TIPS FOR WATER-RELATED COMMUNICATIONS

Communicate Clearly & Transparently

SOLIDIFIES PURPOSE

UNIFIES YOUR MEMBERS

CREATES POSITIVE IMPACT ON PERCEPTION
The absence of information cannot only lead to an absence of perception, but to a negative perception.
Challenges and Changes

NOT ALWAYS WELCOME

NATURAL & INFREQUENT

SHOULD BE EXPECTED

CHANGE IS NECESSARY TO AFFECT REAL RESULTS
Water crisis in Flint, MI
City changed its water source to the Flint River without corrosion control treatment
City was being run by state-appointed financial manager
Corrosive water leached lead into water supply
Aging distribution lines and home plumbing
Residents’ complaints about lead and other water issues were ignored
Michigan Dept. of Environmental Quality Director:

– Government needs to engage with experts and the public when infrastructure changes are made, particularly in an aging system.
Michigan Dept. of Environmental Quality Director:
– Government at all levels needs to collaboratively communicate.
Every community water system should be equipped with information customers are seeking.

Safe Drinking Water Act requires annual Consumer Confidence Report (CCR) be provided to the public.

Paper copies can be made available, or link could be provided on utility’s website.
Teaching consensus can be a challenge.
Timing of communication tasks can be critical to success.
Swift review and action is needed.
MAKE YOUR MESSAGE EASY TO UNDERSTAND

• People must understand a message to re-communicate it
• If message is too long, people will shorten or simplify it
STOP RUMORS BEFORE THEY START

• Communicate
• Monitor social media
• Stay transparent
• Interact
MAKE YOUR MISSION LOUD AND CLEAR

• Define the brand and mission
• Keep this “elevator speech” fresh in your mind
• Terms should be established that clearly explain water issues in a manner that avoids confusion

• Sometimes, there is considerable inconsistency in use of terms

• Words have strong effect on the way people think
• Think it through as a group, if possible, before issuing information

• Include a communications expert

• Explain the bottom line first, then provide some technical background, if necessary, and answer questions
PROVIDE TIMELY AND ACCURATE FLOW OF INFORMATION

• Internal stakeholders
• “People in the Know”
  – Elected representatives
  – Employees
  – Committees
  – Boards
  – Districts
Flow of Information

PROVIDE TIMELY AND ACCURATE FLOW OF INFORMATION

• External Stakeholders
  – General Public
  – Individuals
  – Schools
  – Businesses
  – Governing or Regulatory Agencies
  – Agricultural Groups
  – Others
TIPS FOR WATER-RELATED COMMUNICATIONS

Build Trust, Accountability, & Approachability

Offer helpful information and services, often

Key to gaining general support

Over time, reduces negative or non-existent perceptions
TIPS FOR WATER-RELATED COMMUNICATIONS

Strengthen Relationships

MEMBERS | PEER GROUPS | AGENCIES/ POLICY MAKERS | PUBLIC
TIPS FOR WATER-RELATED COMMUNICATIONS

Listen

Hold Public Meetings

Hold Internal Meetings

Be Active On Social Media
• Don’t wait for times when you “need” the public or media
• Increase communication reach and frequency
• Go beyond project-specific needs
Increase Awareness of Your Importance

- Publish frequent newsletters, website articles, or blog entries
- Print brief thank you on customers’ utility bills for entrusting the utility with providing drinking water
- Be available to the media
Celebrate Successes

TELL PEOPLE ABOUT ALL THE GREAT AND HELPFUL THINGS YOU’RE DOING

WHEN SUCCESS STORIES ARE TOLD IN A FACTUAL MANNER, IT WON’T LOOK LIKE BOASTING
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