



Connecting with your Audience: Planning Your Next Interaction

Each interaction with your audience provides a powerful opportunity to learn about that group and share information about coastal hazard risks. This quick reference leads you through the planning process and provides examples of how others are approaching this task.

Part 1 – Identify Audience and Goal

Part 2 – Outline Content and Format

Part 3 – Identify Logistics

Part 4 – Identify Materials and Supplies

Part 5 – Read about Tools, Techniques, and Examples of How People Are Interacting

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: Before you start filling in this worksheet, have you determined your priority audience? Is your audience narrowed down as much as possible to ensure that your interaction is most effective? Have you defined your risk communication goal? Do you know what ways your audience likes to interact on this topic? If you responded “no” to any of these questions, start with the risk communication strategy template found at this address:

coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/risk-communication-strategy.html

PART 1: AUDIENCE AND GOAL

Fill in the details below using information from steps 1 and 2 in your risk communication strategy. See Before you Begin for more information.

1. **Describe who you are trying to reach. This is your priority audience.** (For example, find out what matters to them, their experience with hazards, cultural norms, language.)
2. **Describe what you hope to accomplish during this interaction. This is your risk communication goal—the action you want your audience to take as a result of this interaction.** (For example, do you want them to buy flood insurance, implement more stringent building codes, pass a new ordinance requiring new homes to be elevated three feet above the minimum FEMA requirement?)
3. **Identify where you will find your audience. Don't expect them to come to you.** (For example, you might find them at a booth at the farmer's market, during a discussion at a homeowner's association meeting about flooding problems, or at a workshop to identify strategies the town can take to reduce risk.)

PART 2: CONTENT AND FORMAT

As you design your program, keep in mind what you want your audience to do as a result of this interaction. This goal should inform the design of the event, which should reflect how the audience likes to learn and how you can best learn from them. Make the event interactive and fun (when appropriate) so they want to stay engaged.

1. **Describe what activities your participants will be doing during the event.** See Part 5 for techniques and examples. Consider alternatives to a presentation. Depending on your priority audience, there may be additional things to consider such as the need for child-friendly, elder-friendly, or culturally relevant and appropriate activities.
2. **Describe how you will learn about your audience members and how their input will help inform what you say and do during the event.**
 - a. List questions to learn about their concerns, values, and what matters to them. Use this “Questions to Ask and What to Listen For” list for ideas: coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/risk-questions.html
 - b. How will this audience input be used to ensure that your approach is responsive to audience needs?
3. **Describe how you will enable participants to share their experiences, thoughts, and questions.** Have people share their experiences, concerns, and ideas. Start with a question such as “what do you like about your community?” Then ask people to share the impacts they are seeing from hazards and the related concerns. You can use small groups, cellphone polling, flipcharts, and photos to have these discussions. Set up the environment so people feel comfortable asking questions. Consider having a place for people to write questions if they don’t feel comfortable asking in the larger group.
4. **List what information is needed to explain the risks in terms of your audience’s experiences, needs, and concerns.** Consider alternatives to PowerPoint. Determine how much technical information is really needed. We are trying to reach our risk communication goal, not turn everyone into a scientist. Avoid jargon, and use terms that resonate with the audience. Use stories. Consider if visuals such as maps, photos, or videos, can help tell the story and foster a connection.

5. **Describe partners who can help plan and implement the event.** Identify the roles, responsibilities, and joint goals of each partner. Consider partnering with a community-based organization that is trusted by the community. Ideally, these partners would help design the activities and help facilitate the interaction.
6. **Describe trusted sources and how they will interact with the audience.** Consider who has existing relationships with your audience and what roles they should play during the interaction.
7. **Describe how you will help participants identify risk reduction options.** Here's a best practice to consider: engage a group of stakeholders and come up with risk reduction options together. Share what your organization is doing, but also ask people to share what they would like to see happen and what they personally can do.
8. **Describe how you will keep the conversation going after this event.** Risk communication is not a one-time conversation. Ask your audience for ideas and preferences for how future events or interactions should be designed.
9. **Describe how you will share updates.** It's important to follow through on what you say you will do and share updates on progress. Let participants know how their input will be used and follow up (for example, through a notice in a newsletter the audience already receives, an email list participants can sign up for to receive information about the next event or conversation, by sharing your contact information.)

PART 3: LOGISTICS

Let your audience direct where the conversation will be held. Consider locations, dates, and times that work best for this audience. For example, some people do not feel comfortable coming to a government building, and some do not have the ability to travel. Consider locations along public transportation routes, if necessary. Think about your audience's needs and plan accordingly.

Location:

Date:

Time:

Number of people:

Sponsors – Consider who can help provide meals, transportation, advertisement, materials, etc.

Name of organization	Details (what they will provide)

Meals or Refreshments

Name of organization	Details

Transportation

Name of organization	Details

Childcare

Name of organization	Details

Event Facilitator

Name or Name of organization	Role and responsibilities

Interpreter

Name or Name of organization	Role and responsibilities

Additional logistics:

PART 4: MATERIALS AND SUPPLIES

Identify the materials and supplies needed for this interaction. Do materials need to be translated into another language? Do you need to offer materials in alternative formats to accommodate people with low or no vision, or those with hearing issues?

Supply (e.g., flipchart, chairs, microphone)	Number of	Details	Assigned to

PART 5: ENGAGEMENT TOOLS, TECHNIQUES, AND EXAMPLES

Use the tools to build your engagement skills. Incorporate the techniques to make your interaction more engaging and effective. See examples of how others are engaging a variety of audiences.

Engagement Tools

Use these tools to engage a variety of audiences.

- Building Risk Communication Skills: Questions to Ask and What to Listen For coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/risk-questions.html
- Facilitation Techniques coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/facilitation-techniques.html
- Introduction to Stakeholder Participation coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/stakeholder.html
- Meeting Engagement Tools coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/met.html
- Techniques for Facilitating Virtual Meetings coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/facilitating-virtual-meetings.html
- Process Agenda Template coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/process-agenda-template.html

Techniques for Interaction

Read about techniques that can be used for more interesting and engaging alternatives to the typical public meeting.

Community Engagement Techniques

One goal of risk communication is to ensure that every community member has access to information and has the ability to participate in discussions about risks and solutions. Those most affected by hazards have historically been left out of these conversations. Below are several resources to help local governments ensure engagement.

- Engagement techniques for local governments
resources.kimlundgrenassociates.com
- Oral Histories Shed Light on Georgia’s Family Fishing Culture
coast.noaa.gov/states/stories/oral-histories-shed-light-on-fishing-culture.html
- NOAA Expands Coastal Opportunities for People with Disabilities
- Creating sign language for “estuary” and other coastal terms, and trails that accommodate wheelchairs and the needs of the visually impaired, are just two of the contributions from research reserves and coastal zone management programs.
coast.noaa.gov/states/stories/noaa-expands-coastalopportunities-for-people-with-disabilities.html

Field Trips

- The Timberworks flood resilience project in Washington State used walking tours as one way to engage community members in the planning process. They asked people to share where they’ve seen flooding, where they see opportunities for improvements, and where they see opportunities to make their neighborhoods safer and more enjoyable. These questions aligned with community planning goals.
ezview.wa.gov/site/alias__1938/36741/overview.aspx
- In this San Francisco Bay community project, an opportunity to collectively experience the shoreline fostered meaningful conversations about coastal assets and issues. “The field trip made it real for stakeholders,” said Lindy Lowe, program manager of Adapting to Rising Tides. Hearing presentations from partners that either owned or managed an asset or geographic area helped the group better understand the issues and see opportunities for shared solutions. Learn more in this case study, “Stakeholder Engagement Process Reaps Big Rewards for Climate Adaptation Project.”
coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/san-francisco-climate-adaptation.html

Games

- The “Game of Floods” is a public education activity focused on sea level rise adaptation. Participants work in small groups to develop a vision for a hypothetical landscape that will experience sea level rise and increased storms. The game has fostered collaborative dialogue and a deeper understanding of the environmental, economic, and social choices that communities face as they prepare for sea level rise. marincounty.org/depts/cd/divisions/planning/csmart-sea-level-rise/game-of-floods

Stories

- Everyone has a story to tell about making Baltimore a stronger, fairer, and safer place for all. This is one of the messages you’ll see on Baltimore’s “Every Story Counts” (baltimoresustainability.org/every-story-counts) project website. The forum is giving community members the opportunity to share how they are building a more resilient city.
- In local government, communication is often about getting city hall’s message out to residents. Denver’s chief storyteller is flipping that around. She thinks city hall communications should be more about listening—especially when it comes to residents whose voices have been ignored in the past. Her role is to find those people and help them get their message out. Listen to an interview with Denver’s chief storyteller to learn more: kimlundgrenassociates.com/devers-chief-storyteller-on-the-power-of-stories-to-engage-your-community. View Denver’s community stories at denvergov.org/content/denvergov/en/i-am-denver/stories/2019/storytelling-lab--smiley-branch-library.html.

Information Booths

South Carolina Sea Grant held an open house to build flood awareness for neighborhoods. Staff members used information booths to share information and start conversations. One booth had updated FEMA flood maps; another helped people share their flood experiences; at another booth, people were asked to identify actions citizens and the city could take to reduce flooding using green infrastructure. People received stamps for every booth they visited and got a free dinner after visiting so many booths. This approach enabled many one-on-one conversations and identified places the citizens could turn to for help.

Acknowledging Homeowners’ Experiences and Concerns

“I’ve found that when you bring flood mitigation down to the human level, people start listening,” shares Jennifer McCulloch, flood mitigation program coordinator, Morris County, New Jersey. Homeowners may want to place blame for flooding on others. In Jennifer’s case, more than one homeowner blamed the county for allowing residences to be built in the floodplains decades ago. She found that acknowledging the past and then moving on to the future was helpful. One

sample response: “You’re right. We didn’t know 50 years ago what we know now about building in the floodplains. That’s why we have this program to help you get a fresh start.” Jennifer learned, through trial and error, to tailor her discussions to her audience. In this case study, learn how Jennifer changed her approach to keep the conversation going: “Sharing Stories and Improving Discussions About Floodplain Buyouts.”

coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/floodplain.html

Including Every Stakeholder Potentially Impacted by Flooding Early in the Process

“Our process was locally led, which meant community members were involved in every step, from modeling flood impacts to choosing mitigation techniques. This enabled an open conversation,” shared Graydon Dutcher, stream program coordinator, Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District. To gain support and maximize benefits, the commission also includes stakeholders in modeling and restoration efforts. Learn more in this case study: “A Community Works Together to Restore the Floodplain and Reduce Damages.”

coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/walton-village.html

Interaction Examples

See examples of how others are engaging different audience groups.

Youth

Kids Teaching Flood Resilience is a nonprofit working to position youth to be a resource of knowledge and resilience. This organization works with Title 1 schools, which are traditionally in low-income, flood-prone neighborhoods. Each project begins by identifying pre-existing conditions of “educational vulnerability”—that is, a lack of awareness or access to knowledge that can mitigate one’s risk of harm from a hazard. kidsteachingfloodresilience.com

Real Estate Professionals

“Our real estate professionals are working on the front lines with residents; their work and input is invaluable,” says Lisa Foster, Pinellas County floodplain administrator. She and her team worked with several agents to better understand their interests. They used this input to develop resources for the agents, including the Flood Map Service Center, realtor training, and flood awareness materials. Learn more in this case study, “Increasing Flood Risk Awareness through a Real Estate Professional Training Program.” coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/flood-risk.html

Over 55 Community Members

Delaware Sea Grant holds preparedness workshops with community members 55 and over. Here are several lessons learned from their experiences:

- “Protect the life you have built” is a message that resonates with this demographic.
- Don’t label people. For example, an image used in the materials that showed an advanced-aged person wasn’t well received.
- Work with trusted authorities.
- Use local hazard events that happened in the community as examples.
- Offer coffee, donuts, and more breaks.
- Ask them to take one action. Have them take action at the workshop. Computers were set up at the meeting, for instance, and everyone registered with Delaware’s 911 service.
- Find where your target audience is. The workshop was advertised at senior centers and assisted living facilities.

Learn more about how Delaware Sea Grant is helping seniors prepare for coastal hazard risks.

deseagrant.org/news-all/2019/1/23/helping-lewes-seniors-prepare-for-emergencies

Volunteers

Through its Thrive Indianapolis Ambassador program, this city provides materials to help community members start conversations about what it means to create neighborhoods that are healthy, happy, and resilient. People can download ready-made materials, including games, trivia, training materials, and mapping exercises.

thriveindianapolis.com/get-involved