

## Developing a communications strategy to engage citizens and stakeholders

Achieving a community’s emission reduction and energy saving goals requires the involvement of citizens and other stakeholders at every stage, from planning what needs to be done to actually making it happen. A well-designed communication strategy is key to building and maintaining public support, and inspiring meaningful action.

### OVERALL GOALS OF A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY



#### EDUCATE

to explain what’s happening, why it’s happening and how it will benefit the community, so that everyone has an advance opportunity to learn and understand



#### ENGAGE

to invite citizens and other stakeholders to participate in the process with their best ideas as well as their concerns; to share goals and receive commitment



#### INFORM

to communicate progress and developments so everyone can know where things stand; to promote programs and incentives



#### MOTIVATE

to celebrate milestones, achievements and successes, so everyone can feel they’re part of something special; to build and maintain support, engagement and momentum

### TARGET AUDIENCES

Citizens are a municipality’s primary target audience. To ensure maximum reach, a communication strategy must be designed with attention to the different ways that different demographic groups in a community obtain their information.

Community groups and organizations can offer unique perspectives, opportunities, talents or reach. Engaging as many such stakeholders as possible will help bring out the best ideas, encourage a more thorough sharing of concerns and strengthen community support. Here are a few examples:



- **Community organizations:** such as non-profits, volunteer fire departments, sports groups or service clubs
- **Schools and other academic institutions:** potentially with large influence over energy efficiency, behavioural change, renewable energy, research, career training and more
- **Real estate developers:** key partners in a community's transition to increased density and high-efficiency buildings
- **Local business groups:** such as Chambers of Commerce to represent business concerns and interests, and to share progress and opportunities with their members
- **Local industries:** such as forestry, agriculture or tourism



### Other potential stakeholders to consider involving include:

- **Neighbouring municipalities:** potential partners in larger projects or shared priorities
- **Regional Service Commissions:** with particular influence in areas such as solid waste management
- **Energy utilities:** for technical expertise and access to incentives and programs
- **Provincial government:** for technical expertise and funding support

## STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

A successful communications strategy can consist of many potential actions, with plenty of room for customization and creativity. For most communities, decisions on which actions to use and how to use them are guided by budget and local suitability. Here are some ideas:

- **Create a section on your community's website** dedicated to your energy and emissions plan. Depending on available resources, it could explain climate change; your community's goals and targets; and news, updates and achievements
- **Generate positive stories** in local and provincial media by issuing press releases about priorities, actions, events and success stories
- **Conduct information campaigns** through mailouts, display booths, bill inserts, web postings and targeted ads across all media
- **Use social media to share goals, plans, resources and success stories,** and to steer traffic to your website
- **Prepare fact sheets, brochures and guides** to build understanding, and to guide and motivate action



- **Issue regular sustainability tips** to help homeowners and other stakeholders save energy and become more engaged
- **Use internal communications tools** like emails, bulletin boards, staff meetings and workshops to build staff understanding and commitment
- **Host public seminars and offer presentations** to any community stakeholder group
- **Host Open Houses and public meetings** specifically to educate, engage and encourage feedback
- **Conduct online surveys** to help build engagement, ownership and commitment
- **Hold contests and challenges** relating to energy, transportation, trash and more, for students and the community – a huge opportunity for fun for all!
- **Hold award galas and networking events** to celebrate successes
- **Engage schools and youth** because young people can have a big influence on their parents and grandparents
- **Make a presence** with a display or presentation at farmers markets, festivals and holiday events
- **Hold one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders** like large local businesses to gain commitment and explore collaborations
- **Use your community's newsletter** to keep everyone updated and to celebrate successes
- **Host facilitated community workshops** and focus groups to receive ideas and get feedback on options under consideration

- **Establish a Stakeholder Advisory Committee** to offer feedback and identify opportunities; maintain commitment by keeping it informed of all progress
- **Use special events** like official openings and ribbon cuttings to promote initiatives and highlight progress
- **Organize special events** like electric vehicle or solar energy demonstrations
- **Create an online dashboard** with up-to-date progress on all actions and targets
- **Issue an Annual Report** to share progress and celebrate successes
- **Develop an Ambassador Program**, a network of community and business sustainability leaders with influence in the community
- **Develop a Community Declaration**, and invite key stakeholders to sign and share to help build public commitment

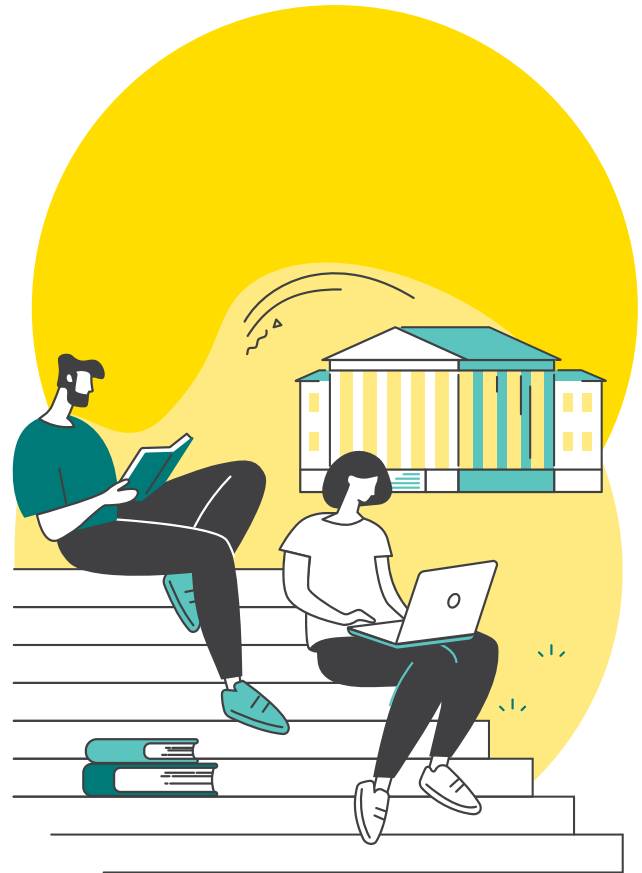


**It's helpful to keep the four goals – to educate, engage, inform and motivate – in mind when planning and executing a communications strategy, and strive to achieve as many of them as possible with every planned action.**

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

Here are a few final tips to help ensure your communications strategy is successful:

- **Engage all stakeholders as early as possible** to develop positive relationships; it's far easier to establish trust early than to try to recover it if momentum wavers
- **Acknowledge concerns quickly** and respond to them promptly and professionally; don't lose sight of the reality that change can be hard for people and communities
- **Stay flexible:** monitor progress and adapt your strategy and plans as necessary
- **Leverage the influence of your Champions:** ensure that individuals and businesses that support the process and wield influence in the community have the tools and support they need
- **Keep it positive:** use every opportunity to celebrate successes and have fun, to help people feel good about the process and progress



## COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL MARKETING

**Community-based social marketing (CBSM) is a marketing approach that incorporates principles of human behavior to encourage sustainable actions within a community. Key elements of CBSM include:**

- **Barrier analysis and removal:** determining the barriers that are preventing a desired behaviour from happening, and then removing them (Example: recycling rates can often be improved by simply moving bins to better locations where people pass more frequently)
- **Clear communication:** so there is no misunderstanding of the objective (Example: clear graphics at a recycling station showing what goes in each bin)  
**Prompts:** strategically-placed reminders to help people remember to take a desired action (Example: a 'please turn off' sticker next to a light switch)