

Planning Your Communication

Prepared for the Healthy Built Environment Program, Fraser Health
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Communication: the means someone uses to convey their thoughts, beliefs, feelings and opinions; the act of imparting information.

Communicating is one of our most basic instincts, and how we communicate can feel ‘natural.’ Yet our communication patterns are learned, often early in life from our families. Since the way we communicate is a learned skill, we can always improve it and do it more effectively.

Clear communication reflects clear thinking. Clear thinking can come from planning and preparation.

Communications planning is a *thinking* process. It’s a way to get clear and to ensure consistency.

Organizations often use a formal process to plan their communications. You can use this process to plan all your business-related communications. It can be used for specific issues or events or long-term relationship-building. The point is to stay focused in your communication efforts.

A communications plan can include your overall goal, specific objectives, types of audiences, strategies and key messages.

Objectives are the things you hope to achieve, and are usually listed as intended results or outcomes related to your audiences.

An **audience** is anyone you want reach. You can also consider others who might incidentally hear your messages.

Sometimes audiences are called stakeholders. When building a professional relationship, it can be helpful to think of an audience as a potential partner, since the communication will be a two-way dialogue.

Strategies are the ways to reach your objectives, such as through phone calls, meetings, publications or events.

Key messages are the concise messages you want your audience to hear.

You’ll want to consider your audience. Try to think about their point of view, and put yourself in their position – this will help you find common ground. It can be helpful to do a more detailed audience analysis. Some questions to consider:

- Who are they? Do they have traits unique to them?
- Why do you want to reach them?
- What do you want to say?
- What do they want to know? What do they already know?
- When and how often is best to reach them?
- What other questions might they have?

Your communication should always match, or mirror, your actions. If there’s dissonance between what’s being said and what’s actually happening, things will fall apart at some point. Authenticity builds trust. Trust and consistency help build relationships.

