

Communicating your Message

Facilitator: Yvonne Menard- PAO, Channel Islands NP

Participants:

Meghan Owen

Bob Butler

Chelsea Carey

James Roberts

Jennifer Tiehm

Charles Blair

Lynn Sweet (notetaker)

Key Steps for Creating a Communication Plan:

Underpinning:

Instilling a sense of resource value for public

Gain understanding of, for example, a restoration project

How can you share and talk about a project with possible controversy?

Identify People Involved:

Players may have different strengths/resources (connect scientist with a communicator who understands audience perspective)

Identify Desired Outcome:

In terms of audience differences/diversity

Identify Strategy:

Briefing statement (background, status, etc.)

What materials and events?

Communications:

Know bounds of facts to craft a message

Message: Clear, Concise, and Consistent

Evaluate Effectiveness of Message/Communication Strategy:

Survey of public opinion

Reevaluate lessons learned

Presentation/Case Study:

Rat eradication program on Anacapa Island in order to protect native rodent

Difficulties:

Rodenticide, Sensitive Species

News articles primarily negative- headlines

Underpinning: (Commonly based on Mission of Parks)

“Interpretation”: Give meaning to a resource

Opportunity for audience to learn “why should I care.”

Relate to something essential/important for them

Comment: “Framing” message for different audiences

Universal messages: beauty, patterns, balance and stability

E.g. Beauty of a restored area

E.g. Ecosystem services/interdependence

Identify People Involved:

Make sure it is all in line with partners (all on the same page)

Gather pre-information about project, issues, and audience

Who are local and national media? Who are political players?

What are target organizations?

Reach out to this whole spectrum

Go ahead of time and outreach if you anticipate interest from a particular group

E.g. prescribed fire in a new location

Always make sure that employees know about spokespeople

Sometimes researchers can be too close to project/not best spokesperson

Depends on organization

Identify key person that knows how to carry out communication strategy

Choose a communicator- person with sensitivity to the audience

Protects scientists and controls lines of communication

Call, follow up, have information, get media excited and informed

This is what their job is; researchers aren't necessarily trained in this

Identify Strategy:

Choosing elements of message:

Pamphlet showing components of problem/timeline (e.g. Island Fox)

Graphics showing pictures of plants/animals (e.g. pigs, eagle, fox)

Language clarification (e.g. re-introduced, re-established, introduced)

Comments: Graphics very important (even though they might be expensive)

Full magazine-style pamphlet telling story of problem

Video produced locally

Webcams can engage audience

Comment: Conundrum for Restoration: In-progress restoration can look “bad.”

Message here is that the story still in development.

How do you explain what your goal is?

Tell about value of returning diversity to community

Comment: It's important to have formulated an answer in advance
Focus points and don't be unprepared

Messages/Talking Points are internal, between resource staff and PAO's
Prepare lead messages, along with supporting facts
Clearly define this first in ways that are understandable
Refine language into a succinct message to come back to
"Quotable" items are likely to be used in the media
Takes patience and persistence

Communication:

Media: Be responsive and respectful, and get back to them in a timely manner
START with lead message (don't bury it at the end)-
Media/news message DIFFERENT than a scientific paper
Provide concrete images, etc.
Imagery is one of most powerful assets/tools
If media person focused on supporting a preconceived "lead story" that isn't correct
or isn't consistent with the message:
Acknowledge if it is a legitimate point of view, go back and demonstrate
why lead message is more important.
Be prepared to tell message and counter arguments
Comment: Foresee alternate viewpoints, have talking points ready-to-go.

Comment: Public attitude can often be: "If it's green it's good."
There is a challenge to explain Mediterranean climate and invasive plants
Have to educate public to see value of what they are not accustomed to
Invasive plants can be pretty!
Removing plant and replacing with native is going to benefit ecosystem.

Case study: Negative Media Attention

*Media focused on killing of pigs, personal attacks of scientists
What could have been done to mitigate this?
They did reach out in advance to several organizations and individuals whom expressed
disagreement.
Effort and energy spent to maintain positive message- focusing on that
Methods and how they are portrayed are very important to message
Credibility: Being honest and disclosing, be up-front about errors and failures.*

Evaluate Effectiveness of Message:

All along- monitor strategy and complete your plan- give milestones of success
Use and take advantage of opportunities to do this

Survey of public opinion

Plan time for approval of a public survey in a federal government setting

Media trips can be important- they are often looking for news

Document positive reactions from stakeholders and others

Specific Tips about Materials and Strategies:

Talking points are always internal, always labeled draft.

FAQ's for media and public

Media:

Identify likely events for media

Revise and keep updated the information available to media

Example: Signs about trail-building disruption

Media event: Presentations and panel

People at different displays available for questions

Mediation sessions

Often people are genuinely interested in the project = opportunity

Prepare public and media for a visible event or change so that outgoing information is accurate and on-message

60-70% find out about your project through a newspaper

Spend time crafting materials and graphics for them

Primary packet of brief summary (what you're doing and why)

Full Media packet- briefing, factsheets, background, images sheets

Press release and disk of images; ftp site or online

A lot of supportive material is already out there.

That might make the difference about whether it gets in the news

Relationships with media important

They will come to you for stories if you are reliable, honest and open

Web: Links to partners, background, images, methods, etc.

Don't underestimate the power of nature to help capture and engage the public!!