

DESCRIPTION

When you have only a few minutes to convey an important message, every second counts! You want your message to be effectively communicated and remembered. As a visual aid, video can significantly enhance your **Presentation**. Video is an influential medium that boosts comprehension of a particular story, action, or message.

Videos can be used by CICs in several ways: as part of a **Presentation**; to promote understanding among the community; to record site activities; and to share professional ideas informally with other CICs, while demonstrating products or ideas.

REQUIRED ACTIVITY?

No.

MAKING IT WORK

Americans love video—even home video is popular. Studies clearly indicate that people remember 50% more of what they see *and* hear than of what they simply hear. Why not capitalize on a formula that works? Video is extremely effective in situations in which you need to deliver a comprehensive, consistent message because it can deliver that message many times in exactly the same way. Videos also can limit the need to make tours of sites available to large numbers of people. While a video made professionally is impressive, informal “homemade” videos can be effective too, at a fraction of the cost. It is important to understand when to use each, and to always keep the financial and image aspects of each clearly in mind.

Videos have been shown to increase your audience’s comprehension and retention of the message and boost the speed at which your audience understands the message. They also focus attention on important information.

WHEN TO USE

Videos are most effective when you need an icebreaker (*e.g.*, before a site tour), site access is difficult or dangerous, difficult technical topics need to be explained, or a particular situation or experience visualized. Videos also are effective when they contain a sincere message from a person who cannot appear personally but needs to communicate with the community, and when you want to give the audience a general, consistent overview of some aspect of the Superfund process.

You also can use good videos to stand in for you, or to be shown at multiple events. Videos of successful **Technical Assistance Grant (TAGs)** groups and **Community Advisory Groups** can mobilize communities because they show ordinary people doing and learning extraordinary things. Such videos provide your audience with a “can-do” community image they may become inspired to emulate.

A video is least effective when it has less to say than you do, or when it is more appropriate to establish credibility and respect by acting one-on-one with your audience and answering specific questions rather than relying on a visual aid. It also is less effective when you only have a short period of time to conduct your presentation and want to spend it directly with your audience, or when the room is not set up for a video presentation.

Do not use videos when the quality of the video is poor and hard to see, the videotaped material may give Superfund an unprofessional image, the video is too long or too complicated



[See Presentations, Tab 29](#)



[See Technical Assistance for Communities, Tab 41; Community Groups, Tab 4](#)

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Videos

for the audience's level of understanding, or the room or the audience is too large for effective viewing or the lighting is bad.

Videos should be used to enhance a presentation, not replace it. Videos of no more than 15 to 20 minutes generally work best. Sustain credibility with your audience by making sure the video is relevant to your presentation and by responding to any issues or questions raised by the video.

How to Use

EXISTING VIDEOS AS PART OF A PRESENTATION

To best use video for enhancing your community presentation, you should know your audience's concerns and informational needs; decide whether an existing video will meet those concerns and needs, at least to a large extent; balance the video presentation with enough time for specifics and questions; and ensure that the room set up will be conducive to sharing a video (*e.g.*, will everyone in the audience be able to see the screen?). In addition, you need to determine if you have access to appropriate video equipment. Some questions that you should keep in mind are: will you need to provide your own VCR and television; and how many people will be in the audience, and will each member of the group be able to see the video?

If your audience is made up of 25 people or fewer, one television should be enough. However, if the group is in the hundreds, you should use a big screen or a projection device; otherwise, using a video is probably not the best visual aid.

Work with your fellow CICs to start a library of existing videos—each of you can contribute the titles of videos you have on hand, with capsule descriptions of each, running time, and other relevant information, such as ideas for use. Then share this information with each other. Determine what is already out there before you brainstorm a new production!

Possible Topics

Creating a new video could involve a lot of expense. Start by researching what already exists. If you still feel there is a need for a video on your topic, try to script it so it will be useful in a variety of situations and usable by other CICs in your or other regions. Sample topics might include: Superfund, Risk, and You; The Superfund Pipeline; Opportunities for Community Decision Making; and Superfund Outreach—Getting Involved.

Making Your Own Video

Do not try to make a documentary with a hand-held camera. It simply will not make the right impression. When you are “speaking for Superfund,” you need to create an aura of technical expertise, and this is conveyed just as much by the medium as the message. We all are so accustomed to professionally-produced presentations that these are usually expected. “Home” video works well, though, in certain situations. These might include when you want to show residents' reactions, when the RPM wants to reassure the community about an imagined risk, or when you want to capture the proceedings at a focus group. Remember that home videos should be used only when the presenter is present to explain, much as in a slide presentation. It is also important to ensure that individuals who appear in the video have given their permission. You can get a pretty good outcome by setting a videocamera (or two or three) on tripods in good lighting. To get a feel for what kind of video is right in a particular situation, you need to shoot video. Practice is the key. Train a few volunteers to help in this endeavor. You will definitely be able to find people who want to do this—it is fun!

GETTING OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE

Working with a production house can also be a lot of fun—and affordable, if you do the groundwork yourself. You can write the script, create the slides, devise the situations, and coach the actors. The professionals will evaluate your script and make recommendations, then come in to shoot it. If you are well prepared, this can happen in just a day. It is a real pleasure to be part of the action when a good video team gets to work. You will have to pay to have the production company to edit the piece into shape, but if you know your material well, you will be able to make quick decisions that will save time and money in the long run. If you are organized, the video editor may even let you help with the final tweaking of your video.

Good scripting is paramount—ask for a consultation from someone who knows how to organize and write scripts. Amateurs often write for the eye, not the ear.

Using “EXPERTS” ON STAFF

There are many video “experts” within the organization who have countless years of experience working with video production or television, so use them as a resource (see “List of Attached Tools/Information”)! When creating your own video, their technical knowledge and suggestions will be invaluable. Not only will these experts be helpful in brainstorming and laying the groundwork, you might also ask them to help make the video.

HOMEMADE VIDEO AS TECHNICAL TRANSFER

Share what you have learned as a CIC with your colleagues!

Shoot *Exhibits* you have built, ideas for outreach, interviews with people who have pulled great volunteer efforts together, etc. Then send your video to other CICs. Do not be shy! By sharing with other CICs, you will be able to build an institutional memory among your colleagues. Doing so will also give you the opportunity to polish your presentation skills and practice video techniques.

One thing to keep in mind as you plan a video is that you don’t always have to use live footage. Sometimes, computer simulations, done properly, do the job just as well as live action taken at the site. Computer-generated images can be revised when needed and can offer the viewer a better view than live footage of the site or technology in some situations (*e.g.*, an aerial shot or a Geographical Information System map).

Examples

EXAMPLE 1: SOOTHING NIMBY

In one region, the CIC was dealing with a very frustrated, angry, and otherwise unhappy community near a Superfund site. Community members perceived the Agency as “invading” their territory, despite an abundance of information distributed to reassure them that the technologies used would not negatively affect the citizens.

The CIC organized a presentation that included a video that displayed the same technology being used at another site. It also showed how the community got involved in the cleanup process. After the presentation was over, the citizens had a new understanding of what was happening around them. They could see how other citizens like themselves were helping and even leading the effort, not just standing by while “others” came into their community and took over.



[See Exhibits,
Tab 13](#)

Videos

EXAMPLE 2: LEADING THE WAY

The community living near a Superfund site was dealing with the problem of lead and mercury. A concerned teacher asked the CIC if there was a way in which to educate local children about the dangers of poisoning in a way that was appropriate for their age groups.

A few weeks later, the CIC organized an exhibit in the auditorium of one of the schools and a variety of information was distributed concerning lead and mercury. Pamphlets were given to parents and school staff on what to do in case of emergencies involving either of the two deadly substances. For the children gathered in the auditorium, two short films were shown that dealt with the dangers of lead and mercury poisoning. Parents, children, and other community members asked questions relating to the movies. Afterwards, many adults stopped to thank the CIC who had organized the function, saying that the movies made the message about the poisonous substances more discernible to the children, as well as themselves! Most said it was a great way to show the students, parents, and teachers what mercury looked like in “real life,” without the danger of having it present. Being able to visualize the effects of the poisoning also strengthened the message.

Tips

- Videos deliver a comprehensive, consistent message. Use them to give a visual impression of a message, to “stand in” for you, or to share ideas with your colleagues.
- Consider your meeting venue (lighting, equipment, size of audience) when planning to use a video.
- Talk with other CICs to find out how they use videos in their community presentations.
- If you decide to make a video yourself, or you are considering working with a production house, **Do** your homework—determine the cost, the time needed, and other logistics before beginning production. Go see samples of their finished work.
- Carefully consider your audience and their needs before deciding to use a video.
- **Do not** use a video that may give Superfund an unprofessional image.
- If you make your own video, make sure that the topic area is general enough to be used in a variety of community presentations!

RELATED TOOLS/RESOURCES IN THE TOOLKIT

- [Community Groups, Tab 4](#)
- [Exhibits, Tab 13](#)
- [Presentations, Tab 29](#)
- [Public Meetings, Tab 32](#)
- [Technical Assistance for Communities, Tab 41](#)

ATTACHED ITEMS WITHIN THIS TOOL

- Attachment 1: How to Make a Video: Quick Reference Guide

ATTACHMENT 1: HOW TO MAKE A VIDEO

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

PLANNING A VIDEO

- Identify two or three main messages for the video script and outline information to support them.
- Describe major scenes that support the script.
- Identify a director, script writer and editor, graphic artist, video editor, researcher, and scout (to find scenes and potential actors). Consider involving stakeholders early in the development process.
- Select a narrator with a pleasant voice, and identify actors (“talent”), such as community members, colleagues, experts, or possibly professional actors. Obtain a signed agreement without contingencies from everyone who will appear in the video. A video production house (see “Resources” below) can help phrase an agreement.
- Interview several video production houses and compare costs and samples of their work. Ask to meet the key people you will be working with, and ask for references.
- Set in writing the division of labor between the production team and the video production house, and together set deadlines. If you prepare more than one division of labor, ask the production house for cost estimates for each of them.
- Plan a pilot test of the script and draft video on members of the target audience.

RESOURCES

- A video is usually a lot of work and expense, so budget time and money before signing agreements. If your production team does most of the writing and preliminary work, you can save money but not necessarily time.
- Supervise the production closely to stay on schedule and prevent cost overruns.

CONTENT TIPS

- Because video productions are expensive, select an enduring topic that is general enough to appeal to a wide audience.
- Less is more: if your messages are succinct, direct, and graphic, the audience will retain them. Avoid long-winded explanations.
- Match the content to the overall “tone” of the video, such as conversational, formal, or technical, and avoid patronizing language. Try to think as your audience thinks.
- Include interviews with people the target audience can relate to. These may include interviews of citizens in other communities with similar environmental problems.

LENGTH

- As a rule, shorter is better. Videos of 15 minutes or less are more versatile than longer videos. In many cases, videos are used to supplement other presentations and question and answer sessions.
- When editing a video for length, ask yourself: (1) Is this portion essential to the video's key messages? (2) Will people remember this? (3) Could this kind of information be more effectively delivered by some other method?

In This Guide, You Will Find Information On:

- **Planning a Video**
- **Resources**
- **Content Tips**
- **The Shoot**
- **Creating Visuals, Slides, Graphics**
- **Editing and Sweetening**

STYLE AND FORMAT

- The introductory sequence is especially important because it sets the tone for the video.
- Dividing the video into sections or phases generally improves viewer understanding of the material. It also provides logical places to stop the video for a few minutes to answer questions during the video.
- The best videos contain a lot of action. A static image or one face should not be on the screen for more than 15 seconds. Long expositions should be broken up with graphics, film clips, bullets, or other visual aides.
- Videos utilize the same organizational devices as written pieces, but instead of headers on a page, videos introduce transition slides or text printed over the video screen to emphasize key points. The video editor can offer a variety of stylistic choices for transitions (e.g., fades, wipes, shutters) and key points.
- Avoid dividing viewers' attention. For example, do not place moving text over a video portion that people need to watch closely. Balance motion with rest.
- It is a good idea to begin and end the video with riveting images that help reinforce the key messages. Sometimes it is effective to open and close with the same image.
- Choose consistent color schemes for graphical elements. For example, the transition slides should all look similar.
- Strive to produce a video that is credible, sharp, and accurate.

WRITING THE SCRIPT

- Choose a scriptwriter with vision and talent. Scriptwriting is a special art.
- Scripts are written for the ear, not the eye. Sentences are typically short and clear because the viewer hears each statement only once.
- Production houses need very precise audio-video scripts, which are usually written in two columns. The audio column describes the speech and sounds the audience will hear. The video column sets forth the sights, including the shoots and text slides, the audience will see.

The Shoot

Using Video Professionals

- Discuss all details of the shoot with the director and the production house in advance of the shoot, and plan the shoot in a place where noise and distractions can be controlled.
- Ensure that the production house shoots several takes of each segment at different angles and distances. During editing, the takes can be mixed to include, for instance, closeups and long shots that make the video interesting to watch. Ensure that the video crew leaves long “tails” of video tape before and after each take. These can be used to cover flaws with graphics or other transitions.
- Provide advice when needed to maintain the tone of the video. Help the production team watch and listen for glitches like unnatural facial expressions or awkward movements. Shoot again if you’re in doubt because it is not cost-effective to reshoot at another time. Video editing can often erase stammers and other verbal glitches.
- Coach your talent, and encourage them with praise. They are often nervous and lack a realistic perspective on how well they are doing. Criticize politely by saying, for instance, “It might be more effective if you...” Most people tire quickly in front of a camera and need periodic breaks.

Shooting Your Own Videotape

- When shooting indoors, rent or borrow lights because room lighting is not sufficient. Shoot in a secluded area, or post a “quiet” sign outside the room. Alert all staff to stay clear of the filming. Disable the public address system, and choose a day when no construction work is going on outside.
- Use a tripod—no hand-held cameras.
- Obtain persons to: videotape, listen for extraneous sounds, direct from the script, run errands, and hold cue cards.
- As with professional shoots, take a variety of shots, including head shots, medium-length shots, long shots, and leave plenty of tape before and after each take. When in doubt, reshoot.
- Keep a record of each take and where it exists on the tape. Annotate the record with, for instance, “stammer at end,” “head shot,” and “horn toots in background.” Mark each tape clearly.

Don’t Make These Common Mistakes

- **Poor lighting**
- **Hand-held camera**
- **Poor organization, rambling or belaboring points**
- **Too long**
- **Jerky camera moves**
- **Not enough takes**
- **Poor sound**

Creating Visuals, Slides, Graphics

- Software for generating transition slides and photos of art, and “optical character readers” for generating text on video screens are available, or you can have the video production house do this.
- The production house will need all transition slides, art, and other graphics before it can edit the video.



Final Editing

- After the production house or tape editor completes a draft video, it is time to craft the final product.
- Evaluate the video by analyzing whether the key messages you want viewers to remember are obvious and fully supported in a lively manner. A pilot test of the video on a sample target audience can be very helpful.
- Fortunately, video can be edited with computer tools now. Before this breakthrough, a video had to be shot pretty much in its natural order. Awkward transitions or graphics can be fixed, and music can be added. Some video experts insist that no music is more intrusive than music. If well done, music adds subliminal charm and attractiveness to the video.