

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY
For
MUNICIPALITY OF DISTRICT OF
BARRINGTON

DRAFT

May 4, 2022



Infrastructure
Solutions

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DRAFT

Municipalities are facing a growing need to maintain and renew aged infrastructure, without the tax base to do so.

Effectively communicating to community groups, opinion leaders, businesses, residents, the media, and professional associations will be crucial in gaining support and ensuring a successful outcome. As a well-known American journalist once said, “The two words communications and information are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things. Information is giving out; communications is getting through.” Sydney J. Harris

The vast majority of municipalities in this country will be facing Tough Choices in the coming years. The decisions of this Council will have a long lasting and wide-ranging impact on our Municipality, and its future for generations to come.

This document, designed to help you communicate with your community leaders, the media and your residents is called **Communicating Tough Choices for Today and Tomorrow**. Tough Choices will help serve as a guide to help you and your team manage the communications process throughout the life of the project.



We hope this document will help you ‘Get Through’

THE PLAN

As stated in the introduction, this document is meant to help you get the information out and your message across in a timely, meaningful and effective way.

The plan will:

- Define the best strategy for your Municipality to communicate its intentions as a result of the Asset Management policies, plan, and environmental projects review, which identified infrastructure deficits and recommended strategies for your community to undertake.
- Define communications requirements for your Council and how information will be distributed.

The plan will address:

- What information should be communicated?
- How it should be communicated?
- When and the frequency?
- Who is responsible for communicating?
- How changes in the communications process are managed?
- The flow of communications

The plan will include:

- Guidance on how to work with the media,
- How to create a news release, or news bulletin
- How to create key messages.



There will also be an appendix of templates or formats for you to use.

GETTING STARTED

Appoint someone to be the key point person for communication. This individual will be the key point person for creating a communications structure and responsible for overseeing the management of all communications. He or she may be a Council member or Mayor, or identified as the key spokesperson

It is the Communications Manager's responsibility to:

- Develop the communications framework
- Write the communications plan
- Appoint and meet with team members
- Oversee all work being created
- Conduct meetings
- Provide a budget



WRITING THE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Most Council decisions will impact a broad range of stakeholders, all of whom may have differing interests and influence on the project. There are three key elements in developing a successful communications strategy and plan when working with stakeholders to ensure a successful outcome.

- Determining the communication needs of each stakeholder group before writing the plan.
- Understanding your stakeholder's interest, point of view, expectations, and influence.
- Succinctly articulating and addressing the communications needs of your stakeholders.

To that end, the most effective way is to first identify the needs and impact of the project on stakeholders through the development of a **Stakeholder Identification Tree**, which you can refer and amend throughout the project

Developing a Stakeholder Identification Tree

Stakeholders include all individuals and organizations that are affected by the project. The first step is to write down all the names of individuals, groups and associations of stakeholders that will be affected by and impacted by the project. For example, they may be affected by the entire project as a taxpayer; issues surrounding road repairs may be affected in some areas or common public spaces such as parks may affect some or all of the community.

That's why it is important to list as many stakeholders as possible so that all aspects of the project are not missed when it comes to developing the communications plan.

Name of Stakeholder or Group

Principal contact

- Name
- Number
- Email address
- Position within the stakeholder group

- Preferred method of communications

Identify the Key Opinion Leader(s) (KOL) In-Group

A key opinion leader is someone who may have influence in the group and is regularly sought out for their opinion. They may or may not be the leader, but their opinion counts a great deal and may be key in helping communicate the plan to their stakeholder.

- Preferred method of communication?
- How will they impact the Council decision?
- How will they be impacted by the Council's decision?
- What are my communication requirements?
- What is my key message?
- Are there additional comments as it pertains to this Stakeholder?

Note: Later in your communications plan, you will begin to develop a communication strategy and plan for each stakeholder and related key messages.

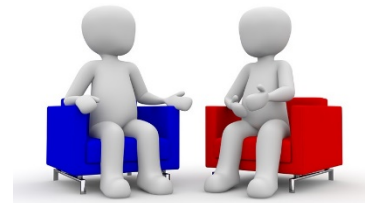
CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

There are many ways to communicate with stakeholder groups and individuals. As well, different circumstances during the length of the project may require various approaches.

Here are some of the common communication methods that may be used as one or in combination. For each communication activity your project team decides to undertake, review the channels to determine the most effective way to reach stakeholders in each instance.

Face to Face Meetings

When individuals get together in the same location or room for an in-person meeting. Face-to-Face meetings can be very efficient, it also gives individuals a chance to 'see' body language to get a feel for how a stakeholder may really be feeling about the issues. It also gives you a chance to quickly clear up misunderstandings and work through issues with participants.



Town Hall Meetings

Town Halls can be an informal way for public officials to engage their communities. Town Halls are about engaging the community more effectively and gaining credibility in the process.

It is a place for conversation, not a monologue. It is an opportunity to provide information and then LISTEN. The most productive town halls are when there is a small group of no more than 100—300 at the most. The downside of a large town hall is that it is harder for all the stakeholders to be heard, as the dominant groups tend to control the meeting.



The best structure for a town hall is to make the presentation no longer than 15-18 minutes. Then hold a question and answer period. The entire Town Hall should last no longer than 90 minutes...

The focus of the town hall meeting should address the recommendations of the plan along with proposed options. Assume in all your communications that the key question at the top of mind with your audience is, “What does it mean to me” so it is critical that you structure your presentation to ensure that value proposition and “what does it mean to me?” is always clearly explained.

Never close a town hall without ending it on a positive note. If the news is bad, acknowledge it – the worst thing you can do is run from it. Instead, find elements of promise and opportunity that your listeners can believe in and act on.

Later in the process, you might want to hold a Town Hall to hear formal submissions from stakeholders. The objective here is not to respond at the Town Hall but to listen. To keep the Town Hall orderly and to create a proper record, it is recommended that you ask stakeholders to provide a written submission, which they can then present orally at the Town Hall. Set a time limit for each submission speaker. Only ask questions for clarification. The information may highlight issues that need to be addressed folded into the plan or disregarded. What ever the case may be, it is helpful to circle back to stakeholders with an appropriate reply.

Newspaper/Media



If media exists in the region, they will be extremely interested in SOTI, as it is certainly news and will have a tremendous impact on the community. They will likely learn about it through presentations to council, if not before.

It is extremely important to ensure the media understand the Asset Management policies, plan, and environmental projects, competing priorities, associated issues, costs and options BEFORE the AMP goes public.

Schedule to meet with the Editor 'on background' to walk through the plan and recommendations and answer any questions they may have. As this plan will be complex, a thorough understanding of the proposal would be helpful for a newspaper in fully understanding the issues. Generally, you can work out an agreement that the information is 'embargoed' until it is released.

Creating key messages that are succinct, easy to understand and resonate with any audience and can be applied when dealing with both the media and the public, will be outlined in another section of this report. Other options when dealing with the media include:

- Writing a letter to the editor or an opinion piece,
- Requesting an editorial board meeting of the editor and members of its editorial staff
- Responding to media requests for interviews.

You may also decide to publish an information piece or advertorial in your local newspaper to get your messages across. An advertorial is a paid advertisement that is designed to look like an editorial to get your message across.

(In a later section we will provide tips on ways to deal with the media when answering questions)

Website or Microsite

You might consider setting up your website or setting up a special website, or microsite that contains all the information about the Asset Management policies, plan, environmental projects, contact information, suggestion box etc. Here you can post the plan, monitor and respond to comments, post-news releases and announcements. You might want to create sections for each recommendation by department or asset class.

Council Meetings

Naturally, Council meetings will be the center for debate and discussion. It is very important to ensure your key messages and responses are clear and understandable. This is where you need to stress the themes, or your key messages related to Asset Management policies, plan and environmental projects. It is important to let stakeholders know when a meeting is to be held and the agenda. You can do this by posting on your website as well as emailing stakeholder contacts to let them know. Be prepared to be able to answer questions and when you don't know the answer, promise to get back to the questioner as soon as possible.



Press Conference

A press conference is an organized gathering of the media for the purpose of distributing information or addressing community concerns via the media and answering questions. Before organizing a news conference, be objective and ask whether it is really necessary. There may be other ways to provide information to the media.

If a news conference is required, then this would require a presentation by either by a representative of council or Municipality staff. The presentation would be similar to the kind you would present at a town hall. Written materials are usually provided. They may include, a news release, a frequently asked questions sheet, a fact sheet or summary of the proposed plan and whatever documentation is deemed necessary to provide information. Preparation for a news conference should include determining every conceivable question that may be asked along with a prepared response. As well, you may want to simulate a press conference and get your colleagues to ask questions to ensure you are well prepared.

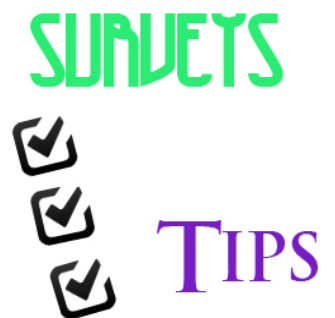
Newsletters

Newsletters or news bulletins can be used as informational updates and a good way to provide information to community and show your engagement. They can be emailed, posted on a website or sent by mail. Whatever your stakeholder preferences, a newsletter should be no longer than one or two pages with salient information. Limit it to one or two key items or issues you want to address and consider using this format to provide updates and detailed information as the project progresses.

Surveys

Surveys are an excellent way to take the pulse of your constituency and get answers. You can develop a survey if you are interested in clarifying some levels of service provided to your residents.

The link below takes you to a free survey website you might consider to develop a survey for your residents: www.surveymonkey.com. Some municipalities are also creating a hard copy to catch people while they are paying their taxes, etc. The survey is the first step to a more detailed strategic plan, which can be set up for you at a later date. With Survey Monkey (surveymonkey.com) you can easily design a survey including polls and get feedback in real time.



News Releases

There is a special skill in putting a news release together and a direct style of writing that appeals to editors and journalists. A news release answers the basics of who, what, where, when and why. If your material does not answer one of these questions, then it doesn't belong in your release, so keep your release tight, concise, and factual. A typical use of a news release related to your municipality's situation may include a Media Advisory, to inform the media that a news conference or Town Hall is being held at particular time, location and day. It would also include the topic, and a key contact for further information.

Your news release may announce new information pertaining to the Asset Management policies, plan and environmental projects, changes to the projects, funding updates, etc. Whatever the reason for the release, it should in the first paragraph, have the main news point usually within the first sentence and

the headline. So, the news release is organized by the most newsworthy up top and less important information towards the bottom. Just like a key message, the release needs to be concise, without formal or the use of jargon.

Developing a Media List

Just as you have done with a stakeholder tree, the same thing is true of a Media list. Write down the publication or media outlet, the key person or contact. (There may be more than one contact) their interest in the project, contact information and any other knowledge you may have regarding their point of view on the project.

CREATING A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Once you have identified your stakeholders, their issues, concerns, impact on the project and how they will be impacted, the next step is to determine how you will communicate with them, by what means and with what messages.

Developing Key Messages

“Municipalities that consistently plan their communications efforts find that they are perceived more favorably by the public, spend resources more wisely and anticipate situations before they spiral out of control.” Scott Summerfield- Communications Professional

Key Messages are at the core of all communications planning. Your key messages are what you want your audience to remember after your presentation, speech, media interview or meeting with stakeholders. Your message may inform the public about an issue, program or crises, generate or rebuild public confidence, or stimulate public action.

A key message is not a fact or statistic, it is a statement that succinctly communicates what the public needs to know about a particular issue, policy, or activity.

Developing a key message involves, distilling the most important aspects of the information you want to convey into simple easy to understand top line messages.

Typically, you want to create three to four overall key messages for an issue and a set of key messages tailored to the interests of each stakeholder group.

Example

“Our Council takes pride in our role to provide and maintain local and public services in our community. In the interests of providing good government we have gone through an assessment review (SOTI). What we’ve found is that our current model, which has enabled us thus far, to maintain services, will be unsustainable in the future. We simply will not be able to fund some of the repairs, and necessary maintenance and improvements in our infrastructure of roads, sewers, bridges, and buildings, with the existing level of funding. We will need to look at the costs involved in replacement, rehabilitation and maintenance requirements and determine the best course of action



and that means making Tough Choices.” Then you need to create a set of facts or statistics or ‘proof points that back up each message. Finally,

Questions You Need to Ask



- What is the ‘take-away’ you want your audience to remember?
- What is needed to motivate people/stakeholders to action?
- What is the value that you bring to the issue/point of view/concern etc.?
- How do these statements align with our goals and objectives?
- What do stakeholders need to know?
- What are the benefits/value proposition to your plan/issue/goal/objectives?
- How relevant is what you need to communicate?

SELECTED KEY MESSAGES

Three messages have been created to provide as a guideline when developing messaging and responses. There is the **Historical Message**, which provides messaging when responding to questions about how this situation developed. There is the messaging regarding what is now required for a community to move forward to **make decisions** and manage expectations. There is the **“Looking to the Future”** Message, which sums up the value proposition related to maintaining community assets and the future of the community.

Historical Message

We are not alone in struggling to maintain existing infrastructure under current tax and rate levels. This is an issue most municipalities are facing across Canada.

Proof Point

Most of the infrastructure we need to renew was built in the 1950's & 1960's and is reaching their projected lifespan. Coupled with the fact that in 1962, 22 cents of every dollar was spent on infrastructure by the Federal Government and by 2002 only 12 cents of every dollar. Which means that public infrastructure has suffered from decades of extensive overuse and possible neglect. We now need to address the situation.

Example: If a road is maintained at current levels, it will experience a 25% drop in the condition of the road in xxx years. If a \$1 is spent today to rehabilitate the road, it will experience a 60% drop in the condition of the road. However, if the cost to either maintenance or to rehabilitate is delayed, it will cost \$8 and the road will need to be completely replaced, which you can see is costlier, the longer there is a delay.

Proof Point

- Rebuilding would cost x and last xxx years, while resurfacing costs x and will last x years. Other considerations regarding a road could include the potential for safety hazards.
- Should we continue to service our community with a library or join forces with other nearby Municipalities to provide one library for the area?
- What is the cost of maintaining vs. relocating or amalgamating?

Value Proposition (Confidently Looking to the Future)

The report spells out what needs to be done to protect our assets, whether it is maintaining, replacing or rehabilitating. We now have the analytical tools and information necessary to implement a comprehensive and cohesive asset management plan. We now need to come up with a long-range asset management plan and strategy. We can no longer 'borrow' from our future. Confident that together, as a community, we will come up with a prudent plan that meets our longer-term targets.

DEALING WITH THE MEDIA



I have been both a journalist covering municipal, provincial and federal politics as well as on the 'other side' explaining company positions on complex and controversial issues and answering questions. My best advice is to be well prepared, avoid jargon and overly technical explanations and speak plainly. Journalists have a job to do by providing information to the community and they can help you get your

message across. You should expect to get a fair hearing of your point-of-view but don't expect the media to take your side. There is no such thing as "off the record", assume that everything you say may be used. Remember, if you choose to say "no comment" it can reflect badly on you. A journalist's boss is the editor or producer. They, not the journalist, usually decide what appears and how it appears. Appendix D is a template for creating media contact list

Preparing for The Media Interview

- Avoid going into a media interview 'cold' – prepare yourself.
- Develop your own strategy for the story: decide on the key points **you** want to get across and how you can work them into the interview. Think about the types of questions that could be asked and have your answers ready.
- Be sure of your facts. Know the case for the opposing point-of-view and what stories have recently been reported. Be ready to present your side without appearing defensive
- Plan the points you want to make before the interview begins (2-3 key points) and know what you want to say before going into an interview.
- Speak in a language everyone understands. Don't use industry 'jargon' and always define industry terms. Remember, effective communications means being understood.

Doing the Media Interview

- Be friendly – a journalist is helping you to reach the public.
- Make **positive** statements about **your** sector or area of expertise.
- Be honest and direct. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Journalists know when you're trying to hide something and will do their best to get it out of you. Never make quotes unless **you** can substantiate them and only talk about things you **know**.
- Be brief and concise. Put your most important point first and learn to talk in statements. Avoid run-on-sentences. This is especially important for radio and TV (electronic) interviews, which want short (6 second) clips not long explanations.
- Take control. Don't be afraid to steer the interview to your key points. And make your points often.
- **When you've answered the question or make your points, stop talking! Resist the urge to fill 'dead space'.**
- Illustrate your point with personal examples or analogies that others unfamiliar with the topic can relate to. Not only does this help to make you understood, but also it adds interest to the story. (Give an example)
- Don't get bogged down in statistics and numbers – especially on radio and TV.
- Don't repeat a journalist's buzz words – unless they are your own and are positive. If a reporter asks questions using loaded or negative buzz words, do not give credence to them by using them. You can also provide a service by explaining why such words or phrases are incorrect.
- Try to avoid answering hypothetical "what if" questions. Make your own statement. If you don't understand a question, ask the reporter to re-phrase it.
- If a statement is made that is not true, refute it immediately and politely. Make sure to correct it in an informative and helpful manner.
- If you don't like the question, you don't have to respond to it directly. Either rephrase the general message on the topic using your key point or refer the journalist to someone better qualified to answer.
- **Rephrase your key points in a response.**
- **Repeat key points for clarity and emphasis.**

- Keep your cool. Journalists may try to bait you and put you on the defensive. In these situations, remain calm and take your time explaining your point-of-view. Even if your explanations don't end up in the news story it will help the journalist's understanding.
- Keep a record of media contacts. This will help you remember which journalists are fair and balanced and who you can call on when you have something to say.
- Be confident, concise and enthusiastic.

Staying on Message

1. **If you are being asked the wrong questions, the interviewer is missing the point, or irrelevant issues are being asked, there are ways of refocusing, bridging, and staying "on Message":**
 - a) The real issue is...
 - b) I'd like to emphasize...
 - c) Let me begin with....
 - d) I'd like to focus on....
2. **To focus the interview on your key points, you can choose to "cherry pick" and address the issue points you need, again, staying "on Message":**
 - a) The most important point your raise is...
 - b) Our main concern is...
 - c) Your questions raise the important issue of...
 - d) I understand your concerns, and...
 - e) I can see how someone might get that impression, but...

CONCLUSION

It is a Council's responsibility to **effectively communicate, gather support, and lead their community** by making the **tough decisions** required to build a strategy for self-sufficiency.



Only by stakeholder buy-in on a practical and implementable AM plan can communities stem their infrastructure deficit, maintain a quality of life and plot a course for the future with confidence.

Form 1 - Communication Strategy - Key Messaging

Historical Message

Proof Point

Value Proposition (Looking to the Future)

Channels of Communication

- Y/N - Stakeholder Meetings
- Y/N - Face to Face Meetings
- Y/N - Town Hall Meetings
- Y/N - Newspaper/Media
- Y/N - Website or Microsite
- Y/N - Council Meetings
- Y/N - Press Conference
- Y/N - Newsletters
- Y/N - Surveys
- Y/N - News Releases
- Y/N – Media

Notes:

Form 2 – Communication Strategy – Stakeholder Communications

Group Name: _____

Principal Contact: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email address: _____

Position within the stakeholder group: _____

Preferred method of communications: _____

Group Key Opinion Leader: _____

How will Stakeholder impact the Council decision?

How will Stakeholder be impacted by the Council's decision?

What are my communication requirements?

What is my key message?

Are there additional comments as it pertains to this Stakeholder?
