

Communications planning

Communicate, and establish relationships, with decision makers and other stakeholders. A communications plan needs to address who (audience), what (message, content of communication), why (purpose), when (how often, or timing), and how (method of communication).

Who: Identify stakeholders.

Who do you need to communicate with? Who needs to be informed?

Stakeholders may include:

-  Mayor
-  Council
-  Municipal departments
-  Homeowners
-  Landowners (e.g. golf courses, school boards)
-  Resource-care professionals (e.g. arborists, landscapers, forestry professionals, nursery and greenhouse employees)
-  ENGO's
-  Interest groups (e.g. master gardeners, nature groups)
-  Media

Why: Determine the objective of communication with each stakeholder group.

For example, seeking budget approval (mayor, council), announcing new emerald ash borer detections (all stakeholders), informing about impending tree treatment or removal (homeowners, ENGO's etc.).

What: Identify the key messages to each group.

Some things to consider:

-  What are you trying to achieve with the message (e.g. educate, build support, or obtain funding)?
-  Communications objectives for each stakeholder group should be S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-focused).
-  Communicate what you are doing and why you are doing it.
-  Be brief.
-  Highlight the positive aspects of what you are doing but don't mislead the audience.
-  Support the message with facts.
-  Explain to the audience why they should care.
-  Speak to all of your audience.
-  Since the message may be controversial, anticipate questions or issues that will arise and be prepared to respond to them.

When: Establish how often communication with each group will happen.
E.g. monthly, quarterly, or as needed.

How: Describe the method(s) of communication to be used for each stakeholder group. Strategies include: in-person presentations or meetings (e.g. mayor, council), website updates & community open houses, email, formal reports, informal reports, phone calls, brochures, advertising, and social networking.

Consider how key stakeholders are likely to react to the message. Do you have a plan for dealing with key stakeholders that are likely to react negatively? For example, perhaps you consult with them in advance, or, think about how you will respond to them if you can't address their concerns. Conversely, can you use the support of those that will react positively?

Sample communication plan template*:

Message/content (what)	Objective (why)	Stakeholder (who)	Timing or frequency (when)	Method of communication (how)

*See the Sample Management Plan for AshTown Ontario for a worked example.

Information from: <http://davefleet.com/2008/08/strategic-communications-planning-a-free-ebook/>