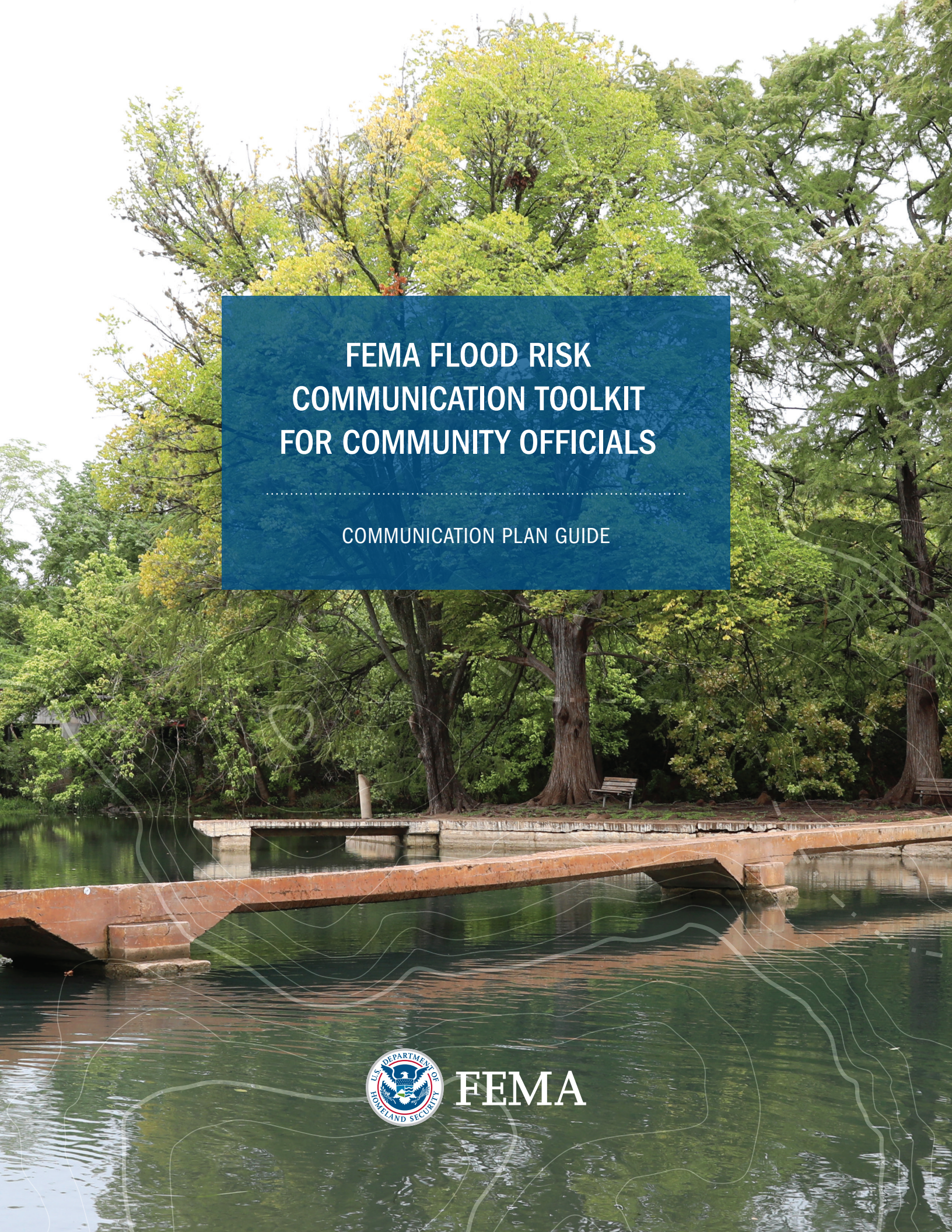


FEMA FLOOD RISK COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT FOR COMMUNITY OFFICIALS

COMMUNICATION PLAN GUIDE

FEMA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FLOOD RISK COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT 3

What is a Communication Plan 4

STEPS TO DEVELOP A COMMUNICATION PLAN 5

Step 1: What's your goal? 5

Step 2: What's your objective? 6

Step 3: Who is your prioritized audience? 7

Step 4: What do your audiences care about? 9

Step 5: What strategies can help you reach these audiences with the right message? 13

Step 6: What are you actually going to do? 15

Step 7: What's working? 17

FLOOD RISK COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT

As a community official, you have an opportunity to share information about risks from natural hazards with a variety of audiences. You are also likely to discuss the steps people can take to minimize the impact of these hazards. Each community is unique, and a communication plan needs to address the interests and needs specific to its community. Proven planning steps will help set a strong foundation for this type of communication. This *Communication Plan Guide* shares common practices and considerations to help you and your colleagues plan for community outreach and engagement during the flood map update process and beyond.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Risk Mapping, Assessment, and Planning (Risk MAP) program provides flood maps and informational tools to help communities assess and address their flood risk. The C*ommunication Plan Guide* is one component of the Flood Risk Communication Toolkit for Community Officials. The Toolkit can help community officials communicate with the public about flood risk during the flood mapping process, but it is also useful at other times, including seasonal or annual events such as hurricane season or flood awareness week. This Guide can help you create a plan to communicate with critical audiences, raise awareness of flood risk during the flood mapping process, and motivate flood risk reduction efforts.

To see the full Flood Risk Communication Toolkit for Community Officials, visit:

FEMA.gov

What is a communication plan?

A communication plan is a methodical approach to communicating — think of it as a blueprint. It clearly outlines the project's objectives, audiences, messages, activities, and other elements. The plan guides all communication toward clear, consistent, and measurable audience engagement. Communication plans are helpful when stakeholders, including the public, need to understand, believe, and care about issues affecting them, and be motivated to act. For example, you might choose to develop a communication plan when your flood maps are being updated or when you are updating the local Hazard Mitigation Plan. **Other opportunities include the following:**

- Your community is beginning to explore the Risk MAP process
- An updated Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) shows that the flood risk has changed in your community
- You're beginning a new community-involved partnership, such as the Lackawanna County Flood Risk Coalition (see: https://www.lackawannacounty.org/index.php/lackawanna-county-flood-risk-coalition)
- The community is adopting higher building standards
- Your community is considering where to invest in becoming safer and stronger
- Your community is updating a local or regional plan or process relevant to flood and other hazard risk, such as a comprehensive plan, a land use plan, a regional economic development plan, or a long-range transportation plan

Effectively sharing information over the right channels and in a way that invites people to take action is important. Community support for risk reduction activities often boils down to whether the community was included in the planning process. A strong, deliberate communication plan can make all the difference.

Use this Guide to drive awareness and encourage involvement in reducing the risk of all hazards, not just flooding.

Developing a communication plan to share information about natural hazards is a strategic step you can take to protect the people in your community and the things they value the most.

Whether you plan to communicate about updated flood maps, hurricane season, or raise awareness about seasonal flooding, this Guide lays out seven steps to walk you through the process.

Refer to the most current Community Rating System (CRS) Manual and follow the seven required steps to develop a Program for Public Information (PPI) to maximize credits available to you if your community participates in NFIP's CRS Program. The sample spreadsheets in the CRS Manual are helpful tools whether your community participates in CRS or not.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Critical to any communication plan is relaying information in ways that are meaningful to each audience you want to reach. Otherwise, they may not care about what you have to say, even if they should care. How can you answer every audience's unstated question: "What's in it for me?" Put yourself in their shoes as you work through each step of the communication plan.

THE STEPS TO DEVELOP A COMMUNICATION PLAN

This Guide helps you organize your messages and desired outcomes around what is most important to the community, whether that is cultural assets, economic impacts, natural resources, tourism, neighborhood access, social equity, or other matters of importance. It also touches on the accessibility and needs of different populations.

A WELL-CONSTRUCTED COMMUNICATION PLAN TAKES TIME. It also requires individuals to talk to their colleagues and be willing to make tough choices. These choices may involve prioritizing one audience over others (see Step 3, Who is Your Prioritized Audience?), or perhaps coming to realize that a particular social media campaign isn't relevant or relatable any longer, even though everyone thought it was a good idea.

By following a defined process, you will find that your communication plan comes together naturally and is easier to put into action. A seven step process is recommended:

STEP 1 > STEP 7

>Step 1: What's your goal?

A goal is what you want to happen as a result of this communication plan. It's the broad end point you are aiming for, which guides every other step. The goal is the "big-picture," and communication is often just one part of it.
For example, a goal may:

- Establish and advance the whole community's understanding of and support for resilience.

Action Step:

Before diving into your communication plan, establish your ultimate goal. Keep in mind that this is a big-picture goal, not defined by any measurable outcome. It may take one or two sentences to describe.

>Step 2: What's your objective?

There is a difference between a goal and an objective, and keeping them straight may be the most difficult part of your communication planning process. However, that distinction is important and will help you identify the best short-term means, or tactics, to increase the success of your communication plan.

Where a goal is a general statement that indicates the intended solution to an identified problem, an objective is a specific and identifiable action carried out to achieve a goal. Objectives are measurable outcomes. Clearly defining your objectives helps chart the course toward realizing your goal. For example:

- If the goal is to "establish and advance the whole community's understanding of and support for resilience" (see example above), what measurable outcomes will help make that happen?
  - Increase the number of households covered by flood insurance by 15 percent by [DATE].
  - Develop support for, and apply for, a Flood Mitigation Assistance grant in 2020.
  - Identify an official point of contact per audience group and hold three meetings by the end of the year.

Action Step:

Break down your goal into objectives. Progress on these objectives should be measurable, either by a statistic, a number, or even the names of stakeholders becoming involved or showing consensus. How will you measure each objective to make sure it has been thought through and is in place when communication begins? In many cases, people find it helpful to reference and work with "SMART" objectives; the words this acronym stands for provide a reliable and well-used structure to work with.

SMART Objectives

Your objectives are the first step where specifics really matter, and using the SMART methodology is a good idea. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timebound. Including these parameters leads to clear, substantive targets that help you achieve your goal.

>Step 3: Who is your prioritized audience?

The answer cannot be "everyone." Within any community, certain groups, segments, or individuals carry more influence or have a louder voice. Focusing on those audiences will increase the likelihood of reaching your goal. These are the people you need to identify and prioritize. However, this doesn't mean you will communicate only with these people or groups. Rather, those with more influence may receive increased attention as the process moves forward.

Approach the audiences in three segments:

a) Critical: The audiences or stakeholders essential to reaching the measurable outcomes listed in each objective. Look at each objective, and write down only the essential communities, stakeholders, or partners. This list will identify your primary audience and guide your focus.

b) Important: The stakeholders who are not vital to success but will help make reaching your SMART objectives an easier or smoother process. This is your secondary audience, and this list will likely be longer than your critical list.

c) Considered: These are audience groups that will be interested in what's happening and should be kept aware, but are not likely to be able to increase or decrease the likelihood of success.

COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

Aligning with a community champion or catalyst can keep the ball moving forward—especially when engaging with the public on a new or challenging topic. As a strong, trusted voice to carry your message, community champions can help generate buy-in across audiences.

Action Step:

Communicating everything to everyone all the time isn't a recipe for success, and placing more attention and focus on specific audiences will increase the likelihood of success. Keeping that in mind, fill out the audience prioritization matrix below. Common audiences may include homeowners, flood insurance points of contact, decision makers, State National Flood Insurance Program Coordinators, primary and supporting agencies, local businesses, other State agencies, real estate agencies. There are no absolutes. Identify and prioritize audiences based on your experience of the community's character and concerns.

CRITICAL	IMPORTANT	CONSIDERED
1.	4.	7.
2.	5.	8.
3.	6.	9.

COLLABORATING WITH YOUR PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

Your community or office's Public Information Office (PIO) will likely have expertise in looking at audiences and messages. Asking this office to lead the process, or at least bringing them into this planning process early, can add tremendous value and help with audience prioritization.

SHOULD OTHER STAKEHOLDERS BE INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING AND USING THE COMMUNICATION PLAN?

The first step in a solid communication campaign is building consensus around the plan itself. Because of the diversity of media today, the complexity of the community safety messages, and the number of stakeholders required for success, we suggest building a working group of the communicators who best represent the stakeholder groups in your community. The end result will be a broader group of resources to promote and share messages, lend expertise, and advocate for the final plan.

People or organizations to consider for a working group are:

- State Agencies—including the State Hazard Mitigation Officer and NFIP Coordinator
- Local watershed groups
- County and city Public Information Officers
- County and city flood or emergency management representatives
- Subject matter expert(s)
- City Council representatives
- Community interest groups, neighborhood associations, and community-based organizations such as representatives from a house of worship or school district
- Local industry organizations
- Historic Preservation Office representatives
- Chamber of Commerce or business district representatives
- FEMA

>Step 4: What do your audiences care about?

Messaging is less about words on paper and more about sentiment and action. The first step to developing well-crafted messages begins with considering what part of the goal makes sense to your audiences. This is the "what's in it for me" factor. Remember, in this exercise, it's not about you or your rationale for seeing goals or objectives become real. It's about why the audiences you've listed in Step 3 will care, feel compelled to participate, and ultimately help the community realize its end goal. These are their care factors, and the care factors will become the basis for your messages.

HOW DO I FIGURE OUT WHAT DIFFERENT AUDIENCES CARE ABOUT?

Several techniques can help you learn more about what your audiences care about, depending on how thorough you need to be. The techniques listed below are meant to serve as a springboard to help you find the best approach, given the budget and timeline for your communication plan.

- **Media Monitoring** — What's trending in the local media and based on analysis? Is there anything you need to address with your communication plan?
- **Web-Based Visual Preference Survey** — Obtain feedback by helping the public and stakeholder groups determine their preferences for any built-environment options.
- **Nominal Group Technique** — Facilitated discussion that allows users to vote for the best ideas through a process of ranking and elimination.
- **Community Event Photo Booth** — Provide blank signs to prompt people to share ideas. For example, "My favorite waterfront park is... _____," including a photo booth with props to encourage interaction.
- **Top of Mind Topics** — Review topics or concerns brought up by neighborhood organizations and community groups at the hyperlocal level. Build risk reduction projects and messages around these discussions in complementary ways.
- **Community Feedback Approach** — Review 311 complaints, code enforcement calls, service requests, and public hearings to help connect projects to existing local issues and priorities.
- **Post Signs** – Use signs to share what's happening, get ahead of the rumors, and actively ask for the local input you need to move your project forward.
- **Public Meeting Feedback** — Use a button-based rating system at public meetings to gather information on community satisfaction levels — let the public express their satisfaction levels through a range of emojis or buttons.
- **Standard Methods** — Employ focus groups, public and "town hall" meetings, charettes, coalition-building activities, coffee klatches. Use a show of hands or stickers on a map to learn more about what your audiences care about.

The process to identify care factors for different audiences can be challenging, but it's important. It's likely that each member of your communication plan team will have different opinions or perspectives about what motivates and is important to different audiences — and this is good. It is important to remember that care factors should be matched with the audience and what would compel them to participate. A rich and thorough discussion between colleagues and partners in communication will help you examine and select the right care factors, and those will lead to a more robust communication plan.

Action Step A:

While keeping in mind your goal, objectives, and priority audiences, begin to determine each audience's care factors. First, list the reasons and rationales that would compel each audience to become involved in or advocate for supporting the objectives. Later in the process, these will help you develop messages that resonate with that audience. The reasons that are most important should be considered "Tier 1," and you can work from there. **An example with hypothetical audiences follows:**

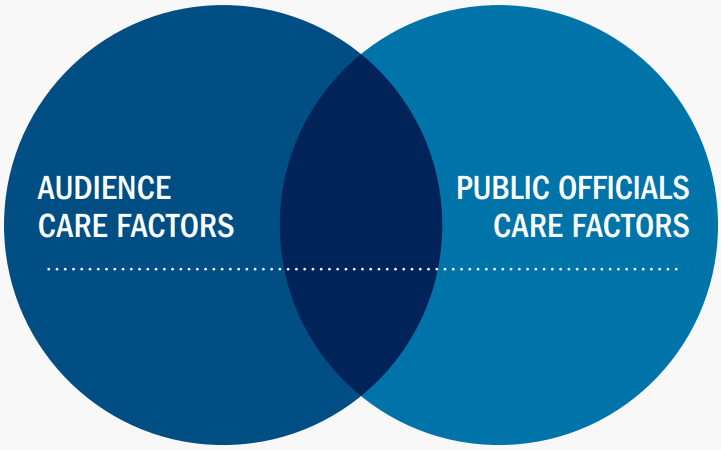
Goal: Establish and advance the whole community's understanding of and support for resilience.

Objective #1: Develop support for, and apply for, a Flood Mitigation Assistance grant in 2020.

Audience: Critical	Care Factors:
City Floodplain Manager Rogers	Damage prevention; public safety; progressive ordinances; career advancement; pleasing the city council; outdoor recreation; outdoor education programs
County Floodplain Manager Rodriguez	Cooperation across city, State and Federal partners; emergency and disaster response; the latest studies and research
FEMA Community Planner Miller	Cooperation with State Floodplain Manager; Community Rating System reviews; compliance with National Flood Insurance Program requirements
Community Resilience Coordinator Brown	Comprehensive mitigation plans; moving from planning to project action and completion; neighborhood and downtown resiliency planning; grassroots planning efforts
Audience: Important	**Care Factors:**
City Council Member Patel	Economic development; socioeconomic diversity; effective community groups; education and social programs
Deputy Mayor Jones	Progressive policy; career goals; fiscal responsibility
Members of the Riverfront Partnership and Recreation Network	Accessibility; education; community-involved decision-making
Community Resilience Coordinator Brown	Comprehensive mitigation plans; moving from planning to project action and completion; neighborhood and downtown resiliency planning; grassroots planning efforts
Audience: Considered	**Care Factors:**
Fire Chief Wilson	Proactive systems to keep people safe and reduce the need for emergency calls; fiscal responsibility

Action Step B:

Don't turn these care factors into sentences, talking points, or social media posts yet! The next step is the delicate exercise to find the common ground and motivating forces between these care factors and your own. Think of it as two circles: one contains your audience's care factors, and one contains yours. You want to find the areas of convergence. In the early stages of a process, you may see little overlap, but a well-planned and facilitated communication plan will merge these circles as messages resonate.



To advance the objectives that support your goals, build on common areas of interest, issues, and topics.

Action Step C:

Looking carefully at the primary audience's care factors, as well as your objectives and internal care factors from Action Step B, begin writing the messages that support and advance the common ground.

It's helpful to keep these key messages in a "snack size" length. In other words, shy away from long paragraphs and full sentences in favor of sentence fragments that inspire and show action. Keeping key messages short will allow for greater efficiency when repurposing the messages across different uses, such as: spokesperson training, social media posts, website copy, or press materials. **Referencing the audiences and care factors in Action Step A, this exercise may look like:**

REOCCURRING AUDIENCE CARE FACTORS	INTERNAL CARE FACTORS	COMMON-AREAS
Proactive, progressive, safety, education, cooperative, comprehensive, sustainable	Action-oriented (grant); community-involved, community-understood; long-term resilience	Cooperative+community developed; focused on lasting, long-term benefits; safety

Sample Messages

1) Will keep our city safe for our children and grandchildren;
2) Co-authored with the community;
3) Education, recreation, and business opportunities along the river;
4) Long-term solutions and safety for the city and citizens

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Some messages lend themselves better to different mediums. Other components of this Toolkit can help you tailor your messages for different platforms and learn how to manage messages for public meetings. See the Social Media Guide and Designing Effective Public Meetings.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAIN LANGUAGE

Just as it's important to see your goals and objectives through the eyes of your key audience(s), it's important to talk to them as peers. This may mean dropping government acronyms, industry lingo, or engineering terms. Talk to your audience(s) as you would to your next-door neighbor.

>Step 5: What strategies can help you reach these audiences with the right message?

Let's recap:

- **We know what we want to get done (goal);**
- **We know what it will take to get it done (objectives);**
- **We know who is critical to achieve success (audience prioritization);**
- **We know the care factors that will help us develop well-crafted messages and deliver them as a trusted partner (care factor common ground).**

Your next step is to look at how audiences get news and information. They do this in a manner that is consistent with *their own lifestyle and influence network*. This is the time to take an unbiased look at audience trends, media or information preferences, and related insights that will eventually help you select the most appropriate ways to communicate (tactics).

Strategies and tactics are often confused. A strategy is an overarching method or approach; whereas a tactic is a specific way to produce and deliver a message to an audience. Working with the example provided throughout this Guide:

Goal: Establish and advance the whole community's understanding of and support for resilience.

Objective #1: Develop support for, and apply for, a Flood Mitigation Assistance grant in 2020.

Target audience: Members of the Riverfront Partnership and Recreation Network

We'll presume, based on our audiences listed above, that because the City Floodplain Manager and City Council Members care about topics such as community organizing and outdoor recreation they'll see the benefits of having an organization like the Riverfront Partnership involved as a positive sign.

We'll also presume that members of the community group are vocal supporters of community-based planning that results in more robust use of the waterfront and its local businesses and trails, and that they value personal relationships. They have a large social media following, write a letter to the editor each year around Earth Day, and exhibit regularly at local Farmers Markets during the summer months to recruit new members.

In this example, the communication strategy may be to *leverage the influence of the Riverfront Partnership and Recreation Network to share news about and increase support for resilience planning along the river*. We'll presume that increased support from the public for such efforts will help motivate city and county officials to prepare a Flood Mitigation Assistance grant.

Here are other commonly used communication strategies:

1. Traditional media (newspapers, television, radio) relations
2. Grassroots partnerships or exhibitions
3. Digital and social media engagement
4. Paid advertising (television, online, radio, newspaper, billboard)
5. One-on-one meetings with stakeholders
6. Grassroots canvassing

Action Step:

Looking back at your prioritized audiences, build a short list of the most effective strategies for delivering a message and sharing a viewpoint with these audiences. This may include partnering with other community groups because a prioritized audience/person has an affinity for that group or respects them, or because it's a proven method of communicating with that particular audience.

Once the initial list of strategies is built, it's time to research and identify the details of each strategy. For example, you may learn that one social media platform will be better for reaching your audience because it has more followers or better engagement in a particular neighborhood. Or that the most online traffic to the newspaper's website occurs on Sunday mornings. Perhaps more than half of one priority audience lives in the same residential area or attends a particular church that shares community announcements in the service or member newsletter.

Now, dive into the details to begin shaping exactly how, where, and when you will share the messages crafted for the audiences you need to reach to achieve success — these will be your tactics (see Step 6).

MEDIA OUTREACH

To learn more about audience research and media outreach, consult your local External Affairs or Public Information Officer, or your FEMA Regional office.

INVITE COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO HELP DESIGN AND DEVELOP PROJECTS TO INCREASE BUY IN

For instance, if a risk reduction project includes green space, invite a nearby community group, neighborhood, or volunteer organization to decide on plantings, provide input on where pathways should go, or start a community garden. Once these steps are implemented, hosting an activity such as a community walk through can showcase progress and keep community members involved in what may be a long process to project completion.

>Step 6: What are you actually going to do?

Tactics are the specifics behind the strategies you outlined in Step 5. This is where the rubber meets the road. With the legwork and thoughtful planning you've already put in to get here, you have a plan that's designed to support and reach your objectives. **Continuing to build on our example:**

Goal: Establish and advance the whole community's understanding of and support for resilience.

Objective #1: Develop support for, and apply for, a Flood Mitigation Assistance grant in 2020.

Target audience: Members of the Riverfront Partnership and Recreation Network

Strategy: Leverage the influence of the Riverfront Partnership and Recreation Network to share news about and increase support for resilience planning along the river.

Communication Tactics:

a. In partnership with the Network, co-author a series of articles for the monthly newsletter.
b. Provide message- and media-trained volunteers with brochures and materials for the Network's tent and booth at the local river festival.
c. With Network staff, create social media posts that the Network can share during Flood Safety Awareness Week.
d. Meet with Network leaders each month to share progress on the Flood Mitigation Assistance grant process.

Here are other communication and engagement tactics:

1. One-on-one meetings with key journalists at local newspaper, radio, or television stations
2. Information and Q&A booths at high-traffic summer festivals and farmers markets in affected areas
3. Including important updates and information in school, church, and community bulletins in affected areas
4. Organizing a social media channel and content calendar dedicated to distributing information to identified community members
5. Adding a resource center page to your community's website, where residents can access and share updates, photos, news, and information
6. Illustrating complex processes through easy-to-understand graphics and illustrations

Action Step:

Being as specific as possible, brainstorm and build a list of communication tactics related to each strategy and audience. For example, if traditional media relations is noted as a priority strategy, and additional research shows that a morning television news show has a high viewership and accepts guests for interviews, one tactic could be outreach through the local morning news show.

There is no magic number of tactics. Instead, think about what your organization's resources (people and budget) can manage to move the audiences towards the desired objective(s). Similarly, consider a mix of short- and long-term tactics to keep the audience engaged throughout the process.

A template to complete this activity is provided below. From here, build an engagement calendar or schedule listing when different tactics will be applied.

AUDIENCE	STRATEGY	TACTIC	INDIVIDUAL OR ORGANIZATION RESPONSIBLE (Lead/Support)	RESOURCES (Supplies / Printing)	TIMING

>Step 7: What's working?

As a part of your plan, build in ways to measure and assess your work at set intervals. Is the communication plan meeting expectations according to the metrics you set? Importantly, try to be objective in assessing whether the identified priority audiences are having a positive effect on the objectives and the goal.

Your metrics may include both formal and informal methods of evaluation, such as polls conducted by phone or door to door, discussions with homeowners while canvassing neighborhoods, analysis of visits to a web page (including time spent on the site), or views and engagement on a social media channel. The community's Public Information Office should be a great resource to help you dive into and understand the information. Remain open-minded. Based on how successful the program is, and what tactics show the most promise or success, revise the plan as necessary.

A successful communication plan doesn't just fill the airwaves with chatter; it moves people's minds and actions toward objectives that support goals aligned with a vision. Keeping this in mind will help everyone stay diligent and focused.