



Communication Strategies

Description

Communication strategies are plans for communicating information related to a specific issue, event, situation, or audience. They serve as the blueprints for communicating with the public, stakeholders, or even colleagues.

Communication strategies should:

- outline the objective/goals of the communication,
- identify stakeholders,
- define key messages,
- pinpoint potential communication methods and vehicles for communicating information for a specific purpose, and
- specify the mechanisms that will be used to obtain feedback on the strategy.

Communication strategies do not have to be formal written documents. They can simply involve taking the time to think about a communication problem or issue and determining the best approach for communicating the message or information. Such an approach is especially true for simple issues that need to be conveyed about low-risk sites that have not generated a high level of public concern. However, at sites with high levels of public concern or site cleanup issues that are expected to be controversial, a more formal written strategy may be needed to ensure that all stakeholders are reached and all key messages are communicated effectively.

Communication strategies are different from Community Involvement Plans (CIPs), which are required under the National Contingency Plan. A CIP is a site-specific overall plan to enable meaningful community involvement throughout the Superfund cleanup process. A communication strategy can be one component of a CIP, but it addresses a specific event, issue, or concern, such as an emergency response to a release, or communicating risk at a site. The CIP, on the other hand, describes an overall strategy for conveying and receiving information throughout the cleanup process at a site.

Required Activity

No.

Making it Work

When significant events or issues arise, a communication strategy can help organize the information that needs to be communicated, identify concerns that may be raised, and ensure the proper audiences are reached.

Why

The first step toward developing a communication strategy is to determine the reason why the communication is necessary and defining the desired objectives. You, as the Community Involvement Coordinator (CIC), should ask yourself, “What is the issue to which EPA is responding?” or “What is the action that EPA is taking that warrants development of a communication strategy?” before determining the need for the communication. CICs should then ask themselves, “What do we want to accomplish by communicating this information?” Objectives may include:

- providing information;
- increasing awareness;
- encouraging action;
- building consensus;
- changing behavior;
- promoting community participation;
- resolving conflict, or
- asking for input.

Who

Once your reason for communicating is determined, you can focus on defining the audiences you need to reach and how you want to reach them. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Who is involved, affected, interested?
- Is there an obvious audience?
- Are there others who may be affected?
- Are there traditionally underrepresented groups that need to be reached?



- What information does each stakeholder already have?
- What information does each stakeholder need?
- What are their concerns?
- How is each stakeholder likely to react?"

Keep in mind that the demographics, knowledge, and concerns of your audiences play an important role in determining the key messages.

What

Once the previous steps are complete, you may schedule a meeting with the site RPM or OSC and other members of the site team to discuss the communication challenges facing them. This discussion could involve coordinating with all Site Team members about community involvement goals and objectives and might involve brainstorming and prioritizing potential messages. Focus on two or three key messages and rank them by importance, timeliness, or other factors. It is possible that you have key messages that are only constructed for one or two of your identified audiences.

How

Once you have identified your key messages, you need to determine the vehicle for delivering your messages. Keep in mind that you may choose different mechanisms to meet different stakeholder needs. Here are a few options:

- Availability session/open house
- Celebrations/special events
- Electronic media, including email, e.g., list serves or website
- Face-to-face meetings with key stakeholders
- Focus groups
- Media, including cable TV, display ads, news releases, and press conference
- On-scene activities
- Public hearings
- Public meetings
- Public or private schools
- Social media tools, e.g., YouTube, Facebook, Twitter
- Workshops

As a CIC, you should be able to determine how you want to deliver your message to produce the best results. Note that the reach and impact of your

message will increase if the same message is distributed several times and via multiple methods. Keep in mind you may have different communication goals and therefore may need to use different communication tools for different groups of people. Delivery methods can include:

- Briefings
- Exhibits
- Fact Sheets
- Internet
- Mailings
- Presentations
- Public notices
- Responsiveness summaries
- Telephone
- Translation of documents into other languages spoken by community members
- Videos

Example 1: Opportunity for Public Review and Comment of Proposed Plan

One CIC faced the challenge of informing stakeholders about an opportunity to review and comment on the proposed cleanup plan. After identifying the message and the audience, the CIC decided to hold a public meeting to announce the opportunity and to invite interested parties to a public participation workshop. By holding the public meeting at a library on a Saturday afternoon, he captured a wider audience than if he had held it during a weeknight. He then identified participants to attend a workshop for the following Saturday. The workshop included information about: 1) requirements for public review of and comment on site activities; 2) documents supporting the proposed plan, and how the proposed plan is organized; and 3) how citizens can maximize their contributions. A workshop handout offered step-by-step instructions for reviewing the site information (including what to look for) and for filing comments. The result: more than half of the workshop attendees submitted comments on the proposed cleanup plan.



Delivering Your Message

In assessing your total communication strategy, ask yourself, “What resources are readily available to me to communicate my message?” Once you have identified your needs and resources, review potential constraints you might face and develop strategies for overcoming these challenges. Determine when the communication will be best received. Determining the best timing involves thinking about whether your audiences prefer to be reached on weekdays or weekends, mornings or evenings, at work, or at home. Keep in mind that community demographics play an important role in determining the best methods for message delivery. Older populations or communities in remote locations may not be comfortable with or have access to the Internet, and some ethnic groups may prefer radio or a community newspaper to television as a news source. Build in time for producing materials and advance notice of events.

Media

The media can play an important role in the communication process. Therefore, if your communication strategy includes use of the media to convey your message, you should work closely with your regional site press officer to ensure that the local media has the most important and accurate information about the issue or event that you want to communicate to your audience. Know the media deadlines in advance and take these into consideration when timing your communication.

Budget Considerations

Many of the best communication strategies also are the most cost-effective, but sometimes a communication strategy will require communication methods that take considerable resources. Therefore, it is important for CICs to know the resources that are available to them and to take possible resource limitations into consideration when developing the communication strategy. While simple word-of-mouth information exchanges can be free and effective for communicating some messages, you may determine that your message will be more effectively delivered via a vehicle that will require resources. For example, while holding a televised press event or a press conference may be much more resource-intensive, it may end up being the

Example 2: Deletion of the site from the NPL

At a Superfund site where the cleanup was completed, enabling site deletion from the NPL, the CIC crafted one final communication strategy. First, she recognized that her challenge was to reach a broad audience. The CIC also realized that communicating a deletion from the NPL should include both State and regional officials who could give the cleanup success the attention it deserved by holding news conferences or communicating with their elected representatives. The successful site cleanup was primarily due to community partnerships and an important technological advancement developed at the site that cut cleanup time by 50%—these became the focus of her message. Once she had considered her audience and framed the message, she reviewed the many delivery vehicles available to her. She decided that delivering the message via network/cable television or a front-page newspaper article would garner the high visibility communication that the story warranted. By pushing the technological angle, her messages got front-page coverage in the major city newspaper, and were picked up by the local television station.

more effective strategy if television coverage is the preferred medium for conveying your message. Similarly, you may determine that you cannot rely on e-mail to notify stakeholders of an upcoming event, and will have to mail notices.

Feedback

When delivering your key messages, ensure your messages are clearly communicated and have integrity. Encourage your audience to provide feedback after the message is delivered. This feedback will help you to evaluate the implementation of your strategy, its strengths and weaknesses, how it can be improved, and how your strategy should be revised to ensure continued effectiveness. Some simple feedback methods include taking note of how many people attended a public meeting; television station viewership numbers during the time your story



ran; or how many “hits” there were on your website news posting. Finally, review the feedback and continue to refine your communication strategy in response to the feedback you receive. Consider following up, in a one-to-one fashion, with a few members of the audience for their feedback.

Remember, you will develop several communication strategies during the Superfund cleanup process. You may be able to develop some communication strategies in advance for milestones and events that are known in advance, such as announcing the public comment period for the ROD or a construction completion. In other cases, you may develop a more involved communication strategy, such as for communicating risk, or you may develop a communication strategy for unforeseen events, such as an unexpected release at the site. In any case, the basic approach is similar: outlining the issue and associated key messages, defining the key stakeholders, pinpointing potential communications vehicles or methods, considering the resources available, and specifying feedback mechanisms that allow you to monitor responses to the messages. Refine your strategy, if appropriate, and evaluate the effort. Keep in mind that the Site Team should form a strong collaborative relationship with people both inside and outside the Agency to help the community identify contacts who may be able to address community concerns outside the scope of the Superfund program.

Tips

- Your communication strategy should define the most important ideas to communicate.
- Consult with the site’s Community Involvement Plan (CIP) to help characterize the community, including their needs, concerns, interests, and expectations.
- Work with your press office to develop and implement the communication strategy, particularly at milestone events in the Superfund process.
- Document successes and shortcomings to learn how your strategy might be improved.
- Revise your communication strategy if it is not producing results.
- Consult your communication strategy often to remind yourself of your goals, messages, and audiences
- Consider adding formal communication strategies as addendums to the site’s CIP.

Attachments

■ Attachment 1–Sample Communication Strategies Worksheet

You may find it helpful to refer to this sample worksheet when drafting your communication strategy. We have used the information given in *Example 1: Opportunity for Public Review and Comment of Proposed Plan* (on page 2) to fill in the sample worksheet.

■ Attachment 2–Blank Communication Strategies Worksheet

Other Resources

- Communicating Understanding of Contaminated Land Risks–Final Report, May 2010, Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Sniffer Project UKLQ13, <http://www.sniffer.org.uk/home/Default.aspx>

This report is guidance for local authorities in the UK in the development of site-specific risk communication strategies in accordance with UK environmental regulations. Topics explored include timing of messages, media interaction, perceptions of risk and contamination, simplifying science for citizens, and identifying stakeholders. Provided in the report are specific recommendations for developing effective communication strategies and practical guidance on communicating about land contamination.

- Sniffer Risk Communication Booklet: Communicating understanding of contaminated land risks, 2010.

This practical handbook was written for use by Scottish and Northern Irish local authority officers, environment agencies, consultants, communication and health professionals, developers, landowners, and other stakeholders. It was designed to be a convenient and easy-to-use reference that complements the Communicating Understanding of Contaminated Land Risks revised guidance (see SNIFFER, May 2010), providing a comprehensive distillation of the ideas and tips contained within the guidance in a format that is more conducive to quick referencing.



Related Tools

- Community Involvement Plans
- Exhibits
- Fact Sheets
- Focus Groups
- Informal Activities
- Mailing List
- Media
- On-Site Activities
- Presentations
- Public Meetings
- Public Availabilities/Poster Sessions
- Public Notices
- Responsiveness Summaries
- Special Events
- Translation Services
- Videos
- Workshops





Attachment 1: Sample Communication Strategies Worksheet

Section 1: Issue/Problem and Key messages

A. Description of the issue/problem:

Release of the Proposed Plan at Site A for public comment

B. The key messages to be communicated for this issue/problem:

- Message 1: The Proposed Plan for Site A has been released for public comment
- Message 2: We will be holding a public meeting to answer questions about the proposed plan and comment process
- Message 3: At the public meeting you may sign up for a day-long workshop to guide you through the public comment process

Section 2: Planning the Strategy: Audience and Communication Vehicle

Audience	Communication Vehicles
Key local and regional stakeholders	Public Notice; Select Media Vehicles
Community Advisory Group/Technical Advisory Group	Public Meeting; Workshop
Local community	Public Meeting; Workshop; Public Notice; Select Media Vehicles
State/local government	Public Notice; Select Media Vehicle

Section 3: Implementation

Vehicle	Required Resources/Time
Workshop	Rent meeting room, prepare presentation materials, purchase and ship meeting supplies, and prepare briefing materials
Public Notice	Draft notice and contact local newspapers
Public Meeting	Secure meeting room, prepare meeting announcement and agenda, rent audiovisual equipment, prepare name badges, purchase and ship meeting supplies, and prepare meeting evaluation
Select Media Vehicles	Determine which media vehicles (television, radio, Internet and/or print) you plan to use, make telephone calls to establish relationships with the media outlets, write and distribute the news release or public service announcement, and prepare handouts for the media.



Attachment 2: Blank Communication Strategies Worksheet

Section 1: Issue/Problem and Key messages

A. Description of the issue/problem:

B. The key messages to be communicated for this issue/problem:

Message 1:

Message 2:

Message 3:

Section 2: Planning the Strategy: Audience and Communication Vehicle

Audience	Communication Vehicles

Section 3: Implementation

Vehicle	Required Resources/Time

