

COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

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

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ACE Basin National Estuarine
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NOT A WASTED
WORD. THIS HAS BEEN
A MAIN POINT TO MY
LITERARY THINKING
ALL MY LIFE.

— Hunter S.
Thompson

October 2020, Issue 24



COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

COMMUNICATING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

For many of you, keeping elected officials informed is part of your job description. From what I'm hearing, it's not your favorite task. We know it's important, but this type of communication is not something we regularly do. This infrequency makes the task intimidating to some, and makes others question their communication skill set.

Guess what? Most elected officials *want* to hear from you, so don't second-guess yourself. You understand the coast and have the data, information, and stories they and their constituencies care about. So yes, they want to hear from you, and yes, you are the perfect person for the job.

To help make the process more comfortable and successful, this article provides some tips. Much of the article is based on a recent report from Ballast Research called *Washington's Insights Review*, which gleaned information from interviews with over 1,600 policy makers.

When meeting with an elected official, a **good communicator** will

- **Establish a clear ask.** Be specific, be able to state it in a sentence or two, and use language that is free of jargon and acronyms.
- **Present data-driven arguments.** Provide credible data to support your information.
- **Summarize the message in one page.** State your ask in a sentence or two, and create a succinct one-pager that provides the pertinent data and summarizes the key aspects.

A **great communicator** will take it a couple steps further and also

- **Tell a story.** To demonstrate relevance, connect constituents to your message, and tell a compelling story.
- **Be place-based.** Bringing national concerns and data to the table is good, but letting the main focus be on local data and stories is even better.
- **Address both sides of the issue.** Provide information about the pros and cons of any issue, because your job is to be the honest broker of information. You may even want to have in your back pocket the contact information for a person or two who have another opinion. Explain how the message and the information fits into larger debates within the community.

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TIMING

The report touts the “Goldilocks” principle. You want to establish a good relationship with elected officials and their staff, but you don’t want to overwhelm them with information and visits, or limit your contact to times of crisis and when a need is present. So, you may ask, how do you structure your communication efforts to fall into that “just right” category?

Everyone, but particularly elected officials and their staff, receives an enormous amount of information every day. Be aware of that, because you don’t want to be that person who sends a constant stream of materials. Stay focused in your communications, and build foundational relationships with the staff. Stay relevant with in-person (or virtual!) visits and follow up with supporting data as appropriate. Consider using off times (recess? slow months?) to meet with these staff members to offer educational opportunities about your topics or invite them for a visit. Make sure they understand the purpose of the interactions—education—and establish yourself as a go-to straight shooter who is a good contact to know.

SUPPORTING VOICES

Multiple voices and perspectives strengthen a message. These three perspectives in particular seem to carry a lot of weight: grassroots advocates, business executives, and subject matter experts. Hearing from these voices can help drive home the importance and relevance of the points being made. Grassroots advocates help connect lawmakers to constituents; business executives help provide a macro-level understanding about the issue; and subject matter experts serve as an accessible resource for follow-up questions.

We hope you’ve found this information helpful. If you have other communication-related topics you’d like to see covered in this newsletter, please drop us a line.



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COMMUNICATORS OF THE MONTH

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Organizational Structure

At the ACE Basin Reserve, we’re very lucky to be highly integrated with our lead partner agency. Many of our staff members play dual (or more!) roles within the reserve and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR). It allows us the flexibility to draw on the strengths, talent, and expertise of a pool of people to make sure we have the right person for every project or program. Because we are so close with our partner agency, we also have ready access to about 100 marine scientists and

fishery managers at all times. They utilize the reserve for research, and we are able to utilize their work to tell stories that resonate with all of our different audiences.

Outreach Approach

Erin: I work full time for the ACE Basin Reserve’s partner agency, the SCDNR. For the past five years, the reserve has not had any dedicated outreach staff, so I’ve provided assistance wherever possible, capturing multimedia, boosting events and campaigns on social media, and coordinating

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with reporters on reserve stories. That fortunately changed this past year when we brought on Kaitlyn Hackathorn, who dedicates about half of her time and talents to the reserve!

Job Duties

Erin: I manage our coastal science blog, write press releases and coordinate with reporters, capture multimedia of our staff in the field, manage our social media pages, and work on miscellaneous outreach campaigns. Kaitlyn handles all things visual for our work, capturing and managing our multimedia, developing incredible graphics, and providing an expert eye on formatting and copyediting everything that goes out through our public channels. Our work is cyclical and seasonal, which I love—in August, for instance, we can expect that we'll be talking about sea turtles, oyster reef planting, and hurricane season prep. But we also enjoy a challenging roster of long-term projects, such as the exciting web redesign for the ACE Basin Reserve that we're wrapping up.

Social Media

Erin: I handle our social media, along with a team of two other SCDNR colleagues across the state. One of our primary and perennial challenges is telling the story of the ACE Basin Reserve—what it is and what it does—while under the auspices of SCDNR. The ACE Basin Reserve does not have its own channels, and all reserve content thus goes through SCDNR. While many South Carolinians are familiar with the ACE Basin region, they may not be familiar with the reserve.

Most Fun, Most Challenging

Erin: Hands down, the people and the landscapes. My colleagues at SCDNR and the reserve are the smartest and most hardworking folks I've known. They're humble, creative, fun, and indefatigable. Adapting to remote work without their physical presence to cheer and inspire me has been one of the most challenging parts of the past five months. We have the honor of working in what is both my home and one of the most beautiful places in the world. That I come to work every day to help understand and protect the salt marshes and barrier islands and coastal forests of the Lowcountry is a privilege and a joy that is never lost on me. The challenge is never feeling that we're doing enough, due to limited funding, staff time, and an ever-growing coastal population that we don't always reach.

Kaitlyn: The best part of my job is the diversity of the work. Not only am I able to employ a variety of outreach mediums, from blog posts to 360 video, but I am always working on a new project. With almost 200 researchers, educators, and stewards working to protect our marine resources, there are always new projects to discover. When I join my coworkers in the field, whether at an artificial reef drop or a sea turtle survey, I see the natural world through their eyes and it's easy to translate their passion into outreach content. The most challenging part of my job is having to prioritize projects. With a small media team, we aren't able to cover all of the exciting initiatives of our coworkers. In the end, we have to decide which messages are the most important for our audiences to hear, even if it conflicts with our own personal interests.

Lesson Learned or Success Story

Erin: I have been in awe of our team during their rapid adaptation and pivot to virtual programming since March of this year. Our educator, Erica Connery, who typically leads an in-person series of adult learning programs each spring and fall, resurrected that work online with free, weekly webinars that have vastly expanded the reach of the original program. Pulling these off (still going strong with about 20 different topics under the belt) has been an incredible group effort and really challenged us to work out an efficient system for designing and promoting these weekly events. It's been a real bright spot for us during this difficult year, and we've heard the same sentiment over and over from the folks who tune in each week.

Vision for the Future

Kaitlyn: This time of fewer in-person events is raising the bar on digital content. We are rethinking the entire structure of our outreach, and as we branch into hosting webinars and expanding our digital resources, we have the opportunity to reach a wider and more diverse audience. I envision the future of our outreach efforts to be a new balance of in-person outreach and digital initiatives that share our messages more widely and effectively. I think our job will branch out to encompass training more of our staff on creating digital content and rethinking our current programs to leverage digital resources.

FROM US TO YOU

OUTREACH TOOL SPOTLIGHT – DEFINING COASTAL MANAGEMENT VIDEO

How do you define what we do and why we do it in under a minute—complete with cool visuals? Easy: just show people this fast draw animation, which helps you communicate the what, how, and why of coastal management in a way that any audience can understand and enjoy. View it here: coast.noaa.gov/gallery/videos/coastalmanagement/video.html.

PRELIMINARY ECOSYSTEM SERVICES CHECKLIST

If you want to communicate the value of an ecosystem services approach to project planning, it's helpful to start with a clear-cut way to help people understand if this approach is right for

them. This questionnaire is a great place to start. It kicks off the process with an easy to follow assessment, leading communicators through the initial steps in the planning conversation. View it here: coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/considering-ecosystem-services.html.

UPCOMING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

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

- October 5 to 9: Use #MidAtlantic to celebrate the region's boundless beauty.
- All month: Use #StrongCoasts to read and share stories of resilience.

FAST FACTS – AQUACULTURE

Aquaculture is Growing!

1.7 million jobs supporting a **\$1.5 billion** industry feeding Americans **626 million** pounds of seafood every year!



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

Coastal Communicators is published by the NOAA Office for Coastal Management.

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Send questions or suggestions to coastal.info@noaa.gov.

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