

15. COMMUNITY COMMUNICATION

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The purpose of this report is to outline a communication plan for the Community Board Area.

The intention is to create a planned, deliberate and sustained communication programme with our community and the groups and organisations we work with.

BACKGROUND

Communication problems

Communicating with residents and groups in the Community is a difficult task at present for several reasons:

- People are busy, and there are many messages and interests competing for their attention.
- Communication needs to be sustained and consistent to achieve satisfactory results.
- Community Boards have small marketing/communication budgets.
- Council communication is generally unco-ordinated, creating a lot of competing messages on local government and services that makes gaining attention harder.
- Politics is often perceived to be boring, and irrelevant.
- Messages from Community Boards and Advocacy Teams are, as a rule, not of great importance to the wider community, who place higher priority on their lives, businesses, families and finances. Council and Government services are only a concern to people when they don't work, or, impacts directly in their lives. Many people have never stopped to work out how Council impacts on them.
- Communication in a smaller locality relies less on mass media and more on other channels of communication, whereas the most effective media are the mass media - TV1, TV2 and TV3.

DRAFT PLAN

Objectives

- To increase awareness of all groups in the Riccarton/Wigram Community Board area that there is a Community Board and Advocacy Team that serves them.
- To inform local communities of relevant local projects and initiatives being undertaken by the Christchurch City Council.

- To inform local communities of relevant local projects and initiatives in the Riccarton/Wigram area.
- To inform audiences as to how they can get involved with or have their say on a local issue using the Riccarton/Wigram Community Board and Advocacy Team.
- To increase awareness of those using our Advocacy Team/Service Centre of the services available.

AUDIENCES (for best results these should be listed)

- Residents
- Residents groups
- Local Organisations
 - Schools
 - Community Groups
 - Clubs
 - Businesses

STRATEGY

One newsletter, advert or letterbox flyer will not achieve the objectives. The way to achieve better communication is through the following techniques:

- **Repetition of message**- current industry wisdom is that people need to be told something five times before they believe it or act on it. Saying something once is unlikely to achieve anything. Only when you are totally sick of saying the same thing over and over are people starting to pick up on your messages.
- **Consistent image and brand values** – The use of standard Council identity reinforces the Council’s role and helps residents to see the consistency of our work. The Corporate Standards manual outlines the logo and it’s use.
- **Repeat the message using different communication channels** - basic messages need to be repeated in a number of different communication channels before the information is accepted and remembered by residents. One newsletter (even sent out three times) will never be enough. Using the full range of channels available will be more successful.
- **Prioritising messages** – there is a temptation to do information dumping where everything possible is included in a piece of communication. We have to accept that we can only say so much and that some things just may be left on notice boards while other things receive more attention. Boards should prioritise messages and communicate the most important over and over again.
- **Keeping it simple** – information should be kept basic and simple with contact details for those wanting to know more.

- **Quality** – ensuring that information is of a high standard. It is important that brochures are professional and look as good or better than other things in letterboxes. Talks to community groups should be relevant and thought out. Information and reports are written in easy to understand language.
- **Relevancy** – messages should, as far as possible, be targeted using media that reach the target audience. A message to rural ratepayers is not likely to have any impact delivered in a speech to an inner city Toastmasters group. An article in Shoreline will not have any impact reaching residents living around Hagley Park.
- **Currency** – messages should, as far as possible, be communicated to the audience at the time or place when the information is of most use. For example dog registration information when dog registrations are due, water saving practises during summer.
- **Building a relationship with customers and information gatekeepers** – The key staff and elected members communicating, need to develop a relationship with the people you are trying to communicate with. This means meeting the community leaders, and the local media and seeing them regularly.
- **Realising that building communication takes time** - It will not happen overnight and will require sustained effort. Educating your community about what you do will take several years of sustained communication.

METHODS

Newspaper Advertising

Buying space in local newspapers can have some affect if combined with other media. The problems with this approach for Community Boards are as follows:

1. Getting a geographical match – since the community papers cover different boundaries many residents outside our area may get confused as to which Board they are covered by.
2. Cost – to cover your Community Board area will in all cases take more than one paper and this will increase the cost.
3. Advertising is not seen as being as credible as editorial – many people skip adverts and don't read them.

Christchurch City Scene

City Scene goes to all households as with community newspapers every month. Readership is higher than community papers and most letterbox drops (source - Opinions Market Research) and it already covers Council issues making it a relevant place to have your information. Cost is cheaper than community newspapers and you get full colour. However some people do not read City Scene and again City Scene alone cannot communicate everything. The monthly frequency means that people recognise the publication and therefore it has a higher value then less frequent publications.

Community Board Newsletter

This allows the Community Board to freely structure messages. However the frequency means that residents will not necessarily remember it and it will be delivered into a vacuum. This can be a useful adjunct to other communication. The best use of this sort of publication would be on one or two specific local issues not affecting the whole Board area, at a time when the issues are topical.

Media Editorial (newspaper, radio)

Media articles have high information values but the difficulties are, working out the stories, interesting the media, (they may not be interested), and the media slant the article the way they want. On the plus side it doesn't cost anything.

Building stronger media relationships and using communication team support can improve this area.

Speaking to Groups

A speaking programme with Board members and members of the Advocacy Team speaking to groups is of high value provided that:

- set speakers notes are used ensuring that the same messages are sent. This helps to keep a good standard of presentation.
- there is relevant information included for the group who are being spoken to.
- the speaking programme is promoted to groups and run over several months to reach a wide range of people.

Direct Mail

Direct mail is addressed letters (or items) sent through the postal service. This is expensive if sent to an entire community, but it is effective. It may be that a letter is sent quarterly to a mailing list of key opinion leaders and residents' groups. This would be effective provided the same messages are communicated through other channels.

Displays

Displays at libraries and our service centre covering one or two key issues, with say a notice board, with other miscellaneous items is a good idea. Council has access to quality display panel printing and such panels can be made with information that can last for several months. Cost is an issue but there are ways to reduce this.

Presence at Local Events

Displays can be taken to local fairs and other events along with existing Council information. Relevancy should also be considered, people love dogs so taking animal control with you to a fair could be a big hit.

Creating Own Events

The Riccarton/Wigram Community Board and the Advocacy Teams can have small afternoon or morning tea functions when appropriate. These could be on your facilities for media or community groups or at other places such as older people's homes. An event could be a major festival or a small presentation. We can choose the size and regularity of such events.

Flyers for Letterboxes

Currently Council Units are sticking flyers in residents' letterboxes as they undertake work. People reading these will be thinking about Council as they look at them. Current practice suggests this is a good idea to give them more information about what Council does or other issues that may be of relevance.

We can look at printing information onto a small leaflet (reprinted every six months to keep them relevant) and ask service units to deliver them with their letterbox drops as they work on streets. Over a number of years it is possible you could get nearly your whole board area covered by this means.

Web and Electronic Information

Although 30 per cent of residents have access to the Web, only a third of these access the internet. However information can be on the internet to support other communication. Email lists can also be built up for sending Council information to key customers.

SUMMARY

Successful communication requires clear and concise information, well presented, in the appropriate medium. It also requires effective planning and adequate budgets. It is also important to identify your audience, and develop the message to ensure it reaches the target audience.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the information be received.
 2. That the report be referred to the Community Affairs Committee.
 3. That the Riccarton/Wigram Community Board develop a communication strategy plan.
 4. That appropriate budget is identified in the 2001/02 budget round.

Chairperson's

Recommendation: That the above recommendations be accepted.