COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

A newsletter for the nation's coastal management and research reserve programs.

In This Issue

> THE ART OF COMMUNICATION IS THE LANGUAGE OF LEADERSHIP.
>
> – James Humes

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DEVELOPING AN OUTREACH PLAN: A RIDICULOUSLY SIMPLE APPROACH

Many organizations spend months writing an outreach plan. Consultants are hired, committees are formed, and numerous people are involved. I guess this is okay for getting foundational information and outreach products in place (more on that in a future issue of this newsletter). But if you want to be strategic, I find the approach provided here to be much more effective.

This is the process used at NOAA's Office for Coastal Management for all of our products and services. This simple approach works best when developing a short-term outreach plan for a specific function, goal, or product. These plans are usually two or three pages long, and can be assembled in a matter of hours. The emphasis is on outreach delivery. We have several of these ongoing at all times.

STEP ONE: DETERMINE YOUR GOAL

The key here, and with most of the steps that follow, is to be FOCUSED. "I want people to be aware of our programs" is too broad. See the list below for examples of targeted outreach goals.

- Increase the number of people coming to an education program.
- Get the beach access program implemented by county council.
- Secure funding support from X program.
- Get X number of people to use our app.
- Increase visits to our website by X percent.

Having a measureable goal is ideal, but not always possible. However, *always* make your goal as narrow as possible. Stay away from goals that start with, "I want people to be aware of…" That is weak, in my book, something akin to saying, "I want people to like us." Why do you want people to be aware? What do you want them to do with this awareness? Answer that question and you will have your specific, actionable goal.

Step two: define your target audience

Once again, being focused is an asset. Listing all potential target audiences can be illuminating, but this outreach plan should focus on one, as a target audience that is too broad often results in a message and approach that are too diluted to be effective.

Let's take the "get more people to come to our program" goal. It would be really easy to say your target audience is "the general public." But is that realistic? Usually, no. The gardening community, or outdoor enthusiasts, or members of the local shore and beach preservation society may represent likely attendees. Get down to that level of specificity. This is important because a large part of the outreach plan involves figuring out the best way to reach that audience. The more specific you are about the who, the more specific you can be in regards to the how.

Step three: think like your Audience

In the outreach plan, after listing the goal and the target audience, create a general description of the thing being sold (that class, that initiative, that funding measure).

Then list the pros and cons of this description from the eyes of the consumer. It is from this that the messaging is created. In the outreach material, you will want to play up these attributes and address the negatives, which is messaging 101.

A common mistake at this stage is to craft the message from the sponsoring organization's point of view. Don't do that. Will the fact that all of your departments are now seamlessly working together move the audience to action? Or would the audience be more likely to take notice if the message focuses on specific ways in which the audience will be better served?

Step four: brainstorm the various ways your audience likes to receive information

Go crazy here. Emails, personal visits, sky writing? Are there opinion leaders or partner organizations that might be good message carriers for you? Maybe a speech in front of a civic group or two? A visit with town council? Newspaper articles? A letter writing campaign? Make this list as long as you can. Again, think about your specific target audience. Secondary audiences can come later.

Step five: develop a plan of attack

Some ideas are better than others, and surely you don't have an unlimited budget or staff. So pick three approaches where you will get the biggest bang for the buck. Decide what type of supporting materials are needed (brochures, websites, exhibits?) and assign tasks and deadlines for creating and delivering these materials. These actions represent another important step, since creating outreach materials does not constitute implementing an outreach program. The ding-ding-ding of the success bell only rings when your materials are seen by the right people. When your outreach campaign moves the target audience to act, then you can throw your arms up in victory.

You are likely to have more than one target audience, which is good. We suggest going through these steps for each target audience. Nine times out of 10, the marketing materials will work for more than one audience, so the economies of scale come into play—meaning the additional times you go through this exercise will be much easier. But go through the process anyway to make sure you aren't making erroneous assumptions. You will spend more time figuring out how to best get in front of the various target audiences and assigning tasks and deadlines to do so. That's where the benefit of putting together a plan for each audience really comes into play.

Final thoughts

Is this plan perfect? Not by a long shot, but sometimes perfection isn't necessary. This shortcut provides an orderly, targeted approach that quickly moves organizations from the thinking stage to the doing stage. We have a template we use; just drop me a line and we will gladly send a copy.

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Communicator of the Month

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Title: Sustainability and Partnerships Specialist
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Organizational Structure

The coastal management program is dedicated to protecting and enhancing the environmental, economic, and social value of Illinois' Great Lakes coast. Our program fosters healthy ecosystems and resilient communities by providing expertise, funding, and other resources that engage and connect communities, enhance coastal stewardship, promote balanced use, and improve interagency coordination.

Our program is part of the Coastal Zone Management Program network and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. About two years ago, the coastal program and the Prairie Research Institute of University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign started a coastal science initiative. My position is joint, and is a reflection of this strong partnership and collaboration. Nine staff members work out of the coastal program office, three of which—including mine—are shared positions with one of the Prairie Research Institute surveys.

Outreach Approach

Most of us work on outreach in one way or another, but two members of our team spend much of their time on outreach and program communications.

Job Duties

Overall, I focus on community resilience, which spans supporting communities impacted by shoreline change or flooding to vibrant waterfronts and economic development. Moving to Chicago was coming home for me, but I spent seven years in ocean conservation in Washington, D.C. I often draw on my background in policy, partnership building, and communications for my work now at the coastal program.

Social Media

This is a great opportunity for a shameless plug! Our program joined the world of social media in the beginning of August when we launched a Facebook page, which I currently manage. Please connect with us (*facebook.com/IllinoisCoastal*)! We have found a lot of value in developing a social media content calendar, and in leveraging content from our program newsletter. We seek staff feedback on our newsletter and Facebook page content at monthly staff meetings so that we can highlight our work and partnerships. Having a protocol in place for content approval and comment response is also very helpful.

Most Fun, Most Challenging

The best part of my job is working with our partners. No impactful work is accomplished alone, and I feel very grateful for the strong relationships we have with the people and organizations who cherish and work hard for our Lake Michigan coast. Navigating government systems and requirements can sometimes be quite challenging, but our program strives to be creative to make the best use of our resources for our communities and our coast.

Work Mantra

When it comes to outreach, the most important lessons I have learned are to know your audience, target your message, and build trust. Those three things are everything!

Wish for the Future

We are just completing a strategic planning effort that will be available on our website this fall. Our communications team is currently small, but our hope is to develop a complementary strategic communications plan that will help us more effectively share the great work of our program and our partners.

From Us to You

Giving Back to Our Veterans

For Veterans Day, NOAA's Office for Coastal Management worked with the National Ocean Service to highlight the many ways research reserves and coastal programs are working to help and thank our veterans. See the article here: *oceanservice.noaa.gov/recreation/veterans-noaa-activities.html*.

Top Ten: Natural Infrastructure

We developed a series of two-pagers to help people communicate about a variety of topics pertaining to our nation's coasts and their resources. This one (*coast.noaa.gov/data/nationalfacts/pdf/handout-natural-infrastructure.pdf*) shares ten benefits of natural infrastructure, ranging from its ability to reduce erosion to the ways the practice benefits a community economically and aesthetically. Contact us at *coastal.info@noaa.gov* for other top ten topics.

Upcoming Social Media Campaigns

Follow us on Twitter and Facebook, and tag along with these campaigns.

- December 3 to 7 – use #CoralsWeek to celebrate the beauty and importance of these ecosystems.
- December 1 to 31 – use #WishList to share your holiday-season hopes for our coasts.

Outreach Tool Spotlight – Sea Level Rise Viewer

Use this popular web mapping tool to help people visualize coastal flooding or sea level rise and see how future flooding could impact where they live and work. This tool was recently updated to map up to 10 feet above average high tides. Find it here: *coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/tools/slr.html*.

Fast Facts: Hazard Mitigation Value

This is one of the many graphics and fast facts available for your use in presentations and handouts. Grab this one at *coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/hazard-mitigation-value*. If you have an idea for a new group of fast facts or illustrations, please let us know.

More Mitigation Measures, More Savings
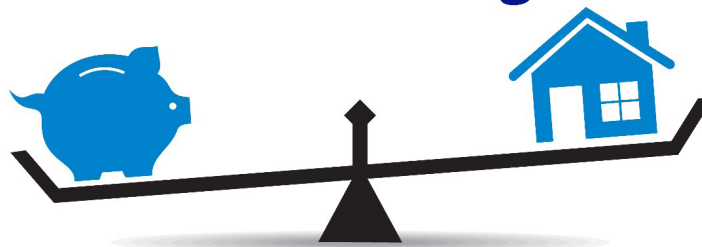
Amount of at-risk U.S. households that are prepared = **ONLY 10%**

Nationwide savings if ALL prepared = **$92 million!**

Improving communication skills, one newsletter at a time.