

COMMUNICATION PLANS AND STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCING PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF POTABLE REUSE PROJECTS - VITAL FOR OUR WATER FUTURE

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I. INTRODUCTION

Potable reuse is an emerging solution that can provide water to communities anywhere in the world with a reliable, locally controlled source of water, but one of the greatest obstacles to the implementation of potable reuse projects is public perception.

The **Model Public Communication Plan for Advancing DPR Acceptance** [3] published in 2015 by the WaterReuse Research Foundation (now the Water Research Foundation) co-authored by Mark Millan, Patricia Tennyson, and Dr. Shane Snyder, unveils strategic methods on how to communicate with communities evaluating potable reuse (both indirect and direct) to meet their future water supply needs. Although this work was first introduced in 2015, it continues to provide guidance and strategic value toward successfully advancing public acceptance of potable reuse.

Knowing what works well, and what does not, are critical elements in the communications and outreach process when introducing potable reuse projects to the public. Since the publishing of WRF-13-02 (Currently referenced as WRF-4540 by the Water Research Foundation), Mark and his team at Data Instincts have tested, explored, and put into practice, findings from this research to advance challenging potable reuse projects. He has consulted on numerous potable reuse projects in the U.S., including:

- Pure Water Monterey - One Water Monterey
- Pure Water SF – San Francisco Public Utility Commission
- Pure Water Westminster - Westminster, Maryland
- OneWater Nevada - Truckee Meadows Water Authority, Reno, Sparks, Washoe County
- Pure Water Soquel - Soquel Creek Water District
- Countywide Water Reuse Master Plan (CoRe Plan) Valley Water - Santa Clara Valley Water District

I.1 General Background

The WRF-13-02 team approach outlines a carefully crafted and methodical strategy that embraced previous theoretical research, tests, and supplements with a thoughtful sequence of extensive literature review, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and public opinion surveys. They conducted in-depth interviews with water agencies in various parts of the U.S. and Australia, as well as with legislators, health professionals, and representatives of special interest groups to identify key concerns and develop initial messaging. The messages were tested in selected communities in California where potable reuse was being considered, using focus groups to obtain a representative sampling. Telephone surveys were used for further testing of messages.

The findings from these information-gathering activities were used to develop a communication framework for detailed outreach plans that could be used as a model for communities worldwide that seek to introduce and initiate potable reuse awareness and acceptance. Knowing what works well, and what does not, is vital in the communications and outreach process when introducing potable reuse projects to the public. [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7]

I.2 Research Objectives

The core objective of WRRF 13-02 was to advance acceptance of potable reuse projects by:

- Building awareness and support of existing and planned potable reuse projects
- Fostering an understanding of the need to continue expanding our water supplies

Key to this objective was to develop communication plans and strategies for public outreach that could be adapted and utilized at local and regional levels, as well as glean lessons learned from previous projects, and share insights that could be universally applicable. [4]

In addition to public outreach strategies, the communication plans include messaging platform components with public outreach tools and tactics. The plans are flexible documents that can be adapted to the specific needs and situations of individual communities. [3]

II. RESEARCH CONDUCTED

Potable reuse involves the use of proven and reliable technology to purify recycled water so it can safely supplement the drinking water supplies of communities. It is especially valuable to communities in water-scarce regions. Experience among water agencies and municipalities has shown, however, that public acceptance of potable reuse is one of the primary challenges facing this source of water supply.

Drinking water that was processed recently from sewage has been a difficult hurdle for utilities to clear. Overcoming the so-called “yuck factor” associated with potable reuse is at the forefront of research currently under way in the water reuse industry. “Model Public Communication Plan for Advancing DPR Acceptance” (WRF-13-02) is aimed at advancing public acceptance for potable reuse projects by building support and awareness of existing and planned potable reuse programs and fostering an understanding of the great need to continue to expand our water supply sources. [7] [3] [8]

One of the critical elements these studies have identified to build support and acceptance of potable reuse is a detailed communication plan for public outreach that describes how to engage the various target audiences who can help to make or break a potable reuse program or project. The results consist of communication plans that include messaging platform components with public outreach tools and tactics. The plans are flexible documents to be adapted to the specific needs and situations of individual communities.

In WRF-13-02 the project team initially conducted an extensive literature review of previous research related to potable reuse acceptance and attempted approaches for communication. Next, a series of one-on-one meetings were held with individuals involved with potable reuse projects in their communities — general managers and communication staff from various utilities — to gain an understanding of communication challenges and successes they experienced. Interviews were also conducted with



legislators and special interest groups in California to learn about their attitudes, perceptions, and support for potable reuse projects. The findings from the literature review and interviews were used to develop a set of messages, which were tested in focus groups and in telephone surveys in two communities (the City of San Diego and the service area of the Santa Clara Valley Water District). The research team surmised that these two regions reflected California’s overall demographic at the time (2014).

During each step of the project, the guiding principle was to “Listen, Learn, Retool, and Engage.” Each data set fed into the next data set, and team members adjusted their approach as new information was received. All the information from the research was then used to formulate a universal Communication Plan framework. The end product is a how-to-guide for potable reuse communications that is applicable to a myriad of communities in any country. [2] [3] [5] [7]

III. KEY FINDINGS / RESULTS

The key findings of the combination of the literature review, one-on-one meetings, and public opinion research indicate that public acceptance of potable reuse can be achieved by implementing a coordinated, consistent, and transparent communication plan. Some of the key findings to achieving public acceptance include:

- Develop trust (build relationships, offer plant tours)
- Be consistent with outreach (start early, continue throughout project)
- Provide information about potable reuse and where it is in use to increase familiarity
- Be consistent with messaging and terminology
- Instill confidence in the quality of water (talk about the treatment process)
- Be transparent (discuss costs, water quality, safety, environment)
- Be prepared (for tough questions and misinformation)

A key finding of the focus groups and telephone survey showed that after receiving additional information about potable reuse and the multi-stage treatment process used to make the water safe to drink, most participants became more comfortable with the idea of potable reuse. In addition, the use of “purified water” was favored by participants in the focus group as a term to describe the potable reuse water. Key findings from each of the research components are summarized below:

III.1 Literature Review

There are consistent lessons and recommendations throughout the potable reuse outreach literature. These generally suggest beginning outreach early, developing consistent terminology and messaging, establishing the utility as a source of trusted information, and focusing on water quality rather than its history. It was often stated that knowledge and understanding of the water treatment process increased acceptance of water reuse. Direct Potable Reuse (DPR) efforts will have a better chance at gaining public acceptance by building upon previous efforts. [3]

III.2 In-Depth Interviews

III.2.1 Utilities & Agencies



When asked what they thought would be the most significant public-acceptance challenge as more communities consider new water sources, such as potable reuse, utility and agency representatives identified the following:

- Addressing health and safety concerns
 - Water quality
 - PPCPs/CECs
 - PFAs/PFOs
 - Perception of potential exposure to contagious diseases
- Costs to ratepayers
- “Yuck” factor/toilet-to-tap
- Engaging (breaking through disinterest and busy schedules) and educating the public
- Building trust
- Regulations/regulators
- Mixed messages from within the industry/inconsistent language
 - For example, clearly and simply defining IPR and DPR

III.2.2 State Legislators

While most leaders, or their representatives, were familiar with recycled water, only a few demonstrated a solid understanding of potable reuse.

- Many respondents demonstrated a lack of awareness of the history of potable reuse and current and proposed projects in the state.
- Several legislators or their representatives stated that they could not go out on a limb without more knowledge and assurances relative to safety, costs, need and benefits.
- A few were reluctant or unwilling to back a project unless public support is evident, which points to the need for public outreach and education.
- To combat issues of government distrust and suspicion, some stressed the importance of careful planning, education, and transparency every step of the way.

III.2.3 Health professionals

Most health professionals interviewed have significant concerns regarding what happens if there is off-spec water, and how to handle prior to sending, or not sending, it into the distribution system. There were also questions regarding monitoring procedures and processes. Those interviewed believe their concerns may reflect those of health regulators and other water industry policymakers.

Fear of the unknown seems to be the keystone concern and will be the most difficult to overcome. In the words of one respondent, “We only measure a few hundred contaminants and fewer viruses, but we don’t know what we don’t know or aren’t looking for.”

Among the specific concerns that these respondents would like to see addressed are:

- Reliable real-time monitoring
- Ability to detect and remove new constituents as they occur
- Assigning parameters for new and existing contaminants
- Response time/plan with regard to events to ensure contamination does not occur



III.2.4 Special Interests

- Many environmental special-interest respondents are supportive because they know the need for supplemental supply is only going to intensify and they believe potable reuse is more environmentally responsible compared to other supplemental water supply options, particularly desalination.
- Respondents with greater familiarity with potable reuse tend to be more supportive of reuse projects and less fearful of the technology.
- Those with little or no knowledge are either casually supportive or strongly opposed to indirect and direct potable reuse projects.
 - Some in the latter group tend to be suspicious of the government and of the science and technology behind potable reuse.
- Among supporters, brine disposal remains an area of great concern; and one that could erode support if not adequately addressed. Other concerns include safety and cost. [3]

III.3 Focus Groups and Surveys

Overall, focus group participants had highly positive impressions of recycled water. Most saw it as a prudent and worthwhile way to expand water supplies at a time when they perceive they are being taxed like never before. Additionally, most were even comfortable with the idea of indirect reuse of recycled water for drinking. However, most expressed initial discomfort with the idea of DPR of recycled water. As much as they could believe it was technologically feasible to make wastewater safe for drinking, they simply lacked confidence that their community was ready – today – to make it a reality.

Over the course of the session, however, and after exposure to detailed messaging, most participants became more much comfortable with the idea of DPR – particularly after hearing the details of the multi-stage treatment process applied to wastewater to make it safe to drink. Findings from the focus groups include:

- Indirect reuse of recycled water had significant initial appeal, while direct reuse of recycled water was initially divisive.
- “Purified Water” and “Certified Water” were clear standouts as terms to describe the product of DPR treatment, but participants also gravitated toward “Advanced Purified Water” as a preferred term.
- Visuals were extremely helpful in building understanding and support for DPR.
- The strongest messages in favor of DPR focused on the safety of the purification process and the importance of developing high quality water supplies to meet the challenges of growth and drought.
- Participants were comfortable with the amount of energy use involved in DPR.
- Messaging increased overall acceptance of DPR. At the conclusion of the sessions, most participants were open to DPR – but with many lingering reservations. [3]

Communication recommendations from the Telephone Surveys:

- DO leverage public concern about ongoing water shortages to consolidate support for DPR – without relying on the current drought.
- DO emphasize the role of water agencies, as opposed to other levels of government, in overseeing the process.



- In particular, DO emphasize the role of scientists and public health professionals in designing and monitoring the process.
- DO place a special emphasis on communications with women, communities of color, non-English speakers, seniors, and less well-educated and affluent communities.
- DO continue to use “purified water” and “advanced purified water” as terms for the product of potable reuse.
- DO NOT simply assert that technology has already made it possible to make any water safe to drink.
- DO emphasize the stages of your proposed treatment process.
- But DO NOT rely on such words as “microfiltration, reverse osmosis, and ultraviolet light” alone – provide some brief explanation.
- DO highlight the frequency and sophistication of monitoring and testing processes.
- DO note that public health and environmental protection agencies have reviewed and approved the DPR process.
- DO use images to reinforce the effectiveness and complexity of the treatment process.
- DO highlight the successful implementation of potable reuse in other communities.
- DO draw comparisons to the health and safety of bottled water.
- DO appeal to the broader principles of environmental protection and recycling as rationales for expanding the use of recycled water.
- DO NOT rely on arguments that potable reuse will end up reducing rates.
- DO NOT rely on elected officials, taxpayer advocates or business owners as messengers – they do not speak to the health issues at the core of public concerns. [3]

III.4 Key Messages include:

- Potable reuse provides a safe, reliable, and sustainable drinking water supply.
- Using advanced purified water is good for the environment.
- Potable reuse provides a locally controlled, drought-proof water supply. [3]

III.5 Key Message Supporting Information include:

- The purification process produces water that is purer than most bottled water.
- Purified water:
 - Will comply with or exceed strict state and federal drinking water standards.
 - Will be tested, in real-time, with online sensors and be strictly monitored by the department of health.
 - Currently used to supplement drinking water in many communities in the U.S. and around the world.
 - There have been no problems from this use of purified water.
- Environmental benefit:
 - The more recycled water we use for whatever purpose we use it, the less we have to take out of rivers, streams, and our scarce groundwater supplies. This is good for rivers and streams and the fish, plants, and wildlife that rely upon them.
 - We all recycle as often as we can – glass, plastic, paper and even yard waste, which is the right thing to do. For the same reason, we should recycle and reuse as much



of our limited water supplies as we possibly can – water is too valuable to be used just once.

- A locally controlled, drought-proof water supply:
 - Purified water is independent of climate or weather in other locations.
 - Purified water enhances water supply reliability and helps protect us from droughts by diversifying supply sources – keeping us from relying too much on any one source of water that may run low in a drought.
 - Purified water provides a community with a constant source of water. [3]

III.6 Suggested Message Points from the WateReuse Association’s Public Education & Outreach Committee:

- Water reuse – including potable reuse – happens naturally all over the planet.
- Water reuse happens daily on rivers and other water bodies.
- Planned Potable Reuse is publicly acknowledged as an intentional project to recycle water for drinking water.
- The amount of fresh water on the planet does not change; through nature all water has been used and reused since the beginning of time. [2] [3]

IV. CONCLUSIONS, RESULTS, SUMMARY

The **Model Public Communication Plan for Advancing DPR Acceptance** demonstrates strategic methods to introduce and communicate the concept of potable reuse and its importance in meeting the future water supply needs of communities. This work establishes the strategic groundwork toward fostering public acceptance of potable reuse. The survey research conducted provides a baseline from which to evaluate the effectiveness of the communication programs.

This project has provided the water reuse industry with a roadmap for robust public outreach efforts that are needed to communicate to decision makers, regulators, stakeholders, and the public they serve, about the capabilities of advanced purification treatment, real time monitoring and the safeguards the water industry will undertake to produce safe drinking water from wastewater. And while the focus of this research at the time (2015) was driven by the regulatory timetable in California, this work has proven to be a model that can be adapted to utilities, cities, and agencies across the world. [2] [3]

As mentioned in the Introduction, the team completed a literature review, and then conducted in-depth interviews, focus groups, and surveys to identify key concerns and then develop initial messaging. In addition, the findings from their information-gathering activities were used to develop a communications plan and outreach tools for use in communities considering potable reuse projects. The results were further distilled into a guidance document entitled, **One Glass at a Time, Helping People Understand Potable Reuse. A Flexible Communication Plan for use by Public Information Professionals** (2015). This was derived from the larger (WRF-13-02) study. [8]

An example of what was learned was that “Pure Water” was a signature term that resonated with the vast majority of those participating in the focus groups and surveys. Fast forward to today, and we are now seeing this term applied to project naming and branding in recent projects being developed and some that are already operational, such as: Pure Water Monterey, Pure Water Oceanside, Pure Water San Diego, PureWater SF, and Pure Water Soquel. [3] [4] [5]



But how do you get a concept like “Pure Water” accepted in a community? The key is in conveying — in straightforward, clear language and images tailored to the specific project — how treatment trains work and how they clean water and ensure its safety for the intended use. The team explored effective terminology, branding, and language, infographics, animations, videos, and utilizing learning centers and demonstration sites that range from visual representations to actual equipment, as well as the sampling of purified recycled water itself. [1] [3]

Overall, the tools and methods described in WRF 13-02 are applicable for any agency, utility, or water purveyor seeking to plan and execute an effective communication and outreach program. These tools will support the challenges in gaining public awareness and acceptance, and successfully implement potable reuse projects, from coastal communities where brine discharge is possible, and in inland projects, where new innovative treatment schemes are necessary for a future that must consider extreme weather variability and looming droughts. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]. Below is a summary of those tools and tactics outlined in an easy-to-use guidance document entitled, **Helping People understand Potable Reuse – One Glass at A Time**.

V. A SUMMARY OF USEFUL OUTREACH TOOLS & STRATEGIES

The following is a collection of highlights from **Helping People Understand Potable Reuse – One Glass at A Time (A Flexible Communication Plan for use by Public Information Professionals)**, derived from **Model Communication Plans for Increasing Awareness and Fostering Acceptance of Direct Potable Reuse** or WRRF-13-02 (2015). You can find the complete document at www.watereuse.org and at www.waterrf.org. [8]

Experience has shown that public acceptance of potable reuse is one of the primary challenges facing the use of this source of water supply. Just as processes leading to potable reuse involve the use of a proven and reliable technology to purify recycled water, there is a set of proven processes that can help you communicate — and deliver — on your project.

The Plan is flexible and is designed to be adapted to the specific needs and situations of an individual community, whether pursuing indirect potable reuse (IPR) or direct potable reuse (DPR) options.

V.1 Draft Your Message Plan

Water Terminology for Potable Reuse

The messages here introduce new terminology for potable reuse — namely “advanced purified water” or “purified water.” This reflects the preferred terminology from the focus groups and telephone surveys conducted during the WRRF-13-02 project. The research clearly demonstrates that “potable reuse” and “direct potable reuse” are not understood by the mainstream population and that, even when explained, they do not resonate well.

We reference direct potable reuse (DPR) and indirect potable reuse (IPR) as “potable reuse.” This is fine when talking among those in your agency and industry, but the public neither recognizes nor understands the terms — we recommend using the term “purified water” from here forward.



WaterReuse Research Foundation created a glossary “simple enough to understand, but technical enough to trust,” which can be found at www.watereuse.org/information-resources/about-water-reuse/glossary-1.

The glossary can help explain water recycling. Research recommends terms such as “treated wastewater” be avoided but that it is important to understand how we all put contaminants into water during use and how the “pollutants” can be taken out. No need to hide the fact that water has been used and reused—all water is used water. Maintain your perspective and don’t simply talk about one slice of the water cycle—all aspects function together.

Get Ready for Public Engagement

Carefully craft your community’s project story

At a minimum, answer the following questions about potable reuse:

1. What is potable reuse?
2. Where does it fit in our water supply portfolio?
3. Why is the potable reuse project needed?
4. What purpose will it serve?
5. How safe is the water?
6. How will it be monitored to ensure safety?
7. How much will it cost?
8. When will it be implemented?

Messaging Tips

- Develop key messages in terms understandable to a non-technical audience and avoid jargon.
- Create a standard community presentation and train spokespeople to present and respond to general and specific questions.
- Identify key community leaders and groups and build a mailing database for distribution of e-mail or direct mail updates.
- Create easy-to-understand infographics that describe the treatment process, how the project fits into the larger water supply portfolio and any complex story.

Three Key Messages

- Potable reuse provides a safe, reliable, and sustainable drinking water supply.
- Using advanced purified water is good for the environment.
- Potable reuse provides a locally controlled, drought-proof water supply

Key Messages Explained

Potable reuse, or purified water as described below, uses advanced, multi-stage treatment to provide a safe, reliable, and sustainable drinking water supply.

Here are some tested and useful message bullets:

- Proven engineered treatment processes are used to purify water to a level that is safe to drink.
- Purifying water is a “multi-barrier process” designed to separate water from pollutants.
- There are various treatment processes to accomplish this objective.
- Purified water will be tested in real-time with online sensors and will be strictly monitored by the Department of Health.
- Purified water will comply with or exceed strict state and federal drinking water standards.



- The purification process produces water that is purer than most bottled waters.
- Purified water is currently used to supplement drinking water in many communities in the United States and around the world. There have been no problems from using purified water to augment drinking water supplies.

At times it may be advantageous to include a more detailed description of the advanced technological processes used to purify recycled water. In such instances, the following language is an example of how to describe the microfiltration/reverse osmosis/ultraviolet light treatment train:

- The water first goes through microfiltration, a pretreatment process, where water is pumped through tubes filled with tiny membranes. Each membrane is made up of hollow fibers, perforated with holes 1/300th the width of a human hair! As the water moves through the tubes, solids and bacteria are caught in the fibers.
- The water then goes through reverse osmosis where it is forced through membranes that remove salt and microorganisms, including viruses, bacteria, and most chemicals of emerging concern.
- Now the water is very clean, but one more step ensures its safety: exposing the water to ultraviolet light to cause any remaining organic particles to break down.

Using advanced purified water is good for the environment.

The more recycled water we use for its intended purpose, the less we have to take out of rivers, streams, and our scarce groundwater supplies. This is good for rivers and streams and the fish, plants and wildlife that rely on them.

We all recycle as often as we can — glass, plastic, paper, and even yard waste, which is the right thing to do. For the same reason, we should recycle and reuse as much of our limited water supplies as we possibly can — water is too valuable to be used just once.

Potable reuse, or purified water, provides a locally controlled, drought-proof water supply. Purified water is independent of climate or weather in other locations.

- Purified water enhances water supply reliability and helps protect us from droughts by diversifying supply sources — keeping us from relying too much on any one source of water that may run low in a drought.
- Purified water provides a community with a constant source of water.

V.2 Building Trust — Why Tools are Needed

Since public acceptance of potable reuse is one of the primary challenges facing this source of water supply, developing clear and informative tools will help gain acceptance and build trust within your community for your project.

V.2.1 Develop Informational Materials

The following are strategies for developing informational materials:

- Make easy-to-understand materials available that highlight key messages appropriate for target audiences and provide them in print and electronic formats; consider using QR codes and social media platform strategies.
- Develop materials tailored to the interests of specific audiences.



- Ensure all materials are responsive to multicultural, multi-ethnic, and age-specific audiences; translate key items into other languages as needed.
- Consistently update all materials (both electronic and print) to make sure designated audiences, including agency employees, have timely and accurate materials.
- Link to other sources that provide information about purified water projects.

V.2.2 Key Plan Element Prioritization and Timeline

An example of a timeline you can adapt for your own public outreach planning.

ACTIVITY	MONTH																	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Review existing communication materials (internal and external)	█																	
Review the literature	█	█																
Develop draft key messages for testing		█	█															
Identify key stakeholders			█	█														
Build mailing list/contact database					█	█												
Conduct in-depth interviews							█	█										
Conduct focus groups and baseline survey									█	█								
Finalize key messages											█	█						
Develop or modify Community-Level Communication Plan													█	█				
Create communication tools																		
• info materials																		
• speakers bureau and training																		
• media training																		
• webpages and social media																		
• IAP																		
Create a Rapid Response Plan																		
• identify a core team																		
• conduct spokesperson training																		
• create template articles for media																		

V.3 Build Trust in Your Water Quality

Past and present market research shows that many people do not believe their tap water is safe to drink and therefore turn to bottled or filtered water. This finding points to the challenge of convincing the public that potable reuse is a good idea; therefore, it may prove effective to initiate public outreach with strong messaging about the quality of the current water supply and the superior quality of highly treated water intended for potable reuse, as compared with lower quality, and loosely regulated bottled water.

Follow these steps to create water quality confidence in your community:

Step 1: Establish Your Water Quality Values

Make sure you articulate the utility’s values or commitments related to water quality. Always connect your actions and decisions to your commitments when you communicate.

- Commit to Water Quality Improvement
- Commit to Increasing Knowledge
- Manage Emerging Contaminants
- Connect Actions with Motivations

Step 2: Be the Trusted Source of Information



Don't let someone else communicate about important water quality issues before you do. Be meaningful by describing the benefits of your decisions, actions, and investments.

- Communicate How and Why You Test
- Share Your Emergency Response Plans
- Articulate Water Quality Risks
- Describe General Treatment Capabilities

Step 3: Be the Trusted Source of Quality

Regularly remind your audiences that it is your values, diligence, process management, and commitment to investment that create water quality, not the physical source of the water or regulations. Never refer to regulations as the driver for quality.

- Commit to Water Quality Improvement by Putting Source Control in the Proper Context
- Use Multi-Step Purification Processes
- Employ Natural Treatment Processes When Possible
- Use Track Record to Create Confidence

V.4 Opinion Leader Outreach

Opinion leaders influence attitudes, beliefs, motivations, and behaviors of others. They influence opinions by raising awareness, persuading others, establishing, or reinforcing norms, and leveraging resources. They usually have high visibility and a defined constituency. Opinion leader outreach builds strong relationships and garners third-party involvement in disseminating information to a broader network.

Goals of Opinion Leader Outreach

- Establish or enhance the relationship between the opinion leader and the agency
- Build awareness, trust, and confidence in purified water treatment technology processes
- Inform leaders of water supply demands and shortages and how purified water can meet demands
- Listen to these stakeholders and be responsive to concerns related to purified water project implementation
- Secure written support of purified water projects from strategic community and opinion leaders

Identifying Opinion Leaders

Each community will have its own unique set of influencers, who will likely change and grow as the project progresses. Keeping an accurate database of opinion leaders, contact information, preferred communication methods, and other pertinent notes is imperative to a successful outreach program.

It's important to identify the leaders and their staff. Characteristics include appointed or elected position, values and traits, competence or expertise, and social position. Opinion leaders can include, but are not limited to, the following (in alphabetical order):

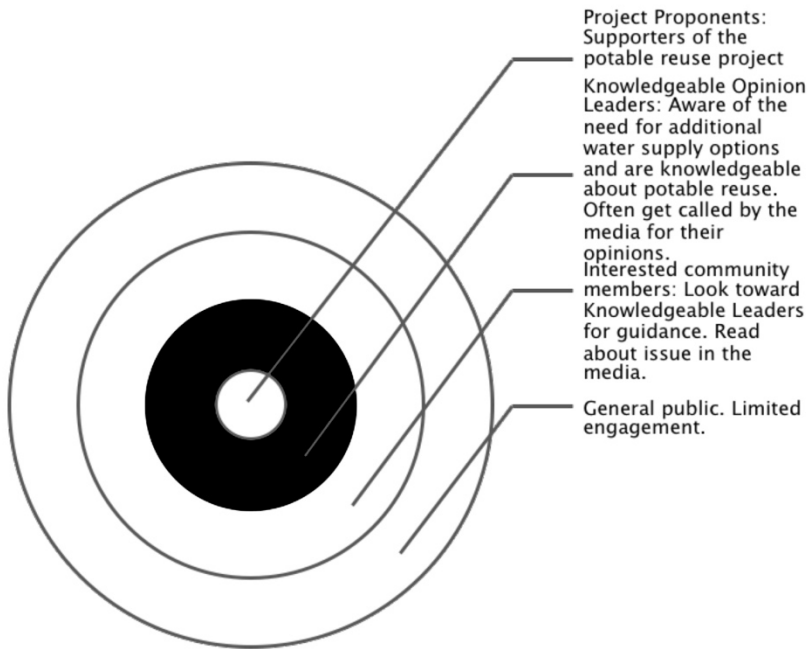
- Academic/education leaders
- Business organizations
- Civic groups
- Environmental entities
- Media
- Medical, public health, and water quality experts



- Multicultural and faith-based leaders and groups (these leaders/groups may be found within the other audiences listed)
- State and local elected officials and their staff

Relationship of opinion leaders to other target audiences

The following graphic illustrates the opinion leaders in relation to other community members. As a core group, from which information spreads to other community members, opinion leaders must be made aware of the need to increase water supply sources and should be knowledgeable about purified water as an option.



V.5 Rapid Response Plan

When unexpected events occur, the agency must be prepared to respond quickly. During emergency and unplanned events, it is the project team’s responsibility to communicate promptly, effectively, and efficiently with affected internal and external stakeholder groups. If the team is prepared and executes the plan appropriately, consistently, and often, vital information will be provided, and this will have lasting, positive effects on the organization’s reputation and credibility.

This Rapid Response Plan is intended to be a living document that provides guidelines and recommendations for how the agency should work to provide a consistent and prompt communication response.

Strategy

The strategy behind the Rapid Response Plan is to:

- Respond quickly to unexpected events by identifying the affected stakeholders, the messages that need to be conveyed, and the most effective and efficient methods to convey those messages
- Respond quickly to misinformation in the news or circulating within the community



Rapid Response Plan Activities

Rapid Response Team

Identify a core team within the agency that is designated as the rapid response team. This team should include the board chair, the CEO, legal counsel, operations staff, communication staff, and customer service staff. This group should meet periodically to review potential scenarios and strategize responses. When a crisis occurs, convene the team immediately to develop a specific response.

Message Development

Develop three unique key messages in response to the situation or event and share those with staff and board members. These are the three messages that should be included in all written and verbal communication about the event.

Employee Communication

Employees are one of the most important stakeholders in a crisis or rapid response situation, and they are often forgotten because of other pressing issues, such as responding to media inquiries and ensuring the safety of the agency's customers. An all-employee e-mail should be developed and distributed with details of the event and the agency's response. This communication should also include the contact information for a person at the agency who can answer employee questions. This needs to be the assigned responsibility of a member of the rapid response team.

Board or Council Communication

Another function of the rapid response team is to update the board on the activities that are occurring or have occurred and the agency's response. Board members should be given the developed messages or talking points as they may be contacted by media or elected officials for a response or statement.

Prepare Web Pages and Public Notices

Create web pages and public notices for potential crisis situations and keep them ready to upload/print in the event of an actual crisis.

Phone Lists

Keep up-to-date phone lists (both hard copy and electronic versions) with home and cell phone numbers of board members, agency management, elected officials, and top staff from other local agencies.

Op-eds and Letters to the Editor

Address inaccurate news coverage by writing letters to the editor and submitting op-ed articles stating the agency's position. Always include appropriate agency messages to leverage any opportunity for providing correct information about potable reuse.

Media Outreach

Identify one spokesperson or select spokespeople for the agency staff (the board members will likely be contacted and speak for themselves) and ensure that all employees know to direct any inquiries to that designated person or persons. The identified spokesperson/people should be aware of the key messages developed and should incorporate them as they respond to media questions.

Social Media



Develop short statements based on the developed messages that can be quickly disseminated through the agency's social media channels while more information is gathered and checked. Identify links to trusted and relevant sites that can be sent out where interested parties can find more information.

VI. REFERENCES

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