



NAVY AND MARINE CORPS FORCE HEALTH PROTECTION COMMAND

IMPROVING READINESS THROUGH PUBLIC HEALTH ACTION

How To Identify and Prioritize Stakeholders

A stakeholder is anyone interested or impacted by the issue. Before communicating any information, you must get to know the stakeholders and understand their issues and concerns.

Stakeholder identification and prioritization is the first process for any effective risk communication strategy. The primary objective of this process is to help ensure that no individual or group is missed and that messages can be tailored to specifically address their concerns and issues.

Identify Stakeholders

With most risk communication issues, the audience is not simply one big homogenous group (i.e., the general public). It is made up of many diverse stakeholder groups who will be affected and/or who will be most interested in a project or issue.

Examples of the many different types of stakeholder groups can include:

Questions to ask to help identify stakeholders:

- Who needs to be involved?
- Who is likely to be affected?
- Who is likely to perceive they are affected?
- Who is likely to be upset if not involved?
- Who has previously been involved in this or related issues?
- Who could help ensure you receive a balanced range of opinions on the issue?
- Who might provide third party support?
- Who would you least like to communicate with on this issue?
- Who is most active, attentive or passive?

Internal Navy and Marine Corps Stakeholders

- Military and civilian leadership
- Planners
- Public affairs
- Program managers
- Contractors



External Stakeholders

- Local, state and federal government
- Tribes
- Property owners
- Businesses
- Community groups
- Environmental groups
- Individual citizens
- Media



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<https://www.med.navy.mil/NavY-and-Marine-Corps-Force-Health-Protection-Command/Environmental-Health/Environmental-Programs/Risk-Communication/>



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Take the time to identify your stakeholders and their specific concerns before developing messages. It is important to recognize that stakeholders can be motivated not only by perceptions of risk but also by a wide range of agendas and emotions.

Consider Cultures

Another aspect of stakeholder identification is culture. Culture is often thought of as country of origin, ethnicity or tribal affiliation, but it is more extensive. Culture is a group of behaviors, values and beliefs held by a group that defines how they conduct their lives. A group's culture is a consideration that is often overlooked when considering stakeholders. One structural model of culture envisions a body of water, like a lake. Above the surface of the water are the cultural **behaviors**.

These are the things we can clearly see, such as how people dress, eat, walk, or play, as well as aspects of their life like arts, architecture, music, dance, language, and celebrations. Below the water are the cultural aspects that are harder to see and understand. These "below the water" factors drive the behaviors above the water. These are called **values** and **core beliefs**.

Values determine what is right and wrong and what is desirable or undesirable in a culture. Laws and rules are derived from these values. Values would be things like the importance of work, family, money, security, education, religion, morals, ethics, and government.

Core beliefs would be things like how time is allocated (Is time limited or is time plentiful?), doing versus being (Do you live to work or work to live?), mastery of nature versus harmony with nature, emotional expression (What level of emotional expression is acceptable?), one truth versus many truths, and individual versus group.

Cultural Traps

The weirdness factor is seeing the behavior above the water as weird or wrong rather than interesting. This is sometimes a natural reaction because as children we are taught a series of behaviors (eating, dressing, talking, etc) that are the "right" way to do things. We get corrected when we step out of those boundaries.

The ethnocentric factor is trying to figure out a different culture through our own lenses of culture. Our own way of living is frequently all we have as a reference point. This is a trap that is hard to avoid unless you gain knowledge from members of the other culture.

Since the weirdness and ethnocentric traps are challenging, here are two solutions in planning dialogue with other cultures:

- 1) Try to view cultural differences as interesting
- 2) Talk to stakeholders within the culture to find out what to do about these differences

"Culture is a group of behaviors, values and beliefs held by a group that define how they conduct life/operate."

behaviors
core beliefs

It is better to view cultural differences as interesting rather than "weird".

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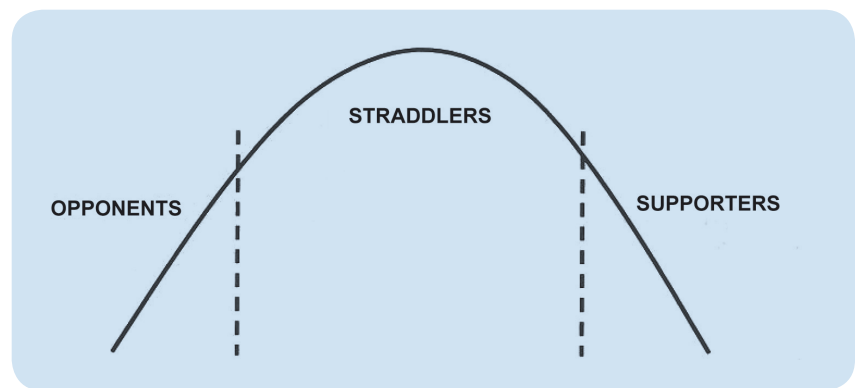
Summary

Taking the time to identify your stakeholders and their motivations is a critical part of developing an overall effective communication strategy. Knowing what their primary motivation is can help you focus on their specific information needs and enable you to develop the most effective message possible—targeted to their issues and concerns.

Regardless of the method, stakeholders and their concerns can change over time and this information must be continually updated as part of any long-term communication strategy.

Prioritize Stakeholders

After identifying key stakeholders, take the time to organize them into the following three primary groups. This will help differentiate communication missions and develop effective communication strategies:



Opponents: People may oppose your project or issues for many reasons, such as concerns over actual or perceived risks, general mistrust or dislike of the Navy and Marine Corps, or as a result of competing agendas (i.e., anger over another unrelated issue with your installation or organization). These groups are often the most vocal and tend to attract much media and public attention. It can be hard to establish and maintain effective communication with this group because they are often motivated by agendas and emotions and may not be receptive to two-way communication. People who oppose your project or issue are still entitled to information, regardless of their openness to consider it, so continue to provide information, listen to them, and invite them to meetings. The primary mission in communicating with these groups is to ensure interactions with them do not adversely influence other stakeholder groups.

Supporters: Supporters trust, believe and agree with you and/or the organization's mission and objectives. Keep them informed and keep up the two-way dialogue. Ask them for advice, ideas, and for help with learning about other stakeholders. Supporters are typically very easy to communicate with because they see you as a trustworthy, credible source of information. The primary mission in communicating with supporters is to maintain the established, positive relationship.

Supporting and opposing stakeholder groups usually make up the smallest part of your audience. Opponents and supporters should be kept informed, but they are not necessarily the primary focus of a communication strategy.

Straddlers: Straddlers fall somewhere on the curve between supporters and opponents. Straddlers may be undecided or apathetic, but they are typically open to finding common ground and/or listening to suggestions. Like supporters, straddlers often have many good ideas to help the communication mission, goals, messages and action plans. **This group makes up the vast majority of stakeholders and should therefore be the primary focus of risk communication efforts.**

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The primary focus of risk communication is to meet their information needs and move them towards a more supportive position, if possible. You do not want to give these stakeholders any reason to mistrust you or your organization and potentially drive them towards opposition.

Remember, the overall goal with risk communication is to preserve or increase trust among stakeholders by providing timely information and addressing as many questions and concerns as possible. Identifying your stakeholders and prioritizing them based on these three primary groupings (opponents, supporters and straddlers) will help focus the communication efforts and resources where they will truly be the most effective. Once this critical process is completed, it is time to develop messages that will both meet the mission goals and address your stakeholder's primary issues and concerns, while allowing them to make informed and educated decisions.

Conclusion

Now that you have an understanding about the mission and its worth to your stakeholders, it's time to decide how to accomplish the mission. What is your plan? Which stakeholders are you going to communicate with and in what order? How, when and where will you communicate with them? Will you use third parties?



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