Communications toolkit and guidelines

for Community groups

1   Introduction

This simple communications toolkit is intended to be a guide to help community groups with their communications.

From Alice in Wonderland
"Where should I go?" Asked Alice
"That depends on where you want to end up." says the Cheshire Cat

2   Six golden rules for good communications

When you communicate with Aucklanders apply these simple principles <u>every time</u>.

❶ **Begin with the end in mind for your <u>project</u>.**
Write down what you want your projects to achieve – just three bullet points
Hint: be clear on your overall projects' outcomes first, ideally no more than three
E.g. *a) Create a group of 8-15 local volunteers to develop a pest free haven in Tui Park* *b) Eradicate ginger plant from xxxx park and replant with natives* *c) Eradicate rats and possums*

❷ **Begin with the end in mind for your <u>communications</u>**
Write down what you want the communications to achieve
Hint: what is it you want people to do, that will help you achieve your projects goals. This is not 'how', best communication channels come later *Hint: One to two clear actions only*
E.g. *a) Recruit a group of local volunteers* *b) Keep them active and engaged in the Tui park project*

❸ **Who is your ideal community group member?**

Write down who your target audience is, what's important to them and why would they be interested in engaging with your project

Hint: 'All Aucklanders' is not a target customer. Who is your 'bullseye' audience you want to reach and 'talk' to.

E.g.
Residents within a 5km radius of Tui Park, have lived in the area for over a year and use Tui Park for recreation

❹ **What to say – less is more.**

Write your key messages that clearly state what you want your target audience to do, in a way that is engaging to them , ideally not more than two messages

Hint: Always think from the customer's perspective. Tell them what they want to know and care about, not what you think they need to hear

E.g.
- *Please join your neighbours to create a pest free haven at Tui Park*
- *I'm pulling together a local working group, one day a month. Please contact John at (mobile number) or (email address)*

❺ **Where to share your messages**.

Decide what is the best way to reach your target audience with your messages and within your budget? Examples include Facebook, posters, flyers, newsletters, community notice boards, web ads, press ads, etc

Hint: A poster isn't always the solution. Choose the most direct way as possible

E.g.
- *Letter box flyers, community notice boards, Facebook pages*

❻ **Monitor your results**

Did you get a good response from your target audience? Which communication channels worked best?

Hint: tracking responses will help you get more effective and efficient with your communications actions

E.g.
- *John received 10 phone calls and 20 emails from Brown Street and Green Street families*
- *From these contacts 10 said they would come to our first community working day on 5 July, eight were families*

2.1 Communication Tools

2.1.1 Marketing

There is a wide range of channels you can use to drive your groups marketing messages

- Social: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube
- Direct: letterbox flyers and emails (collected directly)
- Out of Home: billboards, posters, community notice boards
- Digital: ads on popular websites sites, e.g. NZ Herald, Stuff, TradeMe, Neighbourly

Marketing collateral checklist

- ☐ Messaging hierarchy
    - o Lead message, largest text
    - o Secondary message
    - o Other messaging
- ☐ Who is delivering the message?
- ☐ Clear 'call to action', e.g. go to a website, phone

Cut the jargon – speak in plain English, and keep it short

Your online presence

Facebook tends to be the go-to social media platform for most individuals and has lots of features to support sharing of various kinds of information related to your group.

Using **Facebook,** you can share events, photos and status updates as well as have links to your other websites/social media profiles; list your contact details.

Other social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and Twitter would be best suited as supplementary to your Facebook presence. Use **Instagram** for sharing photos of your events and anything else happening in your patch. Use **Twitter** to keep up with what is currently happening in the conservation world as Twitter is very much an up and coming platform for sharing news, insights and discussions around conservation issues. If your group has video content to share, use **YouTube** as the platform to upload these videos and then direct the audience from your other platforms to view your videos there.

Having a **website** gives your audience a one-stop shop to find out everything they need to know about your group. A website can hold information about your vision and projects, how to get involved (volunteering, events, donating), keeping track of progress, latest updates, links to other platforms (blog, social media, videos, newsletters), key contacts and governance and almost anything else.

Newsletters allow you to give regular, consistent updates to your members. In a newsletter you can provide progress updates, share recent stories and learnings, promote upcoming events/opportunities and share photos/highlights from recent ones. While a website is semi-static (a lot of the information, layout etc. won't change very often), a newsletter is very static and will be different with each edition and is a good way to update

your audience without requiring action on their part (they receive the email as opposed to making the decision to seek out your website).

2.1.2   Publicity

There are two ways in which your group may become connected with a media outlet – you may approach the outlet with a newsworthy story you wish to share, or they may approach you for comments on a pressing current affairs issue.

Before you approach a media outlet, you need to be sure that what you want to share is newsworthy. News usually interests a general audience rather than just a few individuals, is being told for the first time, is topical and relevant, is significant and timely and may affect the audience, is useful information, has an emotional element to resonate with an audience and if it involves people, it will be looked on even more favourably.

Ask yourself:

- Does your news item have human interest and touch the lives of many people?
- Does your news have drama?
- Does your news include people in high places?
- Is your news fresh?
- Is it controversial or involve conflict?

If one or more are present, you probably have a story to tell
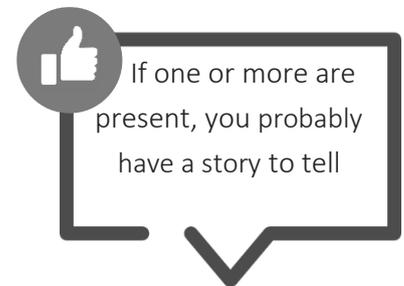
If your answers to the above questions don't indicate that your story is newsworthy, see the marketing section and social media section for alternative methods of sharing your story

Radio NZ: non-commercial and information and news driven

- Morning Report and Checkpoint, 9-Noon, Afternoons, Nights, Country Life, Our Changing World & The Weekend
- **Newstalk ZB**: talkback and news driven
- Breakfast with Hosking, Mornings with Kerre McIvor and Afternoons with Andrew Dickinson
- **Mediaworks**: talkback and music
- Magic Radio Mai, More, The Breeze, The Rock, Tarana, Edge, Waatea, Radio PMN

Newspapers

- **NZME** – NZ Herald (Newstalk) and online
- **Fairfax media** – Stuff online and Auckland suburban papers
- Variety of **niche publications** – e.g. NZ Geographic

Television

- **Television One**: Breakfast, 7 Sharp and Midday, 1News, Late news and Te Karere
- **Mediaworks**: The AM Show syndicated, The Project, 6pm and Late news, and Prime
- **Maori Television**: Te Ao Maori News

3   Appendices

3.1   Appendix A - Creating a Facebook account

1. Decide whether a 'group' or 'page' is best for you

As defined by Facebook:

A **page** "enables public figures, businesses, organizations and other entities to create an authentic and public presence on Facebook. Unlike your profile, Facebook Pages are visible to everyone on the internet by default. You, and every person on Facebook, can connect with these Pages by becoming a fan and then receive their updates in your News Feed and interact with them."

A **group** is "the place for small group communication and for people to share their common interests and express their opinion. Groups allow people to come together around a common cause, issue or activity to organize, express objectives, discuss issues, post photos and share related content."

The main difference between a 'page' and a 'group' is the ability for others to see your posts. If you create a 'page', anyone will be able to see what you post – this is ideal for growing audiences and spreading the word about what you are doing. If you create a 'group', only members of that group will be able to see what is posted in the page (you may choose whether approval is required to join the group or not).

As your intended goal with a Facebook presence is to share more about what you are doing, a page would be better as this allows you to reach people who aren't already connected with you and your cause.

2.   Setting up your page

For a clear social media presence, it is important you have a simple and recognisable name for your page/group on Facebook. It will make it easier for people to find you (avoid weird spelling, signs or very long names).

It's also a must to have clear contact details and a moderation policy (to set the rules for your page/group, allowing you to block people, to delete what they post if they break your rules).

Be sure to include on your page (either in you bio or as a pinned post) the vision and goals for your group, so that visitors to your page know immediately what you are about and can be invited to find out more.

For a step by step on how to set up the page, here is a useful video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i84-uAxeobM

3. Posting

Use your Facebook page to share upcoming events, success stories, general updates and interesting finds/photos.

The frequency of your posts will depend on your audience. It is recommended that you post no more than 3 times a day (this is only advised for a very highly engaged group), optimum frequency is around 2-4 times a week. Try to post at least once a week to keep your audience engaged.

For successful posts, follow these simple guidelines:

- Make sure your post has a goal – to inform, inspire or connect
- Avoid long text posts/big blocks of text – people don't tend to read these. Try make your posts a max of 125 words. Posts with short text do much better, so if there is more that you want to say, try adding a hyperlink where people can find out more if they are interested (in this scenario, your post is a teaser – so make it snappy and inviting to spark curiosity).
- Where possible, have a photo or video to go with your post, these do well on Facebook and catch people's attention.
- It is important photos and videos are good quality. Make sure your video has captions (to give access to everyone) and is preferably 20-30 seconds long (another opportunity to direct audiences to another longer version of the video)
- Most people use Facebook on their phones so make sure your content is mobile friendly – think text size, post length, video length.

You will learn what works best for your page as you go. Try different approaches and keep an eye on your 'insights' page to get an idea of what works best with your audience.

4. Moderation / Community Management

With posting, comes moderation. You need to make sure that your page/group is moderated by admins and that people questions and comments are answered in a timely manner, but also that issues get removed quickly before they escalate. Remember you are in charge and need to obey the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015 https://bit.ly/2FzOFlt or you could face a hefty fine.

3.1.1   How Council can help

Auckland Council has a page dedicated to conservation and biodiversity in Auckland – it's called Auckland Biodiversity. If you have something that you would like shared to a larger audience, create a post and send us a message asking if we might share it. We will review and share according to our own Facebook policies.

For bigger stories (especially ones that are not quite newsworthy for traditional media), photos and events email pestfree@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz for submission to be considered in the Pest Free newsletter (which is sent bimonthly to over 2500 subscribers across Auckland).

What to send to Pest Free email:

- upcoming events to be advertised
- achievements/progress
- photos (events, before and after, your team & volunteers)

3.2   Appendix B - Working with the Media

3.2.1   Approaching the media

Approaching the media should be well planned and executed. Find out the name journalists who work in the space your organization does; send a media release directly to them. If you are not sending a release, call them and have a conversation; be open and honest, clear and accurate about the content of your story; follow the same who, what when, where, why and how process that would be used to create a media release.

> Only approach the media when you have a newsworthy story to tell

Timing is important. If you are sharing an event, get in touch well before the event is set to happen. If you're sharing a story after the fact (i.e. a notable occurrence, progress update, major milestone), get in touch with the media as soon as possible after the occurrence so that the story is timely and relevant.

> Deal with only one journalist in each news organisation

> A media release is to inform people, not sell them something

Use a media release if your story is of general newsworthiness and several media outlets will be interested. Otherwise you may choose to approach a media outlet directly to establish their interest. Follow up a release with a phone call to the reporter or news desk.

3.2.2   Preparing a media release

- Head the page **MEDIA RELEASE**, use a logo at top if you have one otherwise write the name of your organization, date it and give it a short, punchy title

- Use the first paragraph to **hook in the reader**, use engaging active language to convey the essence of your story

- Focus on what is **unique and interesting** about your story so it stands out from other similar stories

WRITING

Write in **simple, clear uncomplicated language** – you are not writing an academic report

✓ Make it **short** – no more than **200-250 words**; stats and additional information can be added at the end as editors notes

👍 Make it **informative**
Give as many facts -
Who? What? When?
Where? Why? How?

✓ Use a **direct quote** or two from your group spokesperson

✓ Include **names and contact details** for people who can offer more information or be interviewed (with permission)

✓ Write "**ends**" at the end of your media release to indicate that you have finished

✓ Create a list of email addresses of the media you want to receive it and **paste release into the body of the email** – journalists are less likely to open attachments

✓ **Upload your media release** to your social media pages and website/blog page.

✓ You can also send your media release through one of the online news outlets such as Scoop and they will publish your media release directly at **no charge**

✓ Include **photographs**. Take active pictures and provide a caption with the date, event, the activity and names of the people if possible. Ask permission before using a picture. The photographs should be high resolution - 1MB or larger for print, for online between 500 KB-1MB.

Your group might like to consider having a **media kit** with a collection of printed information about your group including your *objectives, your structure, current contact details, current and past projects with photographs and the latest newsletter*. Also have this information in a document or PDF form to email to media if needed, available online and on your website and social media pages.

3.2.3 If you are approached by the media

If media contact your organization/group do not feel compelled to answer them on the fly. Pause and give yourself time to decide how to answer:
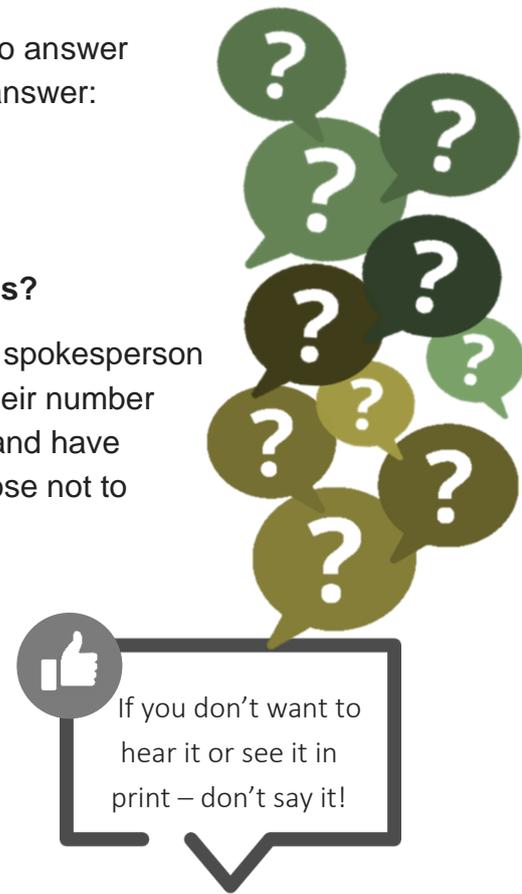
Think about:

What is the story about?

Am I the right person to be answering these questions?

If not, refer to your appointed spokesperson. If you don't have a spokesperson and someone else is going to answer the enquiry, do not give their number to the journalist. Take the journalists details, ask for a deadline and have your colleague return the call. Meet the set deadline. If you choose not to take part give a reason, this goes to your credibility.

If you are the right person to answer their questions, ask who else is involved in the story – chances are you won't be the only one. It may still be best to take the journalists details and return their call. Take some time to consult with your members or committee; what are they key message/s you want to convey. If the media call relates to a contentious or tricky issue, this even more reason to pause.

If you don't want to hear it or see it in print – don't say it!

A reminder, reporters are always taking notes and most these days record their conversations. Be mindful of what you say.

3.2.4 Respecting the Media

Good media relationships are based on mutual respect and professional integrity

be friendly and co-operative, help young reporters by explaining and providing background – help them to help you.

Have an approved media spokesperson to front the media

someone with a good understanding of your group/organizations story, who can articulate ideas clearly, simply and enthusiastically.

Always be honest

do not exaggerate or distort facts, it will lead to loss of credibility; journalists are savvy, they will check out information

Don't keep them waiting

know the constraints journalists work under, return calls quickly, be prepared, be patient, be obliging, don't hassle – journalists are busy people who work under pressure to deadlines

Don't use the media as your publicity agent or advertising agency

they have strict codes of ethics; their job is to report and interpret news honestly

- **Don't get offside with the media**

  you won't win, and you may well lose future news opportunities for your organisation

- **Everyone makes mistakes**

  don't draw their attention to them unless there is a legal or financial reason to; mistakes are generally not glaringly obvious, except to you