY ASK YOU

Health and Lifestyle Concerns

- What is the danger to my health and that of my family?
- Can I drink my water, eat vegetables from my garden, etc.?
- What can I do to find out if my health has been affected?
- What can I do to reduce the impact of past exposure?
- What can I do to prevent further exposure?
- What effects could there be on my children?
- We are already at risk because of X. Will Y increase our risk?
- How will we be protected in an accident?
- How will this affect our quality of life, property values, etc.?
- How will we be compensated for the loss of value of our homes?

Data Concerns

- How sure are you of the risk?
- What is the worst case scenario?
- What do the risk assessment numbers mean and how did you get them?
- What documentation or support for your conclusions do you have?
- What other opinions on this issue exist?

(Adapted from Chess, Hance, and Sandman.)

Process Concerns

- How will we be involved in decision-making?
- How will you communicate with us?
- Why should we trust you?
- How and when can we reach you?
- Who else is involved in this situation?
- When will we hear from you?
- When and how can we get more information?

Risk Management

- When will the problem be corrected?
- Why did you let this happen and what will you do about it?
- Why do you favor the selected method?
- What are other options for correcting the problem?
- Why are you moving so slowly to correct the problem?
- What other agencies are involved and what are their roles?
- What kind of oversight will we have?

When possible include a press officer on the work group, particularly if the issue may generate media coverage. It is NJDEP policy to coordinate contact with the media through the press office. The press office may allow you and the work group to talk directly with reporters, or they may take the lead and use the group as consultants. In either case, the communication coordinator is responsible for making sure that information shared with the media is consistent with the technical and scientific information shared with citizens.

Having one person coordinate contact with the media and citizens assures consistency in agency communications, thus increasing agency credibility and public trust. However, if other members of the work group can better explain departmental policy or scientific information, the communication coordinator should arrange the statements of those agency people who will be directly communicating with the media and citizens.

REVIEW: HAVE AUDIENCE ISSUES BEEN ADDRESSED?

Once audiences have been identified and assessed, review your communication goals. Is the information gathered from the audience assessment consistent with what the group believed were the citizens' needs and concerns? Determine if the audience assessment indicates that the strategy needs to be modified. Questions that should be asked by the communication coordinator at this stage are:

- ❶ Is the goal still appropriate for this case?
- ❷ Is there consensus from the group that the goal meets audience needs?
- ❸ Has the group spoken to representatives of the identified audiences affected by the issue?
- ❹ Based on the audience assessment, what scientific information should be shared with affected audience response?
- ❺ Are there other audiences that need to be identified and contacted for this case?
- ❻ How will we use the information we learned to help shape the communication plan?
- ❼ Are we considering the standard communication goals (see Table 3) as we develop a strategy?
- ❽ Is there additional information the agency needs to share with audiences in order to further develop the strategy and respond to their concerns?
- ❾ Have we learned the networks through which audiences communicate with each other, so that we can reach audiences affected by the case?
- ❿ Have policy questions been raised by audiences that the agency needs to consider and respond to in order to develop the communication strategy?

If this review shows that goals need modification or more information on audience perceptions or concerns is needed, the communication coordinator should address these issues with the program manager and the work group. Major changes in strategy may require a group meeting; minor changes can usually be addressed by a memo. If goals are not being met, identify constraints and minimize them. Discuss strategy changes with audience contacts to assure that they accurately reflect their needs and concerns.²

STEP FIVE: IDENTIFY MESSAGES AND METHODS

The next step is to decide what you need to communicate. A message is information you want to share with audiences, a question that you need them to answer, or both. It should be consistent in all communications. To assure this, messages must be confirmed with members of the work group. Consistent messages build confidence in agency information and improve the chance that they are received and understood.

To develop messages, use your goal as a guide, and list key points about the issue you want people to know. These include scientific facts, departmental policy, and public participation opportunities. Merge this list with the answers to audience questions from the assessment. Consider not only information the agency wants to share with citizens, but information citizens need to interact effectively with the department and take appropriate action. Use your updated issue profile, including constraints, to form messages from this combined list. Before messages are released, consult the work group and key audience contacts to make sure the message is understandable and answers audience questions. Listed in Table 10 are questions to help you prepare responsive messages.

In most cases, only one message will be needed. However, sometimes you need to address questions and concerns of specific audiences. This may mean preparing different messages or including responses to specific questions in your general message.

TABLE 10: MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS

- What information must be conveyed?
- Does the message convey agency views?
- Does the message answer stakeholders questions?
- Does the message reflect the audience assessment?
- Are technical terms explained?
- Can graphics help explain points?
- Are graphics clear and simple or do they need explanation?
- Was the message pre-tested with members of the intended audience?
- Are you prepared for questions that may arise? If not, have you identified appropriate experts to assist you?

(Adapted from Chess, Hance, and Sandman.)

Message Mapping

A helpful tool in developing messages is Message Mapping. Message mapping is a process of developing your information so that it is direct and to the point. That it includes information that is critical to convey. That is simple yet comprehensive enough and includes the most pertinent information relevant to your issue.

A mapped message starts with a question, responds with three key ideas, is no more than twenty-seven words and takes no longer than nine seconds to deliver. Why 27-9-3? Twenty-seven words is the average length of a sound bite in the print media. Nine seconds is the average duration of a sound bite in the broadcast media and three messages is the average number of messages reported in both print and broadcast media within that sound bite or opening paragraph of a new story.

Once the opening message is developed, the three key concepts presented should be further developed to support the statement.

TABLE 11: FACTS ABOUT MESSAGING

- When people are stressed, they often have difficulty hearing, understanding and remembering information.
- When people are stressed, they often lose as much as 80% of the information that is communicated to them.
- When people are stressed, they are often distrustful of others.

(Covello, Vincent T., Message Mapping Workshop, March 2005.)

Mapped Message Example:

Stakeholder: Urban Anglers

Spokesperson: DEP Fish Advisory Expert

Question: Are blue claw crabs from Newark Bay safe to eat?

Key Message 1: Blue claw crabs from the Newark Bay are contaminated with dioxin and shouldn't be eaten. Eating blue claw crabs from these water may cause cancer. Dioxin can also harm brain and nervous system development in unborn and young children. There is no safe way to prepare and cook crabs from the Newark Bay Complex.

METHOD DEVELOPMENT

Develop messages in concert with the method you and audience contacts choose to deliver the information. More than one method may be useful in delivering messages. The audience assessment of how citizens communicate can help you decide suitable methods to send your message. The best method also depends on what information you need to share, the information needs of the audience, and how fast the message needs to get out. For example, if the target audience is a neighborhood association with a newsletter or regular meetings, and article in their newsletter or a presentation at their meeting might work. If these forums are not available, you may need to set up a special meeting through association leaders, go door-to-door, or mail notification.

Table 12 gives an overview of methods that can be used in various combinations to successfully reach your goals. Whatever methods are used, confer with the work group and your audience contacts to assure that the chosen methods are appropriate.

TABLE 12: METHODS FOR COMMUNICATION

Written or Audio Visual Materials

- Pamphlets
- Letters
- Postcards
- Newsletters
- Periodic updates
- Displays
- Fact sheets
- Flyers
- Door-hangers
- Educational materials
- Question and answer sheets
- Placards in mass transit
- Videos
- Slide shows
- Audio tapes
- Articles in organizations' newsletters
- Inserts in mass mailings
- Polls

Person to Person

- Presentations at meetings
- Drop-in or availability sessions
- Public hearings/meetings

(Adapted from Chess, Hance, and Sandman.)

- Informal meetings
- "Open" work meetings
- Workshops
- Advisory committees
- Special events
- Conferences
- Courses
- Door to door
- Brainstorming
- Suggestion boxes
- Telephone/conference calls

Mass Media

- News conferences
- News releases
- Letters to the editor
- Talk shows
- Call-in shows
- Feature articles
- Press briefings
- Public service announcements
- Display advertisements in newspapers
- Legal notices

REVIEW:

DO THE AUDIENCES AGREE WITH THE STRATEGY?

After you develop messages and select methods, the review step addresses two critical issues. The work group and the external audiences need to confirm that the planned strategy is appropriate, and an evaluation method for the overall strategy must be developed to determine whether or not the audiences received and understood the information you plan to share. Questions that should be asked by the communication coordinator at this stage are:

- ❶ Is the goal still appropriate for this case?
- ❷ Is there consensus among all parties that the goal meets agency and citizen needs?
- ❸ Do messages reflect the communication goal?
- ❹ Are we considering the standard communication goals as we develop messages and select methods? (see Table 3)
- ❺ Have we tested the messages on audience contacts for understanding?
- ❻ Have we contacted audience representatives to determine that the best method has been selected to deliver these messages?

If there is disagreement that messages reflect the communication goal and the concerns of citizens, modify them accordingly. Use the methods suggested by your audience contacts or learned in the audience assessment to deliver messages. Once the group and audience contacts are satisfied, you are ready to implement the communication strategy.³

STEP SIX: IMPLEMENT STRATEGY

Putting a communication strategy into play takes some preparation. If you decide that a public meeting is the best way to share the message, you need to decide:

- the time and place of the meeting
- who will make presentations
- how you will invite the public
- what graphs, charts and fact sheets are needed
- how you will evaluate the effort
- when the pre-meeting to review and practice for the meeting will take place
- who is responsible for what task

A timeline makes implementation much easier. It illustrates:

- needed tasks
- how long they take to complete
- who should do each task
- what the constraints are and how to overcome them
- how you will evaluate the strategy's outcome

Because evaluation was considered during message and method development, the evaluation method simply needs to be confirmed. Once the communication plan is approved by the work group and your supervisor, you are ready to implement it. The worksheet at the end of this workbook will help you develop the timeline.

STEP SEVEN: EVALUATE, DEBRIEF AND FOLLOW-UP

Evaluation takes place in many ways throughout a communication plan: confirming messages and methods with internal and external audiences are two examples. Outcome evaluation done at the close of the plan answers the following questions:

- Did the strategy used meet the goals?
- Were the needs and concerns of citizens met?
- Was the intended message received and understood?
- Was the method used appropriate for this case and audience?
- Are there questions which require a follow-up?
- Was the method cost-effective?
- Were there unintended effects, good or bad, in addition to intended effects?

If the goal was to change audience behavior, or increase knowledge of an issue, you need to know audience behavior and knowledge before, as well as after plan implementation. A well-designed survey is one way to measure such changes; checks of media coverage or talks with audience contacts are less rigorous but still useful methods. These methods should include questions broad enough to identify unintended effects, good or bad, of your strategy and messages.

Internally, a work group debriefing determines the success of the communication effort. This meeting identifies areas where the strategy was successful or not, and why. It is an opportunity to review the activities of the group and decide if follow-up with audiences is needed to assure that the goal is achieved. When evaluation indicates that citizens still have questions or concerns, follow-up is needed. The role of the communication coordinator is to see that follow-up is needed. The role of the communication coordinator is to see that follow-up occurs, to maintain the credibility and trust established with audiences during the planning process.

Many times follow-up requires repeating the planning process to clarify the issue for audiences, or address policy changes that may need to be made as a result of new insights or information, but it does not have to be as detailed as preparing the initial strategy because audience contact and assessment has already been made. Follow-up could take the form of a revised fact sheet; a phone call or letter to citizens to respond to additional questions; or a briefing of the press. Whatever form follow-up takes, if evaluation indicates that it is necessary, do it. A communication strategy is not complete as long as the public still has questions and concerns.

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

FOOTNOTES

¹Contributions to this table (and others noted throughout the guide) were derived from “Planning Dialogue with Communities: A Risk Communication Workbook” by Caron Chess, Billie Jo Hance, and Peter Sandman, Environmental Communication Research Program, Cook College, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08903.

²A helpful tool in evaluating preliminary feedback is [Evaluating Risk Communication Efforts: A Catalog of Quick and Easy Feedback Methods](#). This report, produced by the ECRP at Rutgers University is available from the RCU.

³ [Evaluating Risk Communication Efforts: A Catalogue of Quick and Easy Feedback Methods](#) offers some techniques that help in answering these questions, such as readability tests for written documents and citizen focus groups to help you understand how the public will react to agency proposals.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Effective Risk and Crisis Communication during Water Security Emergencies](#), Summary Report of EPA sponsored Message Mapping Workshops, Vincent Covello, Center for Risk Communication, NY 2007

www.projectsmart.co.uk/smart-goals-objectives.php

APPENDIX:
COMMUNICATION PLANNING SHEETS

KEY AUDIENCES:

- ① _____
- ② _____
- ③ _____
- ④ _____

CONSTRAINTS: _____

REVIEW: Is the profile complete? (if not, revise and expand, p. 9)

④ AUDIENCE ASSESSMENT PLAN: (p. 10) _____

ASSESSMENT RESULTS:

AUDIENCE #①: _____

AUDIENCE #②: _____

AUDIENCE #③: _____

AUDIENCE #④: _____

REVIEW: Does the strategy address issues for both internal and external audiences?

(if not, revise accordingly, p. 12)

5 IDENTIFY MESSAGES AND METHODS: (p. 13)

KEY AUDIENCES:

① _____

② _____

③ _____

④ _____

METHODS (list all possible methods; select method for each audience)

TARGET MESSAGES AND METHOD TO AUDIENCES

Audience #①: _____

Messages: _____

Method: _____

Audience #②: _____

Messages: _____

Method: _____

Audience #③: _____

Messages: _____

Method: _____

7 EVALUATE AND DEBRIEF: How well did the strategy for each audience succeed? (p. 17)

Audience #**1**: _____

Audience #**2**: _____

Audience #**3**: _____

Audience #**4**: _____

FOLLOW-UP, if needed: (identify loose ends, possible policy changes or evidence of success)

