

Risk Communication Strategy Template

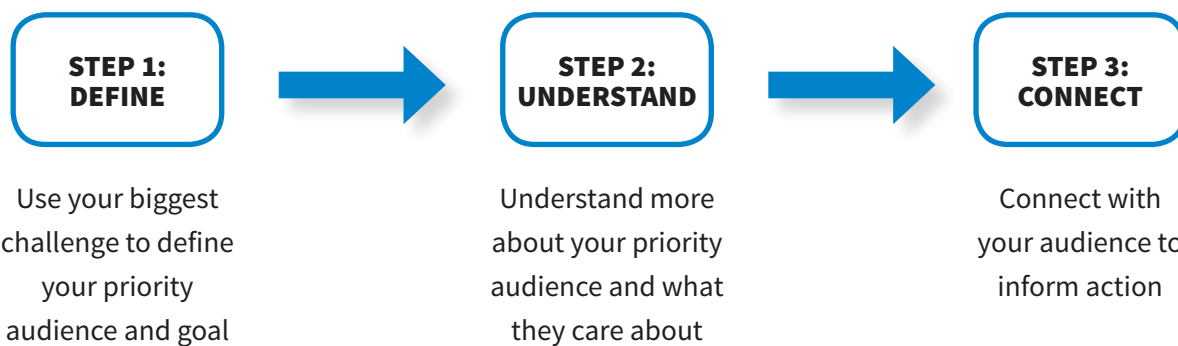
Our goal is to help people understand their coastal hazard risks and take actions to keep their communities, families, and homes as safe as possible.

This template provides a place for you, the risk communicator, to identify the priority audience and determine how to best engage this audience. You can use this template to quickly capture ideas or to build a foundation for a detailed communications strategy.

Keep in mind that there is no such thing as the “general public.” The more specific your priority audience, the more effective your risk communication efforts will be. Use this template multiple times to capture information about different priority audiences.

Need extra help? Contact coastal.info@noaa.gov. You can also attend the Building Risk Communication Skills training.

Learn more at coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/building-risk-communication-skills.html.



STEP 1. Define your risk communication audience and goal.

Defining your biggest risk communication challenge will help you identify your specific priority audience and what you want to accomplish with that audience.

CHALLENGE: What is your biggest communication challenge? (e.g., keeping flood risk mitigation on elected officials' minds as they make decisions about the city's safety and future)

AUDIENCE: Who do you want to reach? (e.g., town council members, neighborhoods in flood-prone areas)

GOAL: What do you want to accomplish? (e.g., town council members understand local flood risks and engage residents to identify ways to reduce these risks)

STEP 2. Understand your priority audience.

Use the space below to answer questions about the priority audience identified in Step 1. Identify what you know about them and where you need more information. Note where you are making assumptions so you can address these assumptions in Step 3.

1. What do they care about most that could be impacted? (e.g., family, job, maintaining community character, small business) This information will help you connect the risk to what the audience values. People are best at perceiving risks that are personal and immediate.

2. What is their experience with hazards? (e.g., been through a big one, none) This information tells you if the audience is familiar with a certain hazard, how they fared, and how that experience may shape their perceptions and preparations.

3. What hazard impacts are they concerned about? (e.g., home or business flooding, property damage, safety of family) This information shows how the audience perceives risk and what they know or don't know about the impacts of that hazard. Use this information to determine what impacts and solutions to talk about with the priority audience.

4. Who do they trust for risk and preparedness information? (e.g., family, faith-based advisor, local news, scientists, friends, emergency preparedness staff) People may trust one person for science information and another for safety and preparedness actions.

5. Where do they get information on risks? (e.g., weatherperson, relatives, local official, social media, favorite website) Knowing where they get information on certain topics can help you better connect with the priority audience.

6. Do they have a community- or individual-focused worldview?

Knowing a person's worldview can help you tailor conversation about actions taken to reduce risk, with the focus being on those strategies the person would likely find acceptable.

- **Individual-focused worldview:** People who lean toward an individual-focused worldview tend to think society functions best with fewer regulations and restrictions. Listen for words such as “my” or “I.”
- **Community-focused worldview:** People who lean toward a community-focused worldview tend to think society functions best when people work together for the common good. They are more likely to use words such as “our” and “we.”

7. How prepared for the next hazard is the priority audience?

Your audience will likely consist of individuals at varying degrees of awareness, preparedness, and action readiness. Target your communications to where your audience is.

- Some people are either not aware of their risk or don't think they are at risk. A first step is to help them see that what they care about can be impacted.
- Some people may be ready to take action but may not know what to do. Help them identify appropriate actions for their situation or community.
- People prepared for hazards can be great messengers. Help them tell their story and be your spokespeople. They can influence their peers.

STEP 3. Connect with your audience about risks.

Use the space below to determine how best to connect with your audience. Risk communication is an ongoing process, not just a catchy message or one-time event. Successful risk communication efforts require multiple interactions with your audience to reach your risk communication goals. Refer to answers provided in Step 2, “Understand your priority audience,” as you answer each question below.

8. What questions could you ask to learn more about your audience? What will you listen for in their response?

Tip: Start simple.

- Tell me more . . .
- Can you explain what you mean by “x” (reiterate what they said)?
- Help me understand your situation.

Consider asking the questions you didn’t know the answer to or assumptions made in Step 2. Rephrase the questions so they are appropriate for your audience and the conversation.

9. What opportunities exist for you to better connect with your audience?

(e.g., neighborhood event, social media)

Tip: Develop a calendar or timeline for multiple interactions. Risk communication is not a one-time thing.

- Find where your audience hangs out or where you can meet them in person.
- Connect through their church
- Meet them at their homeowners association meeting
- Attend a community event such as a farmers market or celebration
- Host a get-to-know-you happy hour
- Attend a town council meeting

10. Who are trusted sources of information that you can collaborate with to reach your audience?

Tip: Reach out to different organizations and agencies to discuss risk communication. Ask who they are talking with, and what their audiences are interested in and concerned about. Consider collaborating with these trusted sources and developing consistent messages geared toward your shared priority audience.

11. How will you make the conversation engaging so people will be interested and will want to continue the discussion?

Tip: Base your approach on what you know. If you don't know, find out. It's best to use multiple methods to share information, since people need to hear the same message repeatedly.

At a public forum, for instance, consider what visuals you will use.

- Posters, photographs, videos, PowerPoint, field trip, stories

Include opportunities for participants to share their experiences.

- Small group discussions
- Question and answer session
- A comment box
- Survey
- Online

12. How can you frame the conversation to connect with what the audience cares about? What did you learn about the audience that led you to select this frame?

Tip: A frame is how we phrase or say something depending on who we are talking with.

Here are a few frames to get you started:

Be prepared. “Be prepared for the next storm.” This empowering message appeals to a broad audience. Individual-focused people see this as a call to take care of themselves, while community-focused people view this as a way to help the community at large. It addresses the question, “what does this mean for me and my community?”

Personal responsibility. Everyone needs to be responsible for his or her choices and actions. This type of approach appeals to people who believe in fewer regulations and restrictions. Most receptive audience: people who value individualism.

Stewardship. Being good stewards and protecting the planet is important. Today's stewardship affects future generations by leaving the community and the world a better place. Most receptive audience: people who value environmentalism and are community-focused.

Find more information about frames in this *Risk Communication Basics* guidebook (coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/risk-communication-guidebook.html).

13. How will you help the priority audience identify their risk-reduction options?

Tip: Create an opportunity, such as facilitating a series of meetings, for community members to work together to come up with risk-reduction solutions. When people help identify solutions, they feel empowered and are more likely to follow through.

Emphasize actions that governments, individuals, and organizations can take, and give examples of how these actions have made a difference in other communities dealing with the same hazards and issues. Talk about both small- and large-scale projects and short- and long-term actions. Share ideas to get people talking and brainstorming. Balance experts and non-experts in these discussions.

Example actions include using local plans and ordinances to steer development away from hazard-prone areas; buying flood insurance; acquiring flood-prone areas; elevating homes and buildings; reinforcing roofs; creating or preserving open space such as a park or greenway; identifying barriers to taking action; and identifying funding opportunities to pay for solutions.