



Risk Communication Strategy SAMPLE

The person filling out the strategy is an extension agent who lives in the community and is trying to connect with elected officials as the priority audience.

STEP 1. Define your risk communication audience and goal.

Defining your biggest risk communication challenge will help you identify your specific target audience and what you want to accomplish with that audience.

CHALLENGE: What is your biggest communication challenge?

Getting the mayor and town council members to allocate funds and implement solutions to fix the town's current and future flooding problems.

AUDIENCE: Who do you want to reach?

Mayor and town council members.

GOAL: What do you want to accomplish?

Getting town council or county council to vote to commit funding for the priority strategies that residents support to deal with flooding.

STEP 2. Understand your priority audience.

1. What do they care about most that could be impacted?

Town and county elected officials represent constituents with diverse interests, but slowing down the pace of development is generally a hot topic for all. Being able to address these concerns should appeal to these officials, as does protecting resident safety and community prosperity.

Protecting these needs is part of their job, and actions toward these goals should help elected officials be seen in a favorable light by their constituents.

2. What is their experience with hazards?

High tide flooding is happening more frequently and with greater reach. Elected officials have to deal with the associated traffic problems just like everyone else. The newspapers are writing about this issue more frequently, which is helping to educate public and elected officials, and providing well-publicized statistics that document the problem.

3. What hazard impacts are they concerned about?

- Property values decreasing due to flooding; could lower tax base (assumption)
- Safety of residents and EMS access during emergencies
- Big increases in flood insurance premiums and the effects on home prices

4. Who do they trust for risk and preparedness information?

- Emergency managers (local, state)
- I need to ask council members who they trust or see who they bring to the next meeting

5. Where do they get information on risks?

- Emergency managers, but many are not focused on longer-term planning
- Local television stations
- Local universities
- Constituents and staffers
- Public interest groups that have the ear of the local government officials
- FEMA
- National organizations such as the National Association of Counties (NACo)

6. Do they have a community- or individual-focused world view?

I think it varies per elected official, since they represent different constituents and political parties. I don't know but need to find out.

7. How prepared for the next hazard is the priority audience?

Elected officials don't seem prepared at all. They are not directing town staff (such as emergency managers or the town planner) and are not providing the resources needed to properly address flooding and storm issues. They don't seem to listen when we talk about risks and flooding.

STEP 3. Connect with your audience about risks.

8. What questions could you ask to learn more about your audience? What will you listen for in their response?

Need to better understand what they care about and who they trust for information. Would also like to hear what strategies they would likely support. Sample questions to get at this information include the following:

- What is it like being an elected official during a major disaster?
- How prepared was the town to respond to the disaster?
- What programs or regulations do you wish were in place before the last disaster?
- Have you made any changes to your city's or county's emergency management processes since the last disaster?
- How are you incorporating what you learned from disaster response and recovery into your longer-term planning for the next disaster?
- If money was not a factor, what would you do to better prepare for next time?

9. What opportunities exist for you to better connect with your audience?

- Town council meeting
- Meet with town planner individually
- Possibly Chamber of Commerce (some of the town council members are small business owners)

10. Who are trusted sources of information you can collaborate with to reach your audience?

- Town planner is well respected but may not have the necessary resources to do this
- Town council listens to some of the local business leaders
- Chamber of Commerce
- Maybe our floodplain manager, building official, or economic development department (assumption)
- Local community groups that represent their constituents

11. How will you make the conversation engaging so your audience will be interested and will want to continue the discussion?

- I am a constituent, so I hope they will listen
- Share my story of how I have regular flooding and had problems during the last storm
- Try not to sound like a complainer, don't point fingers since that never seems to work
- Offer to help and share my suggestions for how the town should get residents' input

12. How can you frame the conversation to connect with what the audience cares about? What did you learn about the audience that led you to select this frame?

Possible framing based on what I learned about my audience includes

- Appeal to their sense of responsibility for the town and the commitment they made to their constituents
- Elected officials may want to leave a legacy
- Safety of the residents could also work
- If they hope to be re-elected, they may want to show how they are protecting and preparing the town for the next storm
- Connect risk with what is already happening, such as increase in road and business closures, damage to town infrastructure, and residents who are trapped in their homes due to flooding at high tide
- I don't think I will mention climate change and the effects on future storms, since that will not go over well

13. How will you help the priority audience identify its risk-reduction options?

Work with town staff to host a town-wide event for residents to share their ideas on increasing resilience to flooding. We need to do something better than the typical public meeting that no one attends. Want this event to be family-friendly and fun. We can ask residents for ideas that they would support and get them to commit to helping town council follow through.

Identify a staff member or council representative who is willing to be a champion for the priority actions. This person will need to attend public meetings to represent the town and present the results to the board for the vote.

Need extra help? Contact coastal.info@noaa.gov.