

Best Management Practice:

BMP F: Create a Communications Plan

1 What and Why?

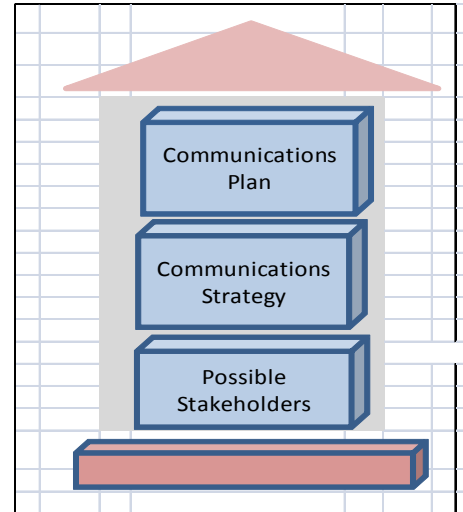
What is a communication plan? A communications plan sets out the ways you will communicate with people who influence the operation of your water system.

Why do we need a communication plan? You need to talk with your stakeholders, including customers, health officials, consultants, suppliers, lenders and others about how you plan to operate your water system.

How do we prepare a Communications Plan? Here are the main steps in preparing a communications plan. These steps are explained further in following sections. For each step you create a building block.

- Step 1: Identify possible stakeholders
- Step 2: Be clear about what you want to communicate
- Step 3: Ensure you communicate effectively

This BMP will help you to better understand the benefits of good communication on financial matters and other items related to your water system, and help you to communicate your needs to others.



2 Challenges and Benefits

A communications plan will help overcome certain challenges and provide several benefits:

Challenges to Overcome	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowing who to include, and when they are needed• Determining what information needs to be available for emergencies and anticipated contingencies• Consolidating contact information in one accessible place• Updating communication plan at least annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifies all those who need to be included, with their resource role clearly explained• A plan that's ready to use is indispensable in an emergency• Public Notice templates will be prepared ahead of time:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Water Quality Advisory• Boil Water Notice• Do Not Use Water Notice• Provides ability to respond appropriately when communication is needed• Builds positive relationships with users, suppliers, regulators and others that can speed actions needed in an emergency.

3 Steps to Follow

Follow the steps outlined below. Create building blocks using the worksheets and other tools provided (See worksheet at the end of this BMP).

Step 1: Identify Possible Stakeholders

Stakeholder

A person, group, organization, member or system who affects, or can be affected by, the actions of your organization.

Decision-makers such as lenders, health officials, and other stakeholder groups may need to know what plans you have in place, including those concerned with finances. See the worksheet *Our Stakeholders* for help in identifying our stakeholders. Stakeholders may include:

- Lenders (such as credit unions, and government granting agencies), who may ask to see your annual budgets, asset management plans, spending reports and other items.
- Health officials (drinking water officers, public health engineers), who may require financing plans for equipment or structural upgrades before permit approval, or to see funding set aside for operator training and certification.
- Customers, who need to know about the state of the system, upcoming projects, rates information, staffing changes and other issues.
- Customers and the general community, who need to know of emergency procedures.

F1. Our Stakeholders

Step 2: Be clear about what you want to communicate

Complying with Regulations

- Tell your team about sampling, reporting and record keeping requirements and follow-up regularly.
- Communicate regularly with health officials to confirm compliance with Conditions of Permit
- Stay aware of new regulations and new tools or technologies.

As a water supplier you have important topics to communicate, such as:

- How you comply with regulations:
- How you handle budget issues, regulatory or good practice changes, and infrastructure needs.
- Your plans for major infrastructure spending and rate changes.
- State of your water system, partly communicated through your annual report to users.

The building block: *Communication Strategies: Examples* shows communications activities for several topics (See appendix to this BMP).

F2. Communications Strategies: Examples

Step 3: Ensure you communicate effectively

SMART Communications Objectives

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Realistic
Time-focused

Know what you are trying to do. Are you trying to educate your customers about the financial situation? Are you trying to build support or create demand? Do you want to get people to do something differently, like conserve water? Maybe you're trying to defuse a situation. Whatever you want to do, you need to define it to yourself before you can communicate it to others. Your objectives need to be SMART. See the worksheet appended to this BMP for use in communication planning.

F3. Communications Planning

If you can't get all of the above, start with specific and measurable. An example might be that you want to communicate about the need for a rate increase of 5%. A measure of success might be that you reach 100% of your users with the message about a meeting. At the meeting, not everyone may accept your reasons for the increase but you can realistically appeal to their concerns for safe and sustainable water service (their values). You'll want to plan your communications well ahead of when you want to implement the increase.

Two Parts to the Message

1. explain the data, risks, and reasons for your communication
2. address the values of your audience.

Clear, consistent communication is an important part of sustainable service delivery. This can help prevent misunderstandings and build trust with both customers and decision makers. Effective communication on financial matters can include:

More tips for effective communications:

- Assume the reader will skim financial reports, so put important elements in **bold** and/or large type.
- Use graphics, maps, and charts to help explain your message
- Provide honest, simple, nontechnical, and consistent messages
- Always list your contact information.

- monthly email updates on spending
- phone calls to get information on specific issues
- weekly talks with your team on system status
- Open houses to engage users about rate changes
- face-to-face meetings with lenders to get financing for new equipment.

Whether your communication is in writing or in person, you need to know what the key message is that you want to get across. Try to limit each communication to **one** main topic. Most topics, particularly difficult ones, will have two parts to the message. Addressing the values of your audience means thinking about and acknowledging their concerns. They may wonder about water safety, quantity of water delivered, and their ability to pay for services. Considering the interests of others can help increase their trust in you and lower

resistance to “the numbers” you are presenting.

Building relationships for effective communication

Communication on financial matters will happen throughout the year, as needed. As you better understand your different “audiences” and how to share financial information, it is a good idea to continue regular communications. This will help your system operation should you have an emergency,

either financial or operational. Your emergency communication will only be as strong as the general relationships you build beforehand.

3. How long will this take?

The table below shows a typical timeframe to prepare this Best Management Practice for implementation. This includes communication time to discuss details with key people, bring together individuals who can contribute to the process, and administrative time to assemble the information needed for the individual building blocks. Preparation of each building block, perhaps in the form of a worksheet or checklist, may only require one or two hours, once you are familiar with the process.

Expect to revisit your communications plan regularly to update information. This review and update will take less time than the initial planning process, and is important for good communications.

	Building Block	Weeks >	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Possible Stakeholders: Worksheets									
2	Communications Strategies: Examples									
3	Communications Planning: Worksheet									

4. More Information

More information on the topic of this Best Management Practice is available from the following:

Drinking Water Health Authority Contacts:

http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/protect/dw_ha_contacts.html

Drinking Water Resources and Associations:

<http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/protect/dwresources.html>

WaterBC:

<http://www.waterbc.ca/resources/best-management-practices/>

[Also see worksheets below](#)

F2. Communications Strategies: Examples

For Year Beginning:

Water System:

Modified By:

Last Update:

Topic	Communication Strategy
Rate Increase Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare your case and show supporting information Host a users’ meeting or Open House Place notices where people meet (mail boxes, grocery store) as well as mailing invitations (in a bill insert), and on your website if you have one Partner with local government officials or financial service providers to share information Bring long-term (5-year) budget information to show costs of maintenance/operations, need for equipment upgrades, and debt repayments Use financial models (spreadsheets, posters) showing that the rate increase will pay for the level of service that customers want Consider a rate structure that will encourage conservation (usage fee versus flat fee?) Explain how your proposal will help provide safe drinking water
Infrastructure Upgrade Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get cost estimates from respected vendors Bring operation and maintenance records to meetings with decision makers and potential lenders Describe your water system, your experience, your training. Partner with your public health engineer, drinking water officer, and local officials for information sharing Give decision makers non-technical reasoning so that the message is clear and understandable. Work to understand lenders’ priorities and help them to understand your own. Explain why the upgrade is necessary for delivering safe drinking water Once financing is approved, host a users’ meeting
Annual Report to Users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An <i>Annual Report to Users</i> is required by legislation to provide the results of monitoring, within 6 months of the calendar year. This report can also communicate financial and other system status information. It could be included on the water system website, take the form of a newsletter, or be a separate report mailed to users. Include financial summaries of past spending and future estimates Explain need for any future projects, including financial impacts and system benefits

F3. Communications Planning

For Year Beginning:

Water System: Completed By: Last Update:

Your communication objectives should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-focused

Communications Objective	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Realistic	Time-Focused	Notes