

Making the Most of Your Outreach Project

Many local, state and federal governmental agencies are now providing Web 2.0 opportunities to support your message delivery. Contacting local Public Affairs Offices in your area, region and state may provide already well established audiences and opportunities to promote your message dissemination.

Use Available Support Systems

There are many sources of support for your outreach project. Other local Floodplain managers can be of great assistance, especially if they've already developed a briefing for the group you are addressing, or if they have dealt with a condition you are addressing in the community such as a recent flood. State and Federal officials and other ASFPM members and groups can also help with information and validation of a message.

Before starting any outreach project there are a few important questions worth asking:

- Who is your audience?
- What matters to your audience?
- What is your message?
- What is the best delivery mechanism for the message?



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Fargo, ND, June 18, 2009—A good example of community outreach - Photograph by Samir Valeja/FEMA

Association of State Floodplain Managers

The mission of ASFPM is to promote education, policies, and activities that mitigate current and future losses, costs, and human suffering caused by flooding, and to protect the natural and beneficial functions of floodplains - all without causing adverse impacts.

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A quick outreach guide for Floodplain Managers Outreach Basics

Audience

Your audience will determine your message. For Example, if you are addressing elected officials your message will likely be very different than when addressing developers, or the public. It is important to consider what your audience's interests are with regards to your topic area and then work to bridge the gap with the important information you wish to share.

Usually, it is critical to get out of the role of regulator in your delivery and move to a more educational approach. In other words, don't share the information from YOUR perspective, tell them from THEIR perspective. Here are two examples of outreach and audience matching the message:

#1: An elected official wants to hear why your floodplain program is important from their perspective. Examples could be: it keeps constituents out of harm's way, it provides voters insurance discounts, it demonstrates community commitment to the safety and welfare of the citizens and it reduces the number of calls for emergency services personnel saving the community time and money.

#2: A developer wants to know how the regulations will impact their developments including potential costs, potential benefits and selling points for their compliance. Examples

could include: being able to tell the buyer how they built to safer levels saving them tens of thousands of dollars in insurance costs over the life of a normal mortgage by building two feet above BFE.

Your Message

Your message is critical to the successful delivery of the concept you want your audience to understand. Where you can, be brief but specific enough to merit attention and to help people remember your idea. Some important tips to help you get your message out:

- Use talking points
- Be brief, outreach presentations can be as short as a few sentences and still be very powerful, as reflected in these outreach messages:
- A House Benefits Only One – *Natural Floodplains Benefit the Entire Community!*
- Build Higher: Build Safer
- 2 feet Higher = Thousands of \$ saved in insurance costs!
- A House is not a boat – 2 feet higher less chance to float!

Messages should be audience specific, clear, attention getting and all about why the program is important for the audience. They can be a few sentences or ½ hour depending on the audience and their time requirements and the importance of the project or topic.

Delivering the Message

There are a variety of choices for your message delivery. Keep in mind, if you have a member of the group who will support your message, this will add validity and authority to the message. For example, you can get a developer to talk to the development community at your meeting about their success in working with you. The same process works with insurance agents, elected officials, engineers, surveyors, home owners, realtors and other groups you may want to address in your community.

In these times of social networking, civilian journalism and decreasing numbers of mainstream media, there now exists many new and exciting ways to develop and create exciting messages and deliver them to large audiences with little effort. With well developed talking points and a little research regarding your audience needs, you will find a number of wonderful opportunities to educate and promote flood plain management.

Consider using many of the already existing systems of communication to get your message out also. YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, FaceBook, Blogger, Coveritlive, and other Web 2.0 tools that may be very valuable in getting your message out. Also consider news media, print, television and radio to help support your message delivery.