

CREATING A COMMUNICATION PLAN

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Summary

This fact sheet discusses what a communication plan is and its components. There is also information on how to structure a communication and engagement plan, and how to measure the success of the plan.

Keywords: community engagement, communication tools, collecting data, analyzing data

Why Is Communication and Engagement Important?

It is important that a community discusses how to involve people in decision making and implementation. Engagement and communication are crucial for all stages of the planning

Communication and engagement allow members to be actively involved at every stage of the community's development agenda.

process.¹ Engagement and communication help to determine how the community brings its members together to share ideas on moving the community forward.

When results are achieved or problems arise, engagement and communication is needed to enable the planning team to tell the community what is happening. Similarly, communication and

engagement allow members to be actively involved at every stage of the community's development agenda.

The engagement and communication plan can have sections like: Goals and objectives; Principles; Level of engagement; Audience identification; Methods and materials; Monitoring and feedback.

What Is a Communication Plan?

A communication plan is a tool that describes how information about programmes will be communicated to community members.²

Why Develop Goals and Objectives?

Developing goals and objectives enables your community to establish long term aims of what you would like your communication and engagement activities to look like and gives your community a sense of direction on how to reach those aims. The goals and objectives help the community understand the purpose of the engagement and communication plan and ensures that the community "has a shared understanding of engagement objectives and principles, key messages, challenges and opportunities, activities and tools, and evaluation".³

For more information on goals and objectives, see the *Setting Goals and Objectives* fact sheet.

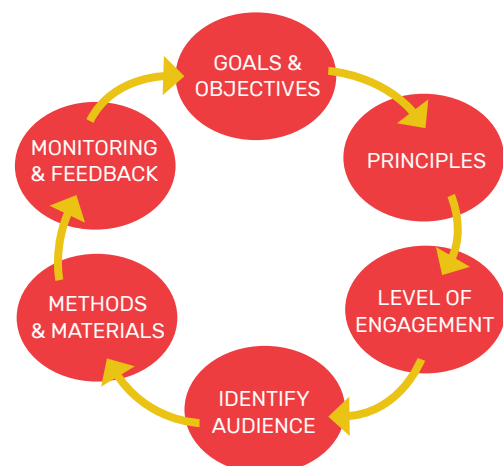


Figure 1 | Steps in creating a communication and engagement plan.

How Do You Establish Principles?

The principles guide how a community can incorporate its values into communication and engagement planning.⁴ The principles also serve as a guide to tap into the experiences of members living both on- and off-reserve for community plan preparation and implementation. There is no complete list of principles to include in the engagement and communication plan. You choose the principles to include based on the values your community wants to attach to its engagement and communication activities.

Table 1 | Sample community engagement and communication principles.

Adapted from (Perth and Smiths Falls District Hospital. "Communications Strategy & Community Engagement Framework." *Perth and Smiths Falls District Hospital*, February 28, 2017. Accessed November 11, 2019, <https://psfdh.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/PSFDH-Comm-Engage-Plan-2017-Approved-Feb-28-17.pdf>. p.4)

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| <p>Effective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage early enough to make a difference Resource it properly Monitor and evaluate its effectiveness | <p>Timely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform participants about how long an engagement is expected to last and when feedback will occur |
| <p>Inclusive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that a cross section of the community is invited to the engagement activity | <p>Appropriate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize levels and methods of engagement and communication that are appropriate to the purpose of the engagement |
| <p>Transparent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with stakeholders in an open process, with transparent purpose, goals, expectations and constraints Be open about how the engagement will be used in decision-making | <p>Balanced and accountable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balance the participation and influence of participant groups Monitor the ongoing effectiveness of the community engagement and communication strategy |
| <p>Community benefit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide clear, accessible and comprehensive information to participants to facilitate involvement | <p>Respectful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use tools appropriate to participants, hear and listen to what people say Create realistic timelines |

What Is Your Current Level of Community Engagement?

Community engagement and communication has the potential to move community members from passive participants to empowered leaders.⁵ That is, they can change from being observers and consumers of decisions to making decisions on issues that affect their livelihoods.

There are five levels of engagement that measure the involvement of community members in decision-making.⁶ Your community may assess their present position on the levels of engagement in Figure 2 and use the communication and engagement plan as a tool for ongoing improvement.

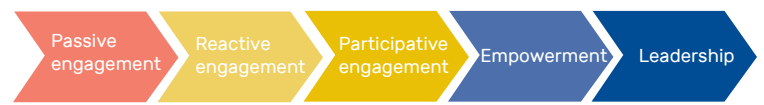


Figure 2 | The levels of community engagement.

Adapted from (Darrell Phillips & Wanda Phillips-Beck, "Moving Towards a Stronger Future: An Aboriginal Resource Guide for Community Development", *Public Safety Canada*, 2015, Accessed November 12, 2019, <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsracs/pblctns/mvng-twrd-strngr-ftr/mvng-twrd-strngr-ftr-en.pdf> p.45)

Levels of Community Engagement

1 Passive Engagement

At this level, community members are only informed of issues by Chief and Council and band staff but have minimal contributions to the issues at hand.

2 Reactive Engagement

Community members provide input into the issues, but band administration and Chief and Council still lead in handling issues and maintaining priorities and resource use.

3 Participative Engagement

Community members increase their influence on the priorities and resources of the community as well as available external resources.

4 Empowerment

Community members work in partnership with the band staff to share in the planning and implementation of mutually agreed-upon actions.

5 Leadership

At this level, community members take the front role in initiating, planning and implementing actions and only seek support from external sources on technical skills beyond their capacity.

Who Are Your Audiences?

Every community is made up of varied and overlapping groups such as youth, Elders, knowledge keepers, men, women and community organizations. Together, these groups make the community what it is. Each of the identified groups and organizations may have different influences, information and interests in the community's development.

Your community can also visualize its long-term decision-making ability and targets using the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Geometry lesson⁷ in Figure 3 which advocates for community members to lead the decision-making processes and only involve external professionals when in need of technical expertise.

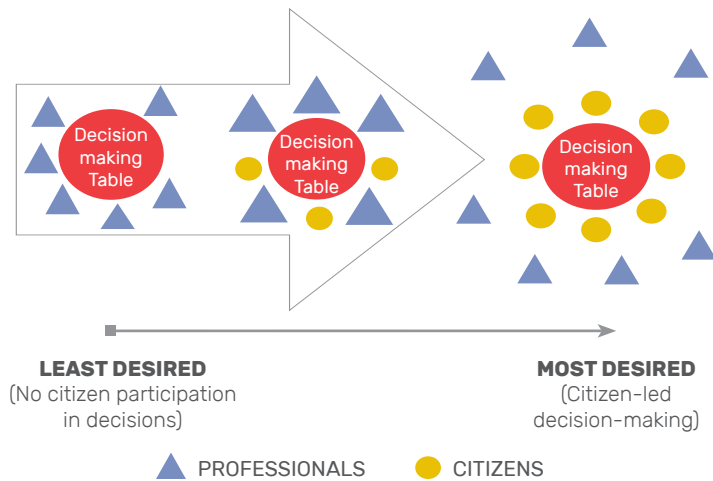


Figure 3 | ABCD Geometry Lesson

Adapted from (Dan Duncan. "The Components of Effective Collective Impact." Digital image. *Clear Impact*, December 2016, Accessed November 12, 2019 <https://clearimpact.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/The-Components-of-Effective-Collective-Impact.pdf> p.4)

You may need different strategies to communicate with the different groups in your community. Unique groups in your community may have different perspectives and ways of seeing the world. By knowing what groups and organizations exist in your community, you can determine the appropriate tools to use in engaging and communicating with them.

What Are Some Ways to Communicate?

Outreach Materials

The type of material used in engagement and communication, and the key messages, must be clear to the audience. The key messages should also be consistent with the goals and objectives. The information should be timely and useful when they are communicated.⁸ The communication approach and the way information is displayed should be appropriate and tailored to your audience. You may also explain the purpose of key messages whether it is to show results, lessons learnt, next steps, etc. The engagement and communication materials should have:

1. Attention grabbing content
2. Easy to understand visuals
3. Legible materials

Methods

How will the message get to the target audience? Different methods are appropriate for different events and different

audiences. For some events, a combination of several methods may be appropriate. In other instances, the method to use may be tied to the venue for the engagement session. The type of method or combination of methods to use are community specific.⁹

Some communities have used methods including online discussion forums, community art, radio meetings and newsletters as ways of engaging and increasing communication among community members.¹⁰

For more information on designing communication methods, see the *Sharing Your Community Plan* and *Communicating Ideas Using Visual Aids* fact sheets.

Community Calendar

A community calendar helps you understand when to hold community engagement activities.¹¹ Certain seasons may not be appropriate to schedule engagement activities because of cultural or traditional activities, or conflicts with other community events. In developing the community calendar, all important community dates, events and seasonal activities can be highlighted on the calendar. It may also be important to develop a month-to-month calendar in order to effectively track community activities. Having a community calendar designed for internal use helps you know when people are available and when it is best to schedule community engagement meetings and activities.

Why Should You Monitor Progress and Evaluate Success?

The engagement and communication plan requires regular check-ins, evaluation and review to determine if the goals and objectives are being met. This should be done periodically during the implementation of the plan. How often these measurement and checks occur is dependent on the preferences of the community. You can use performance indicators such as;

- How many engagement activities have been completed?
- What was the attendance like at the activities?
- What was the average time of the activities?
- How involved were the participants?

This way, you can assess the effectiveness of the methods, period of engagement, participant involvement, and other parameters you have included in your engagement and communication plan. There should be a feedback loop in the engagement and communication plan so that any lessons learnt from previous implementation can be used to improve the plan in the future.

For more information on assessing your communication plan's effectiveness, see the *Monitoring Your Progress* fact sheet.

Final Thoughts

Having an engagement and communication plan is a good way for a community to control how it strengthens participation in decision-making and project implementation.

A plan allows your community to explore the best ways of connecting with one another and with both local and external organizations in the community's development.

Further Reading

Creating the Culture for Community Engagement by Lisa Attygalle Author

This paper provides strategies for changing and improving communication and community engagement.

<https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Publications/Creating%20the%20Culture%20for%20Engagement.pdf?hsCtaTracking=72586817-38d8-4bc3-989d-0952912b95da%7C53d7d90b-ae83-4438-8aa3-a5575051c37b>

Community Engagement Framework: A Guide to Effective Partnership Building by Mount Sinai Hospital.

This publication provides an outline to guide communities in developing their own communication and engagement plan.

https://www.mountsinai.on.ca/about_us/community-development-integration/Community-Engagement-Framework.pdf

Community Engagement and Communication by The Health Systems Intelligence Project, Ontario.

This document contains in-depth information about developing a communication and engagement plan. While the focus is on health service providers, the strategies discussed can be used in other contexts.

<http://www.ontla.on.ca/library/repository/mon/15000/268203.pdf>

Endnotes

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