



**PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK**

# **Communicating About Water**

## **3-Part Webinar Series**



# Introduction

As a water service provider, your core focus has always been to protect public health and the environment. Water professionals have traditionally fulfilled this public health mission through consistent but largely silent and unseen operations. The remote, underground nature of water utility infrastructure and operations has allowed customers to overlook the magnitude of effort required to collect, treat and distribute clean, safe and high-quality drinking water, and, more importantly, the integral role water utilities play in their daily lives.

Today, however, media coverage around drinking water quality incidents, widespread broadcasting through social media, and increasing public distrust of government agencies means your community needs to hear from you. Ensuring this success story continues will require you to adapt to the relentlessly changing world of communications and bring your voice to the water conversation.

Proactive communication is a common trait among effective leaders and an increasingly critical attribute of successful utilities operating in today's media and communication environment. In the absence of effective communication, utilities are at risk of:

- A decrease in community understanding of the services you provide
- Loss of support for future, and increasingly critical, rate change requests
- Loss of support for infrastructure investment and expansion

## OVERVIEW

# Communicating About Water Webinar Series



### Why is it so important?

- Today's communication landscape
- How to set your communication goals
- Introduction to building effective communications



### Building your communication plan

- Prioritizing stakeholders
- Developing messages specific to stakeholders
- Identifying appropriate communication channels
- How and when to engage with stakeholders



### Putting the pieces together

- Getting your story out there consistently and accurately
- Putting the plan in action: Communications Plan Case Study

## COMMUNICATING ABOUT WATER

# Why is it so important?

## Today's Communication Landscape

### TRADITIONAL MEDIA<sup>1</sup>:

The last 25 years has seen the decline of traditional media, newspapers, TV and radio as a result of the rise of digital news outlets. Newspapers have seen the biggest decline with reduced circulation numbers, plummeting advertising revenue and massive reductions in newsroom staff.

Just **two-in-ten** U.S. adults often get news from print newspapers.



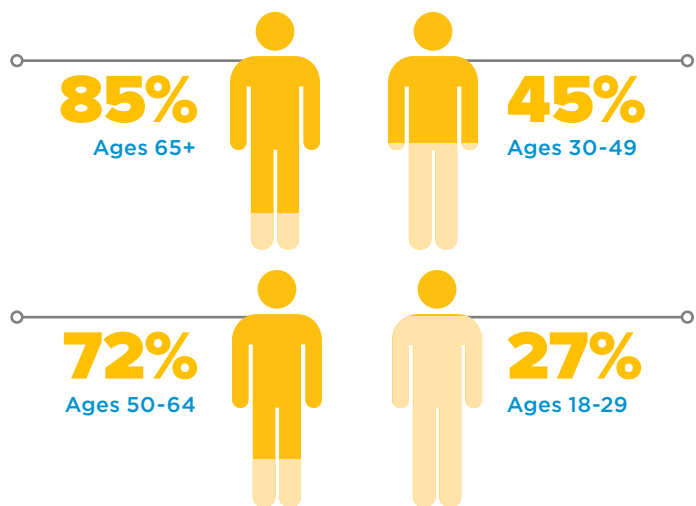
Compared with print, nearly twice as many adults gets news from:



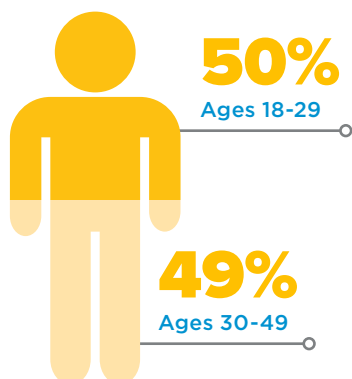
<sup>1</sup>Source: <https://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/pathways-to-news/>



While solid majorities of those ages 50-64 and those 65+ often get news on TV, far smaller shares of younger adults do so.



Alternatively, the two younger groups of adults are much more likely than older adults to turn to online platforms for news.

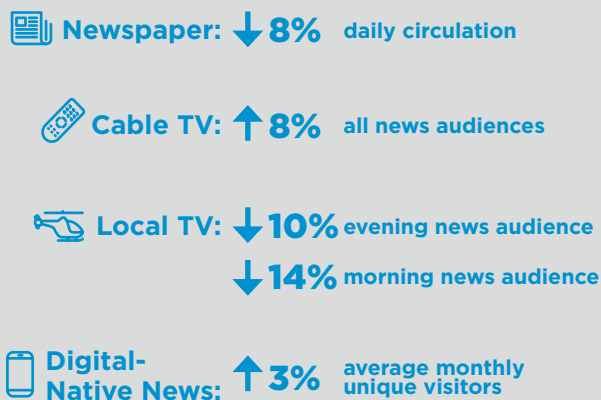


Within the digital realm, mobile news consumption is rising rapidly. The portion of Americans who get news on a mobile device has gone up from

**54%** in 2013 **to 72%** today.

## Key Annual Audience Trends

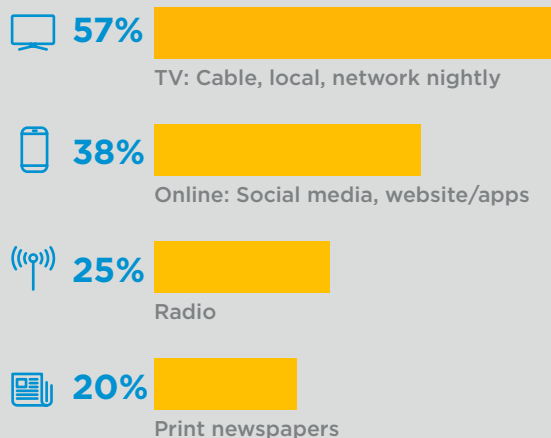
2018 VS. 2017<sup>2</sup>



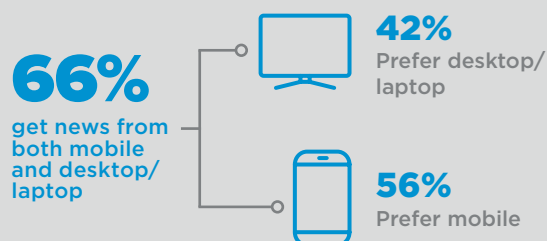
<sup>2</sup>Sources: Pew Research Center analysis of Alliance for Audited Media data; Comscore TV Essentials, 2017 and 2018, U.S.; Comscore StationView Essentials, 2017 and 2018 U.S.; Comscore Media Metrix Multi-Platform, U.S., Unique Visitors, October-December 2017-2018.

## Four-in-Ten Americans Often Get News Online

% of U.S. adults who get news on each platform



## Among people who get news on both, more prefer mobile<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup><https://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/pathways-to-news/>

## SOCIAL MEDIA

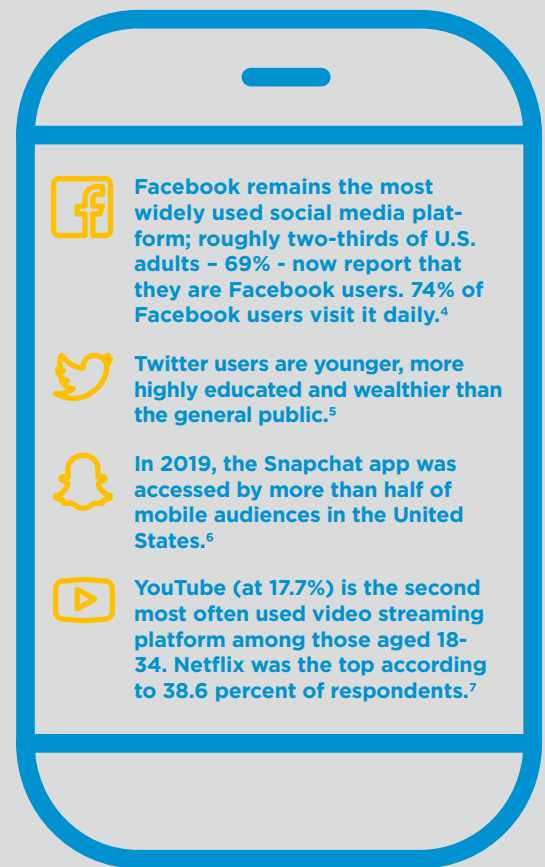
The explosion of social media over the past decade has changed how we communicate, providing a platform for consumers to engage and connect on a global scale. Conversations about water are happening 24 hours a day, 365 days a year inside social media. Customers can share information, raise awareness and rally support for issues they care about, reaching beyond friends and family to hundreds or thousands of users on numerous social media platforms.

<sup>4</sup>Pew Research 2019  
(<https://pewrsr.ch/2vxjuj3>)

<sup>5</sup>Pew Research 2019  
(<https://www.pewinternet.org/2019/04/24/sizing-up-twitter-users/>)

<sup>6</sup>Statista 2019  
(<https://www.statista.com/statistics/281605/reach-of-leading-us-smartphone-apps/>)

<sup>7</sup>Variety 2019  
(<https://variety.com/2019/digital/news/youtube-2-billion-users-tv-screen-watch-time-hours-1203204267/>)



Facebook remains the most widely used social media platform; roughly two-thirds of U.S. adults – 69% – now report that they are Facebook users. 74% of Facebook users visit it daily.<sup>4</sup>



Twitter users are younger, more highly educated and wealthier than the general public.<sup>5</sup>



In 2019, the Snapchat app was accessed by more than half of mobile audiences in the United States.<sup>6</sup>



YouTube (at 17.7%) is the second most often used video streaming platform among those aged 18-34. Netflix was the top according to 38.6 percent of respondents.<sup>7</sup>

## UTILITY CHALLENGES

Most Americans report that trust in local government is much higher than their trust in state and federal governments, however, civility itself has become a concern, even locally. Citizens see government officials as distant bureaucrats. They are skeptical about the virtues, capabilities and good sense of their public officials. Highly polarized policy debates, inaction of elected leaders and seeming inability to compromise has produced levels of citizen distrust that are higher than ever. As a result of this erosion in trust, the public has evolved increasing expectations for engagement and information about decisions that affect them.

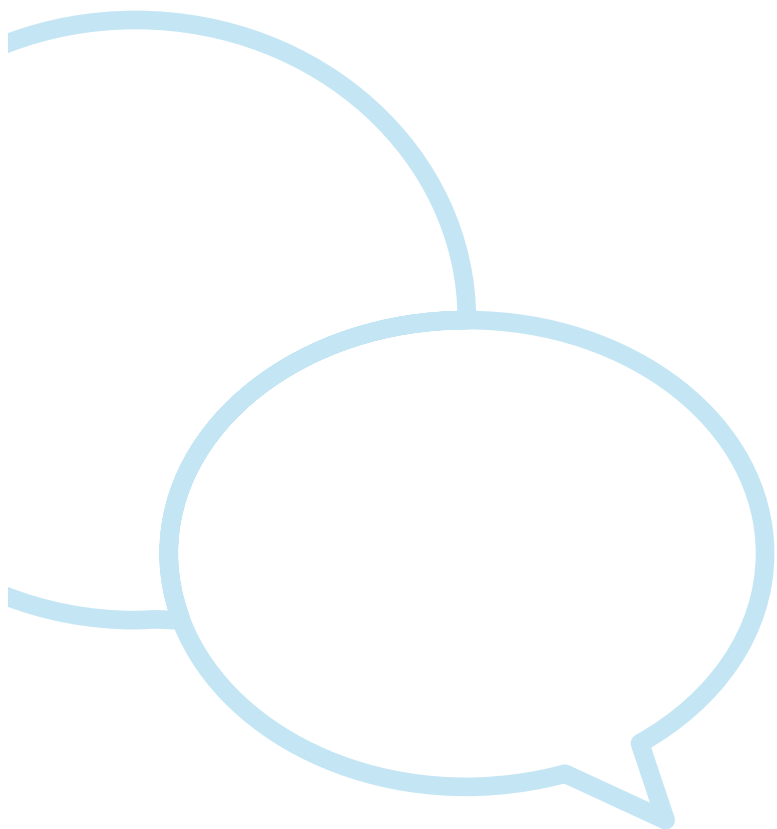
Within this environment, utilities are seeking the support of the communities they serve to address the myriad of financial and operational challenges of 21st century utility management.

### Top 10 Challenges for Utilities<sup>8</sup>

1. Renewal and replacement of aging infrastructure
2. Financing for capital improvements
3. Long-term water supply availability
4. Public understanding of the value of water systems and services
5. Watershed/source water protection
6. Public understanding of the value of water resources
7. Groundwater management and overuse
8. Aging workforce/anticipated retirements
9. Emergency preparedness
10. Cost recovery (pricing water to accurately reflect the cost of service)

<sup>8</sup>AWWA State of the Water Industry 2019 (<http://www.awwa.org>)





## HOW COMMUNICATION CAN HELP

The era of one-way communications and controlled messaging is over. Today, with public confidence in all kinds of organizations at an all-time low, leadership, communications, trust and reputation are inextricably linked. Trusted experts are better able to lead in times of crisis, are rarely targeted for a negative campaign and quickly and easily recover if they are.

Trust is the result of expectations being met and is something that must be earned. One way to begin building trust is through regular communication and engagement. A proactive communication strategy will:

- Increase your community's understanding of and support for the services you provide.
- Increase your community's perception of you as a leader and a trusted source for information.

### 15 Communication Practices That Help Build Trust

- Communication must be two-way
- Ask probing questions to understand what matters to your stakeholders
- Use channels your customers are already using
- Assume positive intent
- It's preferable to say, "I don't know, I'll get back to you" than guessing and being wrong
- Be learning while you're listening, not just waiting for your chance to speak
- Practice transparency, transparency and more transparency
- Apologize if you're wrong, and sometimes even when you don't think you were
- Find common ground by identifying where you agree
- Show empathy
- Be consistent
- Under promise and over deliver
- Communicate gratitude
- Be mindful of your body language, even if you're speaking by phone
- Ask for and be open to feedback



# So What is Public Relations Then?

## COMMUNICATION TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Strategic Communications** – an umbrella term used to describe a combination of public relations, marketing and advertising communications

**Corporate Communications** – frequently used to describe internal communications at an organization but also describes the practice of developing and maintaining a corporate identity or brand internally AND externally

**Marketing** – the action or business of promoting and selling products or services, including market research and advertising

**Outreach** – reaching out to customers and stakeholders to raise awareness and understanding of products or services and build relationships

**Public Involvement** – the process by which an organization consults with or involves interested or affected individuals, organizations and government entities in the decision-making process

**Crisis Communications** – a communication specialty focused on communicating with the public and stakeholders when an unexpected event or emergency occurs with the goal of protecting the reputation of the organization

**Risk Communications**<sup>9</sup> – a communications specialty focused on exchanging real-time information between experts and people facing real or perceived threats to their health, economic or social well-being with the goal of enabling people to make informed decisions.

<sup>9</sup>See AWWA's recently released **Trending in an Instant specific for water utilities for specialized risk communication tools**



# INTRODUCTION TO BUILDING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Communication programs are not a one-time effort and can take a lot of different shapes and encompass a lot of different types of communication. No matter how similar a project may seem on its face to an earlier one, key differences are likely to emerge.

Through this training, we will show you how to walk through a few basic steps to help utilities of any size and with any level of communication resources develop a quick and effective framework for providing information to their stakeholders that will build trust, set expectations and cultivate support for your organization's efforts.



## 1. Set Your Goals

Setting your goal is, perhaps, the most critical step in any form of communication. If your utility is new to proactive communication and your community is used to hearing from you only through their bill, start with an organizational goal of building a foundation of understanding for the value of the services you provide.

Once you've built that understanding, use that base of knowledge with your customers to start communicating about issue specific goals like:

- How your utility handles potential contaminant issues in your area
- Helping your customers understand the need for rate increases and the accompanying bill impacts
- Preparing a local community for an upcoming construction project and setting expectations for the associated parking, traffic and visual impacts

### Communications Framework



**Set Your Goals**



**Perform Research and Environmental Scan**



**Identify Stakeholders**



**Build Effective Messages**



**Identify Communication Channels and Materials**



**Engage Stakeholders**



**Engage Employees**



## 2. Perform Research and Environmental Scan

### Research

The most effective communication plans begin with solid research, but it doesn't have to be overly complicated or expensive. If you're on a budget, or pinched for time, simply spend a little time performing research on the web. If you have resources like time and funding, consider hiring a professional researcher to perform primary research. What you learn will set a strong foundation for your plan and be a valuable input for the Environmental Scan.

### Environmental Scan

Think through the current political landscape you are working in. Identify other issues that may impact how you communicate and/or how your audience might receive the information you are going to be communicating.

### PESTLE ANALYSIS

A framework of macro environmental factors used in the environmental scanning component of strategic planning and management.

 Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Political stability</li><li>• Statutes, laws, code of conduct</li><li>• Government funding subsidies, support for specific industries</li></ul>
 Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strength/weakness of local economy</li><li>• Real estate market</li><li>• Major employers entering/leaving the market</li></ul>
 Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demographic changes</li><li>• Consumer attitudes</li><li>• Social influencers</li><li>• Community organizers</li></ul>
 Technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Big data</li><li>• New ways of transacting business</li><li>• Improved hardware and software</li></ul>
 Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regulation, de-regulation</li><li>• Existing and future MOUs</li><li>• Legal cases</li></ul>
 Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Climate change</li><li>• Source water protection</li><li>• Green consideration</li><li>• PFAS, lead, microplastics and other emerging contaminants</li></ul>



## 3. Identify Stakeholders

Use your environmental scan to start building a list of stakeholders that will be directly impacted by your issue, interested in it, or indirectly impacted by it.

Standard list of stakeholders for water utilities:

- Residential customers
- Elected officials
- Federal or state regulatory agencies
- Employees
- Board of Directors
- Media

Different utilities will have different stakeholders based on their location and their local political, economic, social, technological and environmental conditions. These may include stakeholders like:

- Partner water utilities
- City or County staff
- Neighborhood or homeowners associations
- Industrial customers
- Irrigation customers
- Recreationalists
- Environmentalists





## 4. Build Effective Messages

- Simple and understandable.
- Don't make people do math.
- Use real numbers and not percentages.
- No jargon. Eliminate words like "revenue increase" or "nexus requirement."
- Answer the question people are asking: What does your audience care about? That impact to their bill?
- Be consistent and use similar language in all messages.
- Target a specific audience.

### Messaging Example for Rates Communication



An average winter residential bill for 5,000 gallons of water will **increase \$4 a month.**



An average summer residential bill for 16,000 gallons of water will **increase \$9 a month.**



## 5. Identify Communication Channels and Materials

Getting people to read or listen to what you have written in this information-overloaded world is a challenge, especially when you want to share information that is complex, uncertain or creates anxiety.

To effectively communicate, you must use your own communication channels and use the communication channels of community influencers to reach people where they are already listening.

Tailor your communications to the materials and channels that are most relevant to your customers.



### Communication Materials

Develop your own:

- FAQs
- Infographics
- Postcards
- Presentations
- Talking points for employees
- Website content
- Brochure
- Bill messages/inserts
- Posters
- Newsletter content
- New customer welcome packet
- Doorhangers



### Communication Channels

Deliver where they are listening:


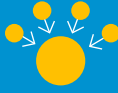

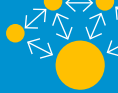

- Customer bills
- Website
- Consumer confidence report
- Direct mail
- Call centers
- Newsletters
- City Council offices
- Partner organizations
- Neighborhood associations/ community groups
- Community events
- Social media
- Traditional media



## 6. Engage Stakeholders

Improved education, technological progress, and interconnected communities have generated a citizenry more interested and better equipped to help take on pressing public problems. Over the past two decades, the public's expectations that they be informed about decisions affecting them and involved in the decision-making process have increased. So much so that an entire discipline of communications has evolved out of it: public involvement. It even has its own association: the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2). Below is the IAP2 summary of the spectrum of possibilities for involving the public. This is a great reference for when you are trying to decide whether to involve the public and how to do it.

*International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation*

	 Inform	 Consult	 Involve	 Collaborate	 Empower
Goal	To provide balanced and objective information in a timely manner.	To obtain feedback on analysis, issues, alternatives and decisions.	To work with the public to make sure that concerns and needs are considered and understood.	To partner with the public in each aspect of decision-making.	To place the final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise	"We will keep you informed."	"We will listen to and acknowledge your concerns."	"We will work with you to ensure your concerns and needs are directly reflected in the decisions made."	"We will look to you for advice and innovation this in decisions as much as possible."	"We will implement what you decide."



## 7. Engage Employees

The people behind your organization are what make your utility human and interesting. If you want to tell the story of your utility, they are your best storytellers. The relationships your employees have with their networks are stronger than any relationship the people in their networks may have with your utility. Don't forget to:

1.

**Communicate  
your vision**

2.

**Provide guidelines for  
sharing information**

3.

**Inspire and  
empower them**

4.

**Provide the tools  
they need**





# WEBINAR 1 REVIEW AND FINAL THOUGHTS

**Don't go it alone.** Start by identifying who can help you.

**Work closely with your public relations staff, if you have them, and your technical staff.** Collaborating with technical staff ensures messages are accurate. In addition, technical staff bring viewpoints that help you address a broader range of public concerns.

**Look outside the organization for proactive communication team members.** You want to identify potential team members that have knowledge about water and public health and are trusted by the community. Research indicates that professors, teachers, and health departments (local, state and federal) are typically considered highly-trusted sources. Local government officials tend to be in the middle on the trust scale.

**Scale your level of communication.** Every step we've talked about today can be customized to fit the resources and budget available at your utility. The most important thing is to have a plan and implement it.

**Set communication goals.** Have at least one. These can range from intricate multi-step goals for communicating health risks to something as simple as "Make sure our customers know about annual rate increases."

**Environmental Scan.** You know your community. Try to put yourself in your customer's shoes and think about how all these issues look from where they sit – how will you explain your issue in that environment?

**Identify Stakeholders.** You already know these people. You are working with them or talking with them every day.

**Build effective messages.** Take a moment to write down all the information you know about a particular issue or service. Break it into bite size pieces and prioritize it according to what's most important to your customers.

**Identify communication channels.** Who needs to hear this information the most? Where are they listening? Local news broadcasts? Social media? Neighborhood association meetings? Their water bill?

**Engage stakeholders.** Don't forget, this can be as simple as just keeping your customers informed.

**Engage employees.** Talk to them where they are, at their staff meetings, through their newsletters.

## COMMUNICATING ABOUT WATER

# Building your communication plan

Now that you've been introduced to the concepts in Section 1, let's build on that. In this section you will learn about:

- Identifying and prioritizing stakeholders
- Developing effective and consistent messages
- Identifying appropriate communication channels
- How and when to engage with stakeholders

While learning all the stages of communication planning, we'll take a more in-depth look at the following phases:

- Identify stakeholders
- Building effective messages
- Identify communication channels
- Engage stakeholders

## Communications Framework



**Set Your Goals**



**Perform Research and Environmental Scan**



**Identify Stakeholders**



**Build Effective Messages**



**Identify Communication Channels and Materials**



**Engage Stakeholders**



**Engage Employees**

# 1. SET YOUR COMMUNICATION GOALS

---

Broadly speaking, public relations goals are the desired end result of a strategy; a desired future state. Some examples are shown below, and you will no doubt have more. A good question to ask first is, what do you want your customers to know?

## *Goals may be to:*

- Raise awareness about your services
- Promote a new program you're launching
- Communicate your leadership
- Build trust and goodwill

## *Issues may include:*

- Long-term future planning
- Water quality
- Watershed health
- Encouraging conservation
- Drought and water restrictions
- Potential contamination
- Rate increase
- Capital improvements
- System investment and maintenance
- Emergency preparedness

# 2. PERFORM RESEARCH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

---

## *Research*

Seek to understand stakeholder perceptions by looking back on the research you performed earlier. What are people saying online? What questions are they asking? Social media can provide valuable insight into potential communication issues well before they start to register or escalate with your customers on social media. Follow your local elected officials, neighboring utilities, influential community and environmental groups, and state and federal regulatory agencies to see what they are posting and how people are responding to issues they are dealing with.

## *Environmental Scan*

The environmental scan serves as the baseline for developing how you will communicate and who you will communicate with. A good way to do this is to put yourself in your customer's shoes. Think about how all the things going on in your community from a political, economic, social, technological and environmental perspective (see also the PESTLE Analysis framework from Webinar 1 on page 8). How will you communicate about your issue in this environment?

## *Sample questions to ask:*

- How is your reputation among your customers?
- Are you generally trusted or distrusted?
- Are you seen as an open or closed organization from an outsider's perspective?
- To what degree do your customers want to protect the natural environment?
- How price sensitive are your customers?
- What do your customers think when they see one of your organization's vehicles in their neighborhood?
- How do your stakeholders talk about you on social media?
- Is the media coverage you receive generally positive, negative or neutral?
- Do your customers like your product/service?
- When was the last rate increase? What was the feedback?
- Have other local fees been increased lately? What was the community's reaction?
- Is your community growing or shrinking?

# RESEARCH

**Tools for understanding your audience:** The following tools can be used to identify the issues and information your audience is interested in hearing about, as well as at the conclusion of your work to examine whether your audience received your messages, understood them, and then acted on them in the way you had hoped. The only true way to know for sure what your audience knows and thinks is to ask them.

**Social Media Engagement.** Examining website views and social media engagement can help assess whether people are engaging with your online information, but they only scratch the surface.

**Surveys.** An online survey can tease out quantitative information about your audience. A good quality survey will require some time to determine what it is you want to know and then to develop the survey itself. Online survey tools like Survey Monkey can be a great way to get some quick information about your customers and stakeholders. For a more formal survey that provides statistically valid results that can feed into the decision making process, consider using a survey professional.

**Sample survey questions:**

- *How often do you drink water from the tap versus store-bought bottled water?*
- *On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the greatest, how much do you value the water we provide to your home?*
- *To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Activities I engage in on my property, such as fertilizing my lawn, impact my drinking water quality.*

**Focus Groups.** Focus groups can be used either as a stand alone tool or in combination with a survey to help you probe deeper into the why behind the data, and it can give you an opportunity to test new messaging or outreach ideas. Consider using a professional research firm to deliver solid results. If budget is an issue, you can also do these less formally by recruiting a citizen advisory group—a great strategy to consider—for on-going two-way communication with a representative group of your customers.

**Sample focus group questions:**

*Thirty-five percent of the customers we surveyed are not drinking tap water. What are your feelings about that?*

*When you read news articles about water quality, which topics are of the greatest concern to you?*

*When it comes to water efficiency, how well do you think you are doing? Are you willing to do more?*

**Stakeholder Interviews.** Interviews are another way to get insights from your audience. Interviews are great for understanding what the most influential members of your audience are thinking. It's important to interview true influencers and not just people who happen to be available to talk. You need the input from the folks who are aware of high-level community issues and strategy and who are driving conversations. Figure about a two-week period to conduct them and 30 to 45 minutes for each interview. Conducting 10 to 12 interviews should be sufficient to get a sense of the environment.

**Sample interview questions:**

*In terms of the water quality in your community, what concerns you the most? Why?*



### 3. IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS

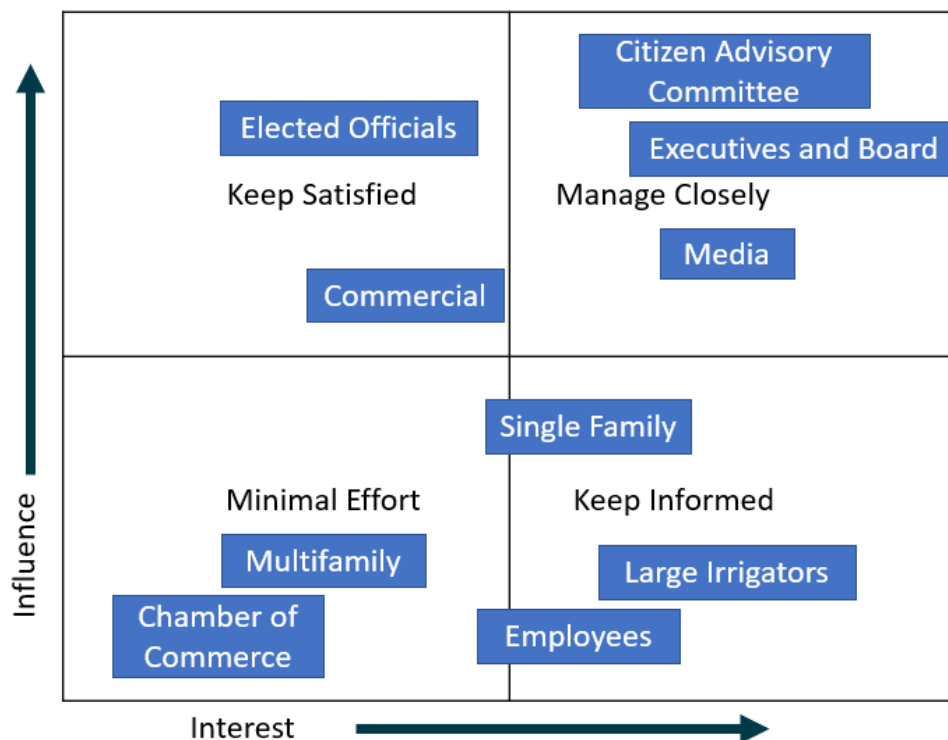
The first step in identifying your stakeholders is to think through the issues you identified in the environmental scan and how they overlap with the issue you want to communicate about. Who is most likely to be impacted or care about this issue? Next, assess how much interest and influence each group of stakeholders has in the outcome of the decision or issue.

**Use stakeholder mapping to identify and prioritize your stakeholders.** Stakeholder mapping is the visual representation of stakeholder identification that helps organize your stakeholders and how you will manage them.

Evaluate your stakeholders based on their:

- Interest
- Influence
- Financial stake
- Emotional stake

It's critical to note that all stakeholders are important. But to be successful, each stakeholder audience requires different messaging and tactics that mesh with their interest and influence on the rate study. This stakeholder map provides an example of the audiences you might encounter during a rate increase, along with where they may be in relation to levels of interest and influence.



## 4. BUILD EFFECTIVE MESSAGES

Communications cannot always be controlled, but your key messages can. Organizations using key messages are quoted more, misquoted less and develop better relationships with reporters. They help you:

- Prioritize and crystallize information
- Ensure consistency, continuity and accuracy
- Measure and track success
- Stay focused when speaking with media or stakeholders

It's easy to identify what you want to tell your community, but not as easy to identify what your community wants to hear. One of the fundamental principles of communication is to consider and respond to what the audience is interested in hearing. Addressing the questions already in the community's consciousness creates strong engagement and makes it easier to create effective messages.

The best way to know what your community wants to hear is to ask them! If you don't have resources for focus groups or a survey, ask your community influencers to identify topics their constituencies are concerned about. Social media is a great way to identify and participate in audience-specific proactive communication. Identify local community web and social media sites that might provide access to community members with potential concerns about water.

Accomplishing your communication goal requires breaking information down into manageable pieces that your audience can easily consume. Receiving abundant amounts of information can be overwhelming to people; it can make them trust you less, and potentially escalate the situation or issue you are communicating about.

### Working on a sensitive issue?

Typical questions a consumer may ask about a critical concern include:

- Where does this problem come from?
- What are the potential consequences to me and my family?
- What do I need to do to protect myself and my family?
- What are you doing to protect me and my family?
- What else can I do?

### Core Attributes of Key Messages

**Concise:** Optimally three key messages on the topic; each statement only one to three sentences in length or under 30 seconds when spoken.

**Relevant:** Balance what you need to communicate with what your audience wants to know.

**Compelling:** Meaningful information designed to stimulate action.

**Simple:** Easy-to-understand language; avoid jargon and acronyms.

**Memorable:** Easy to recall and repeat; avoid run-on sentences.

**Real:** Active rather than passive voice; no advertising slogans.

**Tailored:** Effectively communicates with different target audiences, adapting language and depth of information.

## The 27/9/3 Information Input Rule:

The human brain can effectively process NO MORE THAN 27 words, that can be spoken in 9 seconds, that have 3 (or fewer) pieces of information. Anything more than this diminishes the power of the message. Think about building messages in two parts:

1. Create an emotional connection
2. Share information using the 27/9/3 Rule

The first step in developing effective messages is to identify the specific pieces of information that are most useful to the audience. Start by listing all the information you could use to address that question. Then prioritize which pieces of information are most important to the audience. Always start with addressing what your community is talking about and keep it extremely simple. When you have your list prioritized, pick the two pieces of information you think are most important.

### Pro-tip



Jargon kills trust. Industry jargon makes otherwise simple messages opaque and difficult to understand. If your communications include lots of jargon, your messages are probably not getting through to most of your audience.

#### **Example - which is better?**

“As part of our 2019 capital plan we are installing an 8.5-mile-long, 84-inch diameter conduit to replace the existing Conduit A and Conduit B that run through the public right of way and are reaching the end of their useful lives.”

**or**

“We’re replacing aging water pipelines before major service disruptions occur.”

 Words to Avoid	 Consider Instead
Environment	Land, air, and water
Ecosystem	Natural areas
Biodiversity/endangered species	Fish and wildlife
Regulations	Safegaurds/protections
Riparian	Lakes, rivers, and streams
Aquifer	Groundwater
Watershed	Land around rivers, lakes, and streams
Environmental groups	Conservation groups/ organizations protecting land, air, and water
Agricultural land	Working farms and ranches
Urban sprawl	Poorly planned growth/ development

## 5. IDENTIFY COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND MATERIALS

Communication channels are defined as a medium through which a message is transmitted from the sender to receiver. Some of your stakeholders are reachable through multiple channels, while others will be limited. Select communication channels where members of your audience are already listening and/or participating. It's likely that you'll also want to create new or enhance your own existing communication channels.



### Pro-tip

Repeat your message often and across multiple communication channels

- Is your audience primarily senior citizens?  
Consider direct mail.
- Is your audience primarily your customers?  
Consider bill inserts.
- Is your audience small and highly impacted?  
Consider face-to-face visits.

Identify the communication channels your audience prefers

- Are you causing traffic impacts?
  - » Get your local news stations to re-tweet traffic alerts.
- Are you dealing with a water quality issue?
  - » Work with local health departments to send messages through their channels.

Use trusted sources to convey your message

- Social media to share information on another partner's site, reach out to them with a specific opportunity and why and how their members or followers will benefit.
- Social media sites to leverage for greater exposure:
  - » Other utilities
  - » Chambers and economic development organizations
  - » Faith-based organizations
  - » Library; City Council; County government
  - » Neighborhood associations
  - » Environmental organizations

Adhere to the rule of seven: A customer needs to hear a message at least seven times before they'll take action.

Getting people to read or listen to what you have written in this information-overloaded world is a challenge, especially when you want to share information that is complex, uncertain or creates anxiety.

To effectively communicate, you must use your own communication channels and use the communication channels of community influencers to reach people where they are already listening.

Tailor your communications to the materials and channels that are most relevant to your customers.



### Communication Materials

Develop your own:

- FAQs
- Infographics
- Postcards
- Presentations
- Talking points for employees
- Website content
- Brochure
- Bill messages/inserts
- Posters
- Newsletter content
- New customer welcome packet
- Doorhangers



### Communication Channels

Deliver where they are listening:

- Customer bills
- Website
- Consumer confidence report
- Direct mail
- Call centers
- Newsletters
- City Council offices
- Partner organizations
- Neighborhood associations/ community groups
- Community events
- Social media
- Traditional media

# LEVERAGING MEDIA

## Traditional Media

While traditional media is suffering in this changing media landscape, these channels remain an important information source for significant portions of many stakeholder groups. The impact that local newspaper and television news still have on influencing public opinion is still significant. Some tips for working with traditional media include:

- Personal relationships are critical, so take the time to get to know your local reporter. Sending them an interesting story idea that has nothing to do with benefitting you is a great way to start things off well.
- Research recent published work and social media posts of a reporter with whom you plan to build a relationship with so you can reference this information next time you have a conversation with them.
- Use the information you've gleaned from your research to customize the story idea you are sending to a reporter – time spent tailoring your idea will pay off.
- Story ideas are known in the industry as a “pitch.” Respect a reporter's time by making sure your pitch is short and compelling. They'll also smell self-promotion a mile away.
- Tie your pitch to a trend or interesting theme or an article they wrote about recently.
- Once you've made contact and are in conversation, make sure you are always very helpful and responsive; be someone they know you're a competent source that makes their job easier.
- Depending on the stakeholder group, a positive article you secure in a small local publication that hits a large percentage of your stakeholders can be as valuable as one you secure in a larger publication that doesn't attract your target audience.
- Stay in contact long after they run your story. Send reporters story ideas that don't involve your organization but could benefit them. Don't be the one who only calls when they need a favor.
- Invite media to organizational events and treat them as an important guest.
- Tell your own story – on some occasions, news outlets will take and repurpose content you develop for your site, including audio, video, infographics, etc.
- Primary research you conduct can often be the basis for a positive news article, so share customer survey results and other research that is informing decisions and policies being made at your utility.
- Provide special behind-the-scenes tours and access to members of the media.

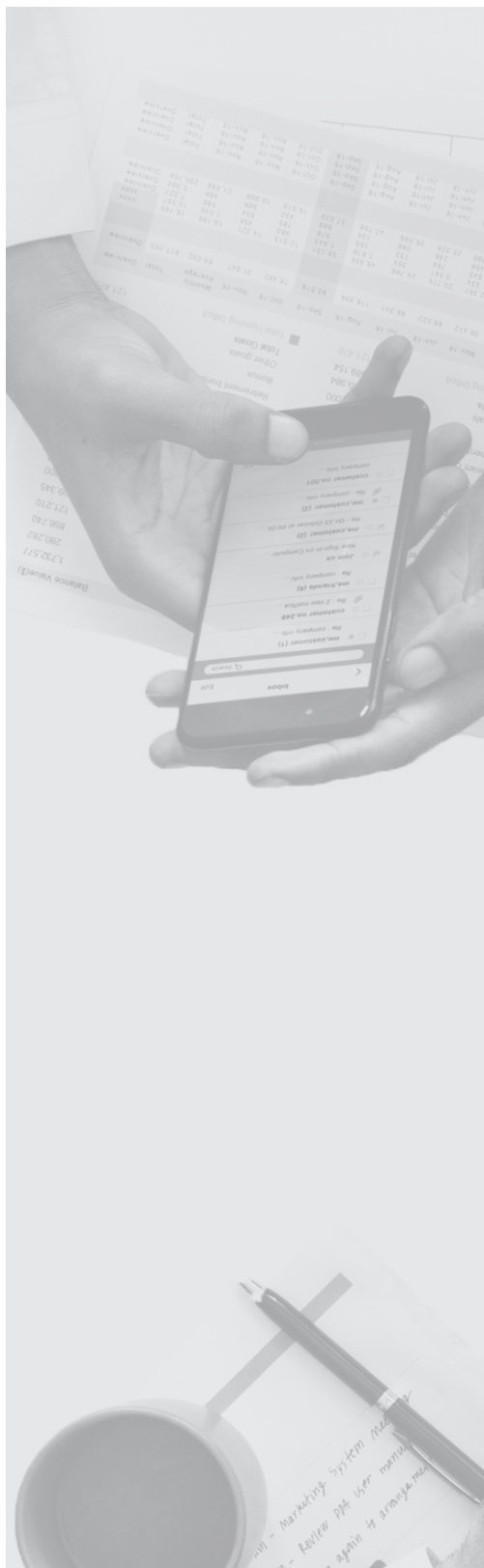
## What is newsworthy<sup>11</sup>?

All news pieces have at least one of these components:

- **Timeliness** – It's news because it's “new.”
- **Proximity** – We care more about things that happen “close to home.”
- **Conflict/controversy** – When people argue about actions, events, ideas or policies, we care.
- **Human interest** – People are interested in other people, and unusual or heartwarming stories resonate because we can identify with them.
- **Relevance** – We value information that is relevant to us; information that helps us make better decisions.

<sup>11</sup>PBS News Hour; What is newsworthy? ([www.pbs.org/newshour](http://www.pbs.org/newshour))





## Social Media

More and more, utilities are braving the still relatively new frontier of social media. If done strategically, the benefits of the relationships you'll build with your customers and the degree to which you'll shape your brand and reputation will greatly outweigh the risks. Social media gives you the opportunity to communicate directly with your stakeholders without the filter of traditional media.

Social media tips:

- **Be responsive.** You can't hide in social media. If someone is complaining, thank them for sharing the information. Respond that what they are saying is concerning to you and provide a number they can call to have the issue resolved.
- **Be consistent.** Plan to post at least a couple times per week. Schedule your posts ahead of time, but be flexible to adjust plans to take advantage of opportunities that arise.
- **Different platforms** (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) have different strengths and weaknesses and its users have different expectations. Be sure you're using each platform the most effective way.
- **Be nimble.** Just because something is successful once doesn't mean you can go back to the well. Keep adapting and experimenting. Don't get stale.
- **Be excited and positive!** Your passion and values will shine through.
- **Be visual.** Pick photos you know your audience will enjoy.
- **Be human! Be likable!** Social media is all about engaging and connecting with your audience, so go ahead and use some personality in that post.
- **Include people in the photos and videos you post.** People like looking at other people. Photos get more than 50% more likes, more than 100% more comments, and more than 80% more click-throughs.
- **Animals!** If you can manage to include a dog or a cat or a cute wild animal in the post, do it.

## Use Images

Use photos and infographics to help illustrate your project or your issue. Make sure there are people in your photos. This makes your project a lot more relatable to the community. Examples of free photo sources include Pexels.com and Unsplash.com.

Use video where possible. With all the apps available now – even short cell phone videos can help illustrate the concepts you are trying to get across better than a text explanation.



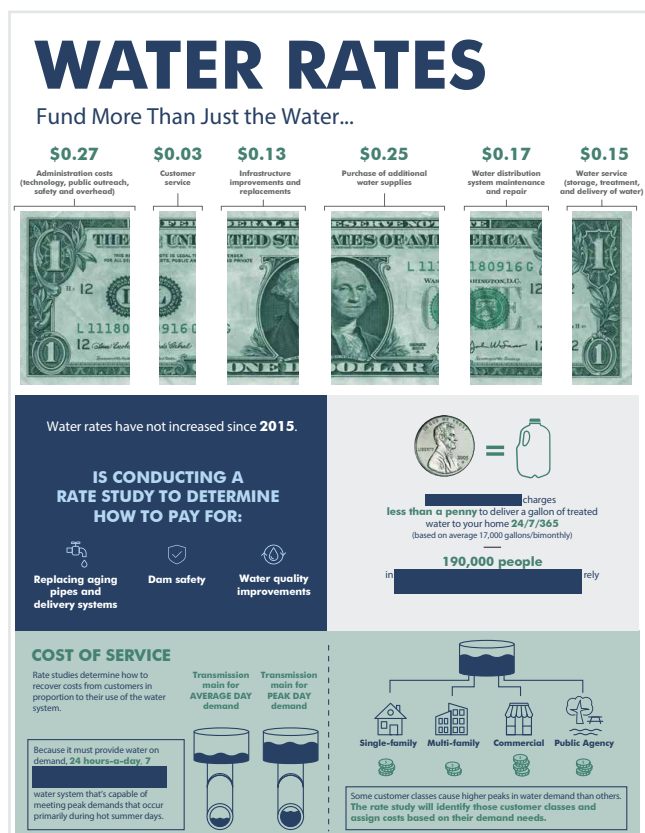
**Paul Granger**  
@pjgrange

Proactive infrastructure is a wise investment that will pay dividends by providing a safe and reliable water supply well into the future.

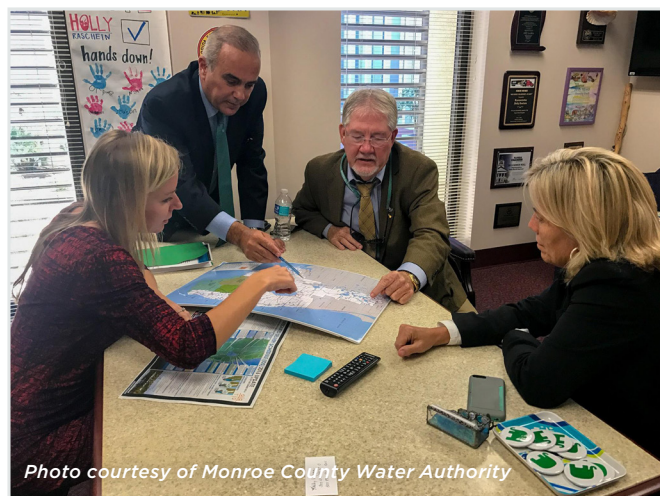


Officials: Port Wash \$16M upgrades may up water rates  
[www-newsday-com.cdn.ampprojec...](http://www-newsday-com.cdn.ampprojec...)

*Photo courtesy of Hicksville Water District*




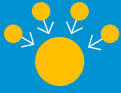

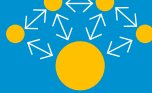

*Above is an example infographic developed and designed by Raftelis.*



## 6. ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS

Much like there is no one communications plan, there is also not just one public participation plan — instead there are dozens and dozens of techniques that can be used to bring people together to accomplish one or more of the public participation levels.

*International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation*

	 Inform	 Consult	 Involve	 Collaborate	 Empower
Goal	To provide balanced and objective information in a timely manner.	To obtain feedback on analysis, issues, alternatives and decisions.	To work with the public to make sure that concerns and needs are considered and understood.	To partner with the public in each aspect of decision-making.	To place the final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise	"We will keep you informed."	"We will listen to and acknowledge your concerns."	"We will work with you to ensure your concerns and needs are directly reflected in the decisions made."	"We will look to you for advice and innovation this in decisions as much as possible."	"We will implement what you decide."

### Techniques to:

Share information<sup>10</sup>:

- Bill stuffers
- Briefings
- Expert panels
- Feature stories
- Field offices
- Hotlines
- Information kiosks
- Information repositories
- E-mail
- News conferences
- Newspaper inserts
- Press releases/press packets
- Print advertisements
- Printed collateral
- Technical reports
- Websites

### Collect and compile input:

- Comment forms
- Computer-based polling
- Community facilitators
- Delphi process
- Interviews
- Mailed survey/questionnaires
- Resident feedback registers
- Telephone survey/poll

### Bring people together:

- Appreciative inquiry process
- Charrettes
- Citizen juries
- Coffee klatches / kitchen table meetings
- Computer-assisted meetings
- Deliberative forums
- Dialogue
- Fairs/events
- Fishbowl process

- Focused conversations
- Focus groups
- Future search conferences
- Ongoing advisory groups
- Open houses
- Open space meetings
- Panels
- Public hearings/meetings
- Revolving conversations
- Study circles
- Symposia
- Task forces/expert committee
- Tours/field trips
- Town meeting
- Web-based meetings
- Workshops
- World cafes

<sup>10</sup>International Association of Public Participation ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org))

## 6. ENGAGE EMPLOYEES

### Communicate Your Vision

Make sure your employees understand the value you are providing to your customers. It's important that everyone is speaking from the same page when it comes to who we are and what we do.

### Provide Guidelines for Sharing Information

Make sure your employees know what they can and can't share publicly, as well as how to properly refer to the utility and its services. If there is specific language they should not use, be sure to let them know that as well.

### Inspire and Empower Them

Your employees are the most trusted source of information about how your utility works, ask them to tell your story and provide them with the resources to go out and do it as part of their daily routine. Create an organization they can be proud of and they will let people know about it!

### Provide the Tools They Need

Make sure employees have accurate and up-to-date information that they can easily explain to their friends and neighbors. Use internal newsletters, websites, staff meetings, field visits, etc., to provide updated information and materials.



#### Pro-tip

## EDITORIAL CALENDARS

Develop a calendar to guide the information and messaging you will produce and deliver throughout the year. Maintain customer knowledge and awareness throughout the year so that you can build on it in times where communication is critical.

Build communications around specific milestones:

- Irrigation season
- Rate increases
- Drought/flood season
- Recreation
- Winter preparation and safety
- Community events
- Flushing

Make sure to back out your deadlines far enough to leave time to create and design communications and messages and distribute in advance of the specific event.

## COMMUNICATING ABOUT WATER

# Putting the Pieces Together

Today we will learn about:

- How to get your story out there consistently and accurately
- Communicating about a Rate Increase: A Case Study

## TELLING YOUR STORY<sup>12</sup>

Why do good stories increase engagement?

- Who doesn't like a good story? Stories are meaningful and memorable; people connect with them.
- Stories answer the question customers are asking themselves – so what's in it for me? Stories communicate the why and give your stakeholders a reason to care about the issue, your organization, etc.
- Stories can make the complex simpler. Use metaphors and analogies. Without straying into the condescending, act like you are explaining something to your 5th grader.
- Numbers and figures are great, but only as part of a bigger story. Include them as proof points in a bigger story and it'll have legs and get shared much more than statistics alone.
- Stories can advocate and be more influential.

<sup>12</sup>Source: (<https://thestoryoftelling.com/10-benefits-strategic-storytelling/>)



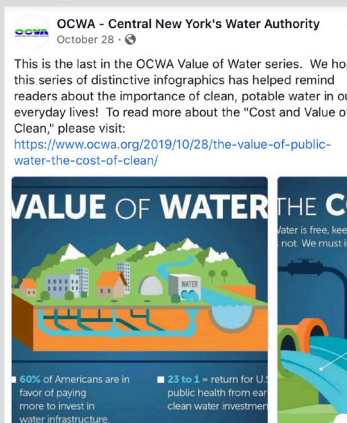


Photo courtesy of Central New York's Water Authority (OCWA)

.@TOHReceiver, @hempsteadtown  
Councilman Tom Muscarella & water providers seek state funding to treat drinking water for the contaminant 1,4-dioxane in order to comply with new restrictions imposed by @HealthNYGov. Without more funding water customers may face huge rate increases

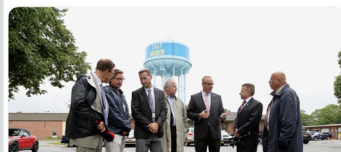


Photo courtesy of Hicksville Water District



Photo courtesy of Hicksville Water District

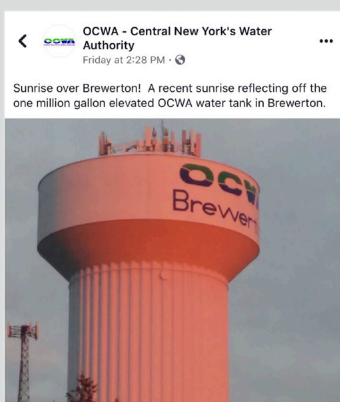


Photo courtesy of Central New York's Water Authority (OCWA)

## TELLING YOUR STORY (CONTINUED)



### Make it Visual

- Include images that are clearly from your community, not stock photos
- Include renderings of new infrastructure to give readers an idea of what they'll be funding



### Appeal to Emotions

- Safe, quality drinking water is critical to our everyday lives
- Protecting the environment is important to all of us
- What we are doing will benefit us and our children's children



### Make it Accessible—Simple and Focused

- How much will this change be for the average customer's bill?



### Make it Human

- Include photos of people, not just plant machinery



### Make it Interactive

- Tailor content to work on your website, convert to a Facebook post and write compelling tweets that link back to your content



### Use a Call-to-Action

- For more information, visit [www.yourwebsite.org/rates](http://www.yourwebsite.org/rates).

# Case Study

## *Rate Increase Recommendations: Communications Planning*

### RESEARCH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Springfield Water Utility District was formed in 1961 and serves more than 17,000 customers.

The District gets water supply from a variety of sources and is a participant in a new regional water supply project.

The District's portion of the project is estimated at \$59 million. In addition, the utility, with other water providers, is planning for additional water treatment needs, which will include the construction of a regional water treatment plant. The District's estimated cost for the treatment plant is \$32 million. Because most of this water source is intended to supply growth in the communities the District serves, it will be paid primarily with system development fees that developers pay when they build new homes and commercial buildings—not by current District customers.

The District's elected Board of Directors makes all decisions on rates and fees. At an upcoming meeting, the Board will consider a proposal for an across the board 4% rate increase and a substantial system development fee increase. This proposal is a step toward assessing future revenue needs, but it won't solve the funding needs.

The District engaged a consultant to conduct a Water Financial Planning and Rate Study (Study). The Study includes:

- A financial plan.
- A cost of service study that determines the revenue required from each customer class.
- The development of water rate structures that reflect each customer class's cost of service (COS) and utility-determined pricing objectives.
- The development of system development fees (also known as plant investment fees), and associated assessment schedules/methodologies.

The rate study indicates that the utility needs to increase its future revenues from rates and system development fees and lays out recommendations on how to do that. While the Board is considering longer term action on the rate study, it will also consider implementing rate increases. The Board is also two months away from a Board election, with three of the five members in contested races.

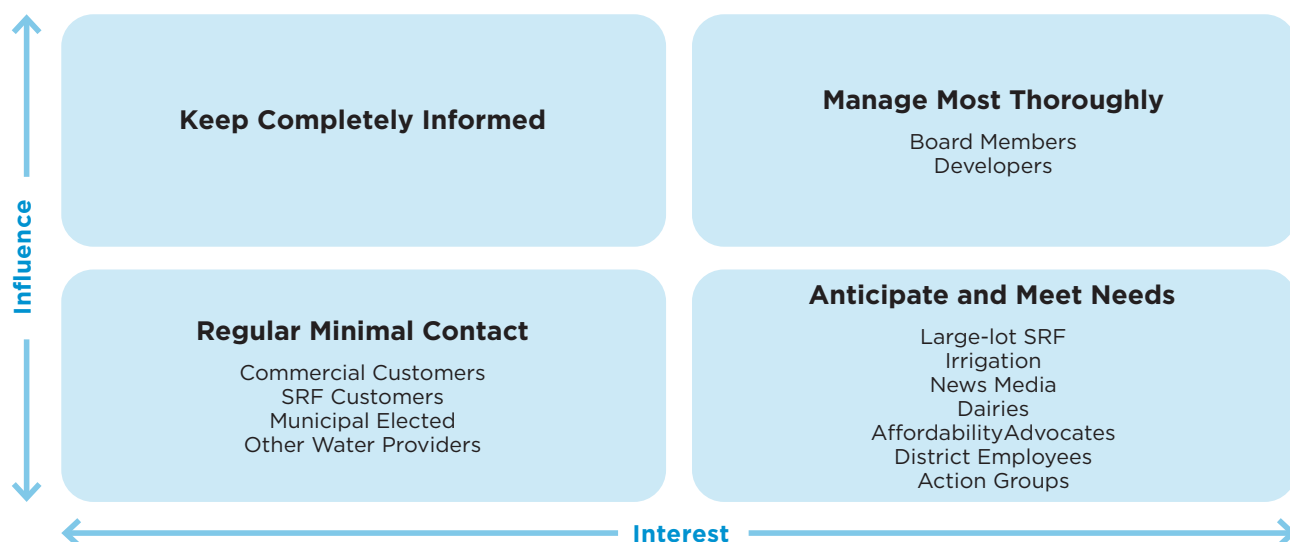
# COMMUNICATION GOALS

- To clearly communicate why the utility conducted a rate study, while engaging customers and stakeholders in learning more about their water system.
- To provide a way for utility board members and staff to hear from customers and stakeholders in advance of acting on a revenue increase, while considering how to address the key findings in the rate study.
- To build customer understanding by focusing on the services the utility provides to bring water to their taps every day; how the utility proactively maintains and improves the water system; and the major capital projects that drive additional revenue needs.

# IDENTIFICATION OF STAKEHOLDERS

For this utility, the following stakeholder audiences have been identified as having a connection to the outcome of the rate study and mapped below.

- Single family residential customers
- Large-lot single family residential customers
- Commercial customers
- Irrigation-only customers (HOAs, parks, school utilities)
- Dairies
- Affordable housing/utility advocates
- Developers
- Board members (current and potential future)
- Utility employees
- Elected officials within the utility’s service area
- Partner water providers in the water supply project and the regional treatment plant
- News media
- Associations or action groups



# KEY MESSAGES

## **Major Theme: We are experts and provide a valued service.**

- Utility employees work hard every day to deliver on our promise of reliable water and quality service.
- The utility continues to think long-term while prioritizing necessary projects to keep water affordable today and well into the future.
- Utility employees work 24/7/365 to run a large, intricate water system.
- With a significant 12-year capital improvement plan, we're staying on top of the upgrades and new projects needed to keep this system running.
- With rapidly changing technology, aging infrastructure, and new regulations the cost of running a complex water system continues to rise.

## **Major Theme: We are investing to secure the water future of the communities we serve.**

- There are several major projects identified in the utility's capital improvement plan, ranging from replacing aging pipes to partnering to build a regional water treatment facility.
- These projects, in addition to the utility's expenses associated with day-to-day operations and emergencies, like water main breaks, are funded by water rates, bond sales, cash reserves, and fees for new service (called tap fees).
- The major projects driving the need for additional revenue over the coming years include creating a new water supply, partnering with other water providers to build a new, regional water treatment plant, and installing a new water pipelines.
- Our utility consistently reinvests in the water system by maintaining and upgrading infrastructure and finding innovative projects and new technologies that can improve efficiency and increase the water supply. This ensures the communities we serve have a reliable water supply now and into the future.

## **Major Theme: Water rates are charged based on cost of service provided.**

- The water rates on your bill help to maintain and upgrade the pipes, pump stations, treatment plant and other infrastructure that allow us to collect, treat and deliver safe, reliable water, and provide essential fire protection services.
- Our utility does not make a profit and receives no revenue from tax dollars. We reinvest the money you pay for your water bill money to maintain and upgrade the water system.
- Our utility water rates are lower and have been increasing at a slower rate than the national average.
- Our utility water rates rank in the middle when compared to water rates in neighboring communities.

## **Major Theme: The rate study indicates that increases in water rates and system development fees are needed.**

- Our utility has not increased rates since 2013 and the last time system development fees were increased was 2014. The rate study shows that to maintain our water system in the future we will need additional revenue. It is critically important that our utility continually reinvest in our infrastructure and keep pace with inflation and other cost increases.
- Research has shown that customers prefer small, predictable increases to their water rates over larger, less frequent rate increases.

- Rate studies look at cost of service to determine how to recover costs from customers in proportion to their use of the water system. Some customer classes cause higher peaks in water demand than others. The rate study has identified those customer classes and assigned costs based on their demand needs.
- While our Board reviews and considers the recommendations in the study, it will consider a 4% increase in water rates and an increase in tap fees at an upcoming meeting. If approved, water bills would increase 4%. That means that if your June 2017 water bill was \$50 and you used the same amount of water in 2018, your June 2018 water bill would go up increase by \$2 to \$52.

**Major Theme: Growth in the communities we serve must pay for the future demand it places on our water system.**

- System development fees recover the cost of connecting a new customer to the water system and developing the capacity of the system to accommodate the extra demand placed on it by the new customer.
- System development fees, which developers pay for new service, are aligned with neighboring water districts of similar size to our utility, and are directly tied to the cost to develop and treat new water sources for new growth in the communities we serve.
- The rate study determines the demands that different types of development place on the future water system and assigns them a cost of service. Some types of development cause higher peaks in water demand than others. The rate study identified those development types and assigned costs based on their water demand needs.
- Our utility must maintain adequate operating cash reserves to cover emergencies such as infrastructure failures or declines in water sales due to extreme weather, and has been building its capital reserves so that it can cash fund smaller future capital expenditures while leveraging those reserves to finance the largest of its capital projects at the lowest possible interest rate.
- While our Board reviews and considers the recommendations in the study, it will consider an increase in system development fees at an upcoming Board meeting.



## COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

### Website FAQ:

Q: What does my water and/or wastewater bill pay for?

Q: What type of maintenance is performed throughout the service area?

Q: How are rate increases decided?

Q: How will the proposed rate changes affect me?



# IDENTIFY COMMUNICATION CHANNELS



## One-on-One Briefings

The utility has a board member election scheduled and has received interest from qualified candidates in running for board seats held by incumbents. The rate study may be a topic of interest to candidates and incumbents alike. The utility's general manager can offer to provide current board members and board candidates a presentation about the rate study during individual meetings and answer questions. Doing so would ensure that all current board members and board candidates receive consistent information and are better prepared for their potential term of service.



## Bill Message

The utility's water bills are a primary channel to reach every customer. Sample bill message:

### ***Investing for the Future: Balancing Rates and System Development Fees***

*Our utility needs additional funds over the next 10 years to upgrade infrastructure and add water supply. We are considering increases to your water bill and system development fees paid by developers to invest in your water system. Go to our website for more about these proposed increases and scheduled meetings to learn more about your water system.*



## Website

The utility should build content on the website that helps customers seeking more information. Provide an infographic, a summary of the rate study and an FAQ.



## Direct Mail Postcard

As a second point of contact to all current customers, a postcard will be developed to mail to every customer account to invite them to community open houses and inform them of the rate study available on the website. Additional postcards will be provided to employees and board members so they can provide them to customers as they interact with them.



### Develop a Presentation

Certain stakeholder audiences have been identified in the stakeholder map as having the potential for a high level of interest in rate changes, while others may have a lower interest level, but be in positions where they are influential in their community. A presentation can be developed that is geared for these stakeholders and focuses on clear messages about the need to invest in the water system. The following stakeholder audiences would be appropriate targets to offer a presentation/ briefing to:

- City Council members
- Developers that have regular interaction with the utility
- HOAs that have regular interaction with the utility
- Regional treatment plant partners



### Contact with “High Touch” Customers

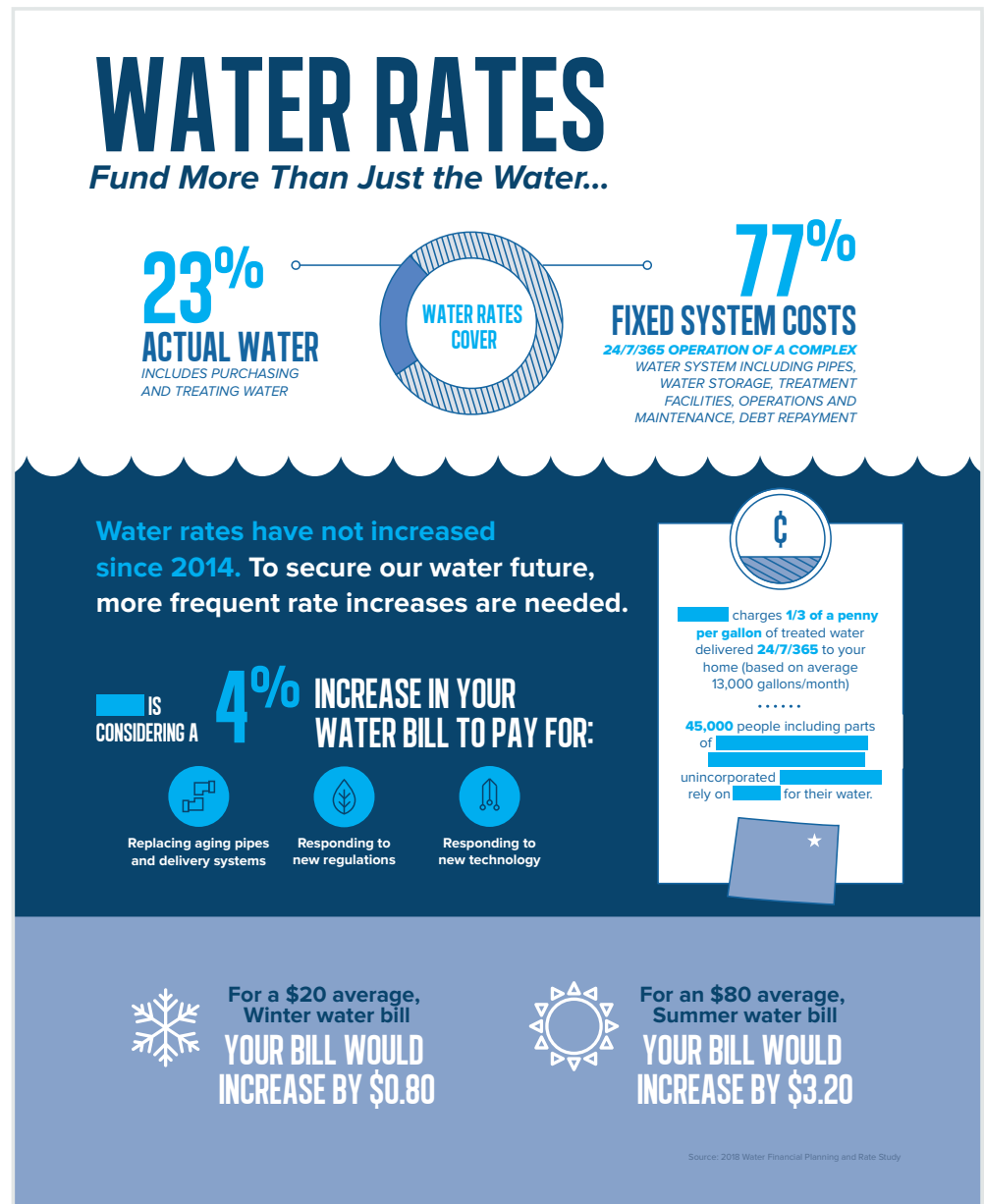
The utility has several customers that have high water usage, and would therefore be more interested in the rate study and its potential impact on their organizations and businesses. While the utility does not keep a formal list of these customers, it’s likely that in the last year the utility has had personal contact with some of them. Developing a list of these “high touch” customers and proactively reaching out to them by email or phone to inform them of the potential rate changes and encourage a discussion about why the utility needs to invest in securing the community’s water future would be proactive and help prevent a potentially negative reaction.

# COMMUNICATION MATERIALS

## Develop Materials that Explain the Rate Changes

Materials can be developed that help stakeholders understand the rate changes. Simple materials that help summarize the process that was used to help develop the rates and explains cost of service would be helpful in aiding understanding. These materials can be used on the website, at the open house and in presentations and conversations with key stakeholder audiences. Materials that would be helpful include:

- FAQs document on the rate study
- Fact sheet or infographic about the rate study
- Water supply project materials



*Above is an example infographic developed and designed by Raftelis.*

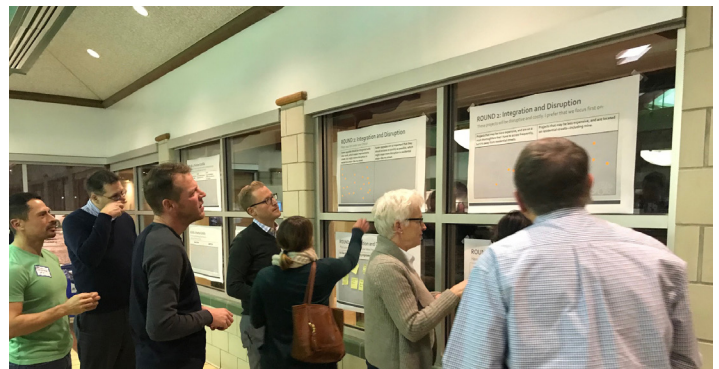
## ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

The utility will host community open houses at its offices. The goal of offering the open houses is to raise awareness of the opportunity to engage with the utility while learning more about the water system and the potential rate changes in advance of board discussion of the rate study.

Hosting an open house provides an informal setting for participants to view information at multiple displays on set topics at each station and discuss the topic with utility representatives. Participants get the opportunity to ask questions and get their points across directly to staff at an open house and they don't have to devote an entire evening to the meeting. While the open house will be used to improve public understanding about the water system and the rate changes—both complex topics; the utility can also choose to use the open house to gather public input formally or informally.

An important point to consider is that even if attendance is low at the open house (participation in any type of public meeting or open house is often low and attended by those that have the highest interest in the topic), the fact that the utility will be raising awareness of this opportunity by reaching out to all customers through multiple channels helps position the utility positively as being transparent and interested in providing opportunities to engage customers with information about decisions that affect them.

The utility will host community open houses on April 11 and 17 from 6 to 8 p.m. in the large conference room space at its offices. An open house is self-directed to a large degree. Participants stop by at their convenience and visit the information stations of greatest interest to them. They can talk to utility staff members and share with staff their individual comments and questions. The following is an overview of what the open house entails and how the utility can prepare for the event.



# COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE - OVERVIEW

## Goals

- Improve public understanding of the water system and rate study
- Receive public input
- Explain complex points in an informal setting allowing for one-on-one discussion

## Timing

The open houses are set to occur April 11 and 17 from 6 to 8 p.m. Attendees can arrive at any time during the open house.

## Preparation

The utility has identified the topics to include at the stations in the open house as the following: water system overview, regional water treatment plant, rates and fees, water quality and conservation. Specific staff and consultant team members need to be identified for each station and a “dry run” of the event will be conducted to test the materials and staff preparation in advance.

It will be important to promote the open house through all available channels. This accomplishes two goals: 1) it creates awareness of the event even for those that have no interest in attending; and 2) it helps drive participation for those that have a high level of interest in the topic.

## Promotion

The following tactics will be used to help build awareness of the open house:

- Inclusion on the utility’s website
- Postcards mailed to every customer
- Inclusion on the customer’s water bill
- Signs at the intersection closest to the utility offices promoting community open house on their social media
- Request towns and cities promote community open house
- Investigate whether email to e-bill customers is OK, and if so send an email open house invitation

## Implementation

- Setup team arrives early to arrange the room and stations.
- Setup should be complete 45 minutes before scheduled start time.
- Resource team arrives at least 45 minutes before the start for a briefing and walk-through of the displays and stations.
- Review station assignments with Utility staff and consultant team.
- Spend a few minutes reviewing the key messages and providing tips for active listening.
- Attendees are greeted as they arrive, asked to sign in and are briefly oriented to the event setup.
- People move at their own pace, visiting one-on-one or in small groups with resource team members.
- Attendees conclude at a comment station, where they can sit down, complete comment forms and enjoy refreshments.



## Documentation

- Comment forms that can be completed at the event help participants provide useful comments by soliciting their input on specific topics.
- Alternatively, people can provide comments on a “paper comment wall” sticky notes or on a flip chart paper at each station.
- Attendee sign-in sheets provide a basis for building a mailing list.
- A written summary of the event can be included in the board’s packet for their board meeting, provided to key stakeholder audiences and posted on the utility’s website.

## Evaluation/Debrief

After attendees have departed, the resource team will gather to debrief on the following:

- What went well?
- Was anything confusing?
- What are the major things we learned?
- What action is needed for attendees’ requests and/or questions?
- How well did the event meet the objectives we outlined?

## Resources

A fine balance exists between too many and not enough staff. Each station needs at least one staff person.

- Two floaters are necessary to walk the room and answer general questions or direct attendees.
- A greeter at the entrance manages sign-in and orients attendees to the event layout.
- Board members and board candidates should be invited to attend.
- Name tags for all staff members, and board members should be provided.



## HINTS

- Be ready for early arrivals.
- Need a contingency plan to accommodate large numbers of arrivals (such as using the patio or an alternative conference room).
- Ensure exhibits and displays are informative, but not persuasive in tone. They must be simple, clear and easy to read at a distance.
- Minimize technical language and jargon.
- Aerial photographs can be used to help attendees orient to their location (particularly helpful for the regional water treatment station and the water system overview station).
- Ensure the words “draft,” “proposed,” etc., are clearly displayed at the rate and fee station.
- Provide relevant handouts (general utility information, FAQ on rate changes and brochure).
- Media may be present, so ensuring that the designated utility spokesperson is at the open house is critical.

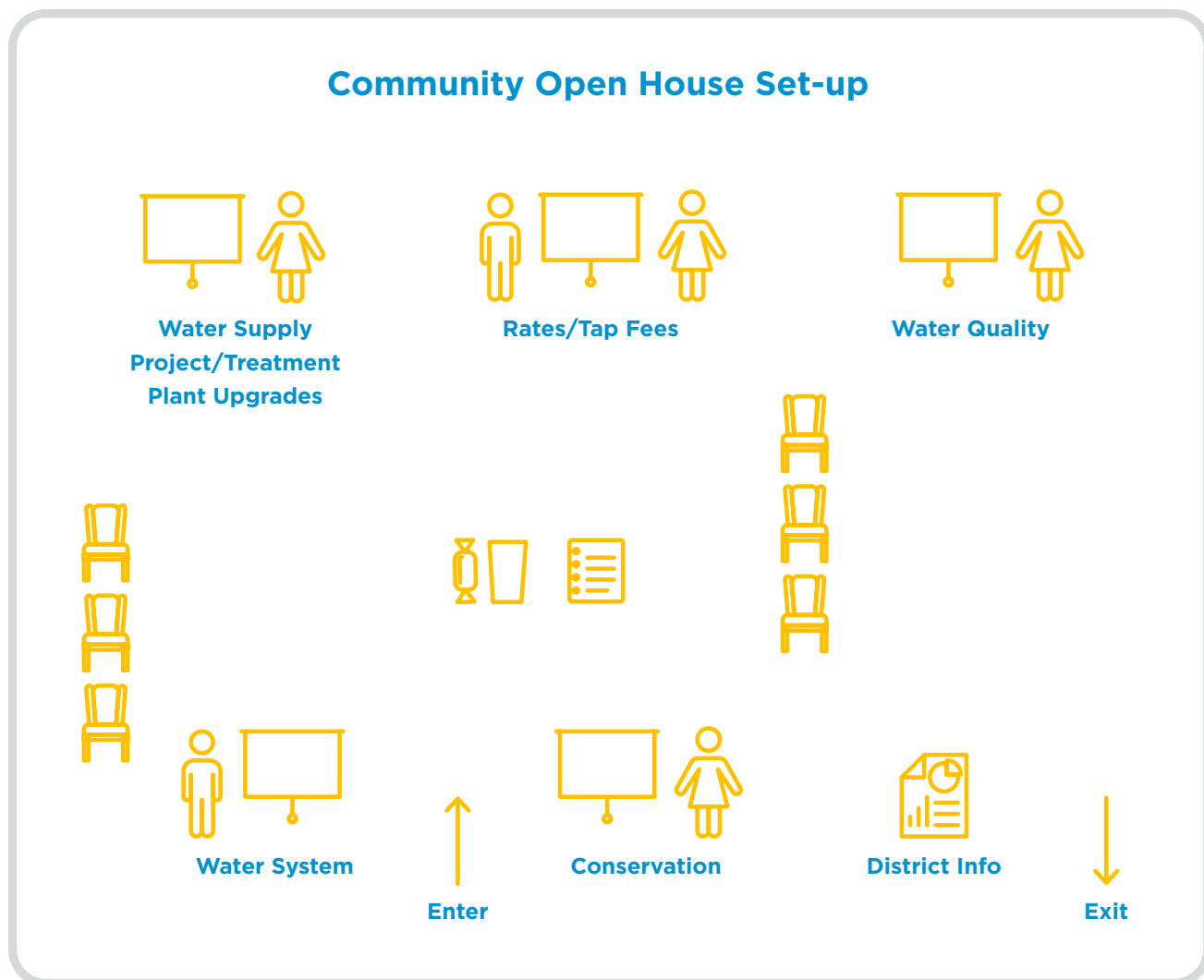
## Equipment

- Plenty of easels
- Comment box
- Signs identifying stations, refreshments, comment boxes, restrooms

## Space and Room

A draft room set-up has been included in this plan. There should be no fixed seating, although a few chairs for use when filling in a comment form, or for those that need a seat should be provided.

- A display and potentially a hand-out at each station, and a sign above each station identifying the topic
- Tables and chairs by the refreshment and comment area
- Arrange stations clockwise from the entrance



# TABULATING RESULTS

Given all of our busy schedules and the natural desire to move on to the next project, taking time to tabulate results at the end of a communications effort can be difficult. Foregoing this step, however, misses the opportunity to collect valuable feedback that can make your next project even more successful. It also misses the opportunity to thank those who helped along the way and celebrate a success in the organization.

Here are some tips for evaluation:

- Look back to your goals. You should be able to compare your results against your goal to determine the degree of success.
- Ask colleagues inside the organization to share their impressions of the effort; let them know you are open to their views on what went well and constructive criticism on what didn't go well.
- Develop a short online poll and ask those in the public who participated in the process to give their feedback.
- Outcomes are far more important than outputs – in other words, don't measure how many news releases you sent out. Measure the number of stakeholders who were likely reached by the news coverage you secured by sending out a news release.
- Dig into your traditional and social media metrics
  - » How many people were reached in traditional media articles that were published/aired? What percent of these articles/stories included at least one of your key messages? Was the tone of these pieces positive, negative or balanced?
  - » Compared to your baseline social media metrics, how was the engagement different on posts/tweets you sent as part of your campaign?

With these metrics in hand, write a short memo and send it to your organization and leadership. Give credit and appreciation to those who supported you and made the communication effort a success. Tout your metrics and share a couple items you think you'll do differently next time. Doing this will create a record and be a resource in the future, allow you to celebrate success as an organization and help position yourself as a strategist and organizational leader.

