Guide: How to communicate effectively

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Why do we need to think about how we communicate?

The simple answer is - when people understand they are more willing to act.

Helping someone to understand your perspective and trust your expertise requires a bit of work, no matter who you are working with.

When we think of effective communication in relationship to our activity management planning, it's about sharing the right level of detail with the right people, at the right time, to inspire action.

There are critical people in your organisation and partner organisations who make decisions that significantly impact your role. For you to have an influence on their decision-making process, these key people need to:

- Trust that you have an accurate view of the challenges and opportunities
- Understand why you are making your recommendations; and
- Be willing to act or make decisions based on this information.

How do we communicate effectively?

Listening well and a bit of planning can help build trust with your key audiences, increase their understanding of the impact of your recommendations, and inspire them to act.

The foundation of communication planning is based on the answers to the following questions:

- Who are you speaking to?
- How well do you know this person/people and how well do they know you?
- What information do they need, and when do they need it by?
- What do they need to do with that information?

Step by step guide for planning your storytelling

Steps	Questions to ask yourself	Output	Impact
STEP 1: **Define your goals**	What does success look like for you? This may vary depending on the level of sophistication of your AMP development process.	A list of 2-3 goals you are trying to achieve. Example: 1. Inclusion of full maintenance schedule for x asset in LTP. 2. CEO is a champion for AMP and our planning approach. 3. Rate payers understand why their rates will increase and the positive impact of our recommended maintenance and renewal work on the local network.	Keeping your goals in mind helps you prioritise your audiences and investment of time and money.
STEP 2: **List your key audiences**	Who are the decision-makers who have the greatest influence on the success of your goals? Who are the other (secondary) audiences who need to understand your work, but whose understanding may not impact the success of your goals?	A list of your primary, secondary and tertiary audiences. It is important to be specific here and list individuals, rather than groups, especially for primary and secondary audiences.	Having a list of your primary and secondary audiences will help you focus and plan your time efficiently. A specific and planned approach will increase the likelihood of building trust, increasing understanding, and inspiring action with your key people.

| STEP 3:

Understand your key audiences | For each audience (individual or group) find answers to the following questions:

• What is their background?
• What level of technical understanding do they have?
• What are their priorities/concerns?
• What is their availability (i.e. will they have time to meet with you and when)?
• How strong is the existing relationship? Do they already trust you or do you need to build trust?
• What other programmes of work or key events are competing for their attention? How does your AMP relate to that work?
• What deadlines are they working towards?
• How can the AMP help them with decision-making for these deadlines, events, etc? | A spreadsheet or table that allows you to easily scan through the answers to these questions for each individual/group.

It may be a shared document within your team, or a document you keep private, depending on the level of detail you record about each individual.

Categorise each audience as a primary, secondary or tertiary audience.

Primary – an individual or group that you communicate with directly.

Secondary – an individual or group that your primary audience communicates with directly.

Tertiary – an individual or group who receive information from other sources, i.e., social media, newsletters, community groups, etc. | The answers to these questions guide your storytelling – from the timing through to the information and level of detail included in your communications.

The better you understand who you are talking to, the greater the likelihood that they will be in a position to listen to you and take action based on your recommendations. |
| STEP 4:

Define the actions | What are the actions you need each of your audiences to take for you to reach your goals stated in Step 1?

Each audience may have a different action you need them to take. | Add a column to your audience spreadsheet or table that clearly states the call to action for each audience.

Make this action clear and concise. For example:

• I need the CEO to accept a meeting with me to present the AMP and discuss (x) project.
• At the end of that meeting, I need the CEO to support my recommendation by doing (y). | Busy people appreciate clarity and concise language.

The more time you spend clarifying what you need from people, the easier it will be to create clear and concise messages that will inspire that action. |

STEP 5: **Key messages**	What are the key pieces of information or messages each audience need to understand to take the action you've listed in Step 4?	Another column in your spreadsheet or table. Again, be as clear and concise as possible. Avoid jargon or technical terms as they often require prior knowledge or understanding.	Key messages help you quickly tailor an email, document, presentation or conversation to your audience. Having these messages linked to the actions from Step 4 ensure that all communications or storytelling efforts get you closer to that desired action and achieving your stated goals.
STEP 6: **Channels and tools**	How do your audiences prefer to receive information? For example: email, newsletter, one on one meeting, group briefing, webinar, etc? Do they like to see raw data, or do they prefer a high-level overview of the challenges, opportunities and impacts? How much time do you have with them? One half hour meeting, a 10 minute presentation, or a series of emails over time? Do you have direct access to them or do you need to communicate to them through your primary audience or a different communication channel, i.e., newsletter, media, social media, etc.	Add a column to your spreadsheet to define the audience's preferred communication channels. Add another column to list the communication tools you'll need to get your key messages out on this channel, for example: • infographic • flow chart • collection of raw data • report visualisation • photos or video that tell the human side of your story	People are most receptive to information when it has been tailored to their learning, information gathering and decision-making preferences. Doing this work well will improve your chances of inspiring the right actions and achieving your goals.

Turning your planning into practice

With these steps complete you'll be able to start writing, creating, or preparing to speak to your key audiences.

Depending on the amount of time you have available, you may or may not be able to achieve all your goals in your set timeframe. It's best to think of this process as just that – a process. The work you do now can be built on over time.

Trust, understanding and willingness to take a desired action are all foundations of strong relationships – the more effort you put in to building and maintaining these relationships, the more you'll get back.

More information

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Working in partnership to support the sector since 2012