

Upping Your Communication Game

A Public Works Interactive Workshop

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Objectives

01

Understand why communication matters in Public Works

02

Identify common communication challenges

03

Practice translating technical language into plain language

04

Apply practical strategies you can use immediately



Why Communication Matters in Public Works

Our work is highly visible and directly impacts the public

Clear communication builds trust and credibility

Good communication improves safety, coordination, and morale

Poor communication creates confusion, complaints, and delays



Warm-Up: Think About Your Experience



Think of a time communication went really well on the job



Think of a time communication broke down



What made the difference?



Be ready to share a quick example



Common Communication Challenges

Technical language that doesn't resonate with the public



Too many channels: emails, texts, calls, systems



Assumptions instead of confirmation



Reactive communication instead of proactive updates



Activity: Decode the Message



Rewrite a technical statement
into plain language



Focus on clarity, simplicity, and
public understanding



You have 5 minutes



Technical Statements (Examples)

Sanitary sewer rehabilitation using cured-in-place pipe

Traffic impacts due to subsurface utility investigations

Temporary turbidity during distribution system flushing



Key Lesson

If people don't understand it, they won't support it

Plain language does not mean dumbing it down

Always answer:
“What does this mean for me?”



Communicating with the Public

Lead

Lead with empathy and awareness of impacts

Explain

Explain the 'why' before the technical details

Be

Be proactive and communicate early

Use

Use multiple platforms consistently



Lean Teams vs Full Divisions

Lean or Lightly Staffed Cities

- One core message
- Reuse across platforms
- Press release → website → email → social

Cities with Engagement Divisions

- Coordinated campaigns
- Content calendars
- Multiple formats layered intentionally



Communication Options

Reaching Residents Where They Are



PRESS RELEASES /
MEDIA



EMAIL BLASTS AND
LISTSERVS



SOCIAL MARKETING
PLATFORMS



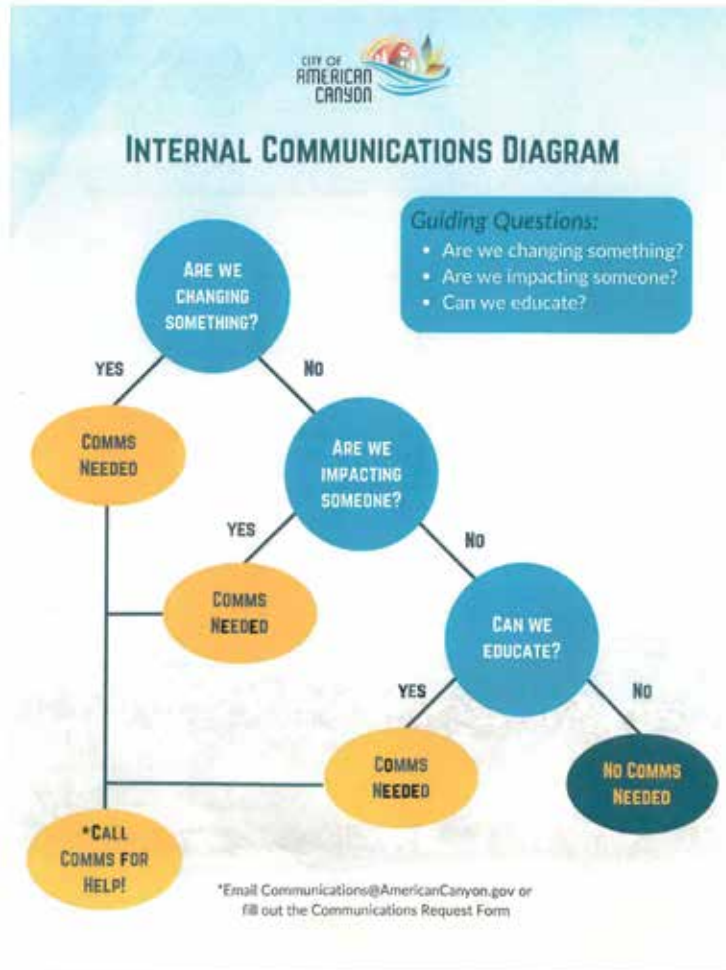
CITY WEBSITE AND
PROJECT PAGES



VIDEO (PRODUCED
OR SIMPLE REELS)



Communication Options

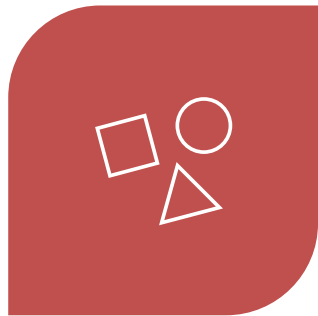


Our Platforms/Marketing Mix



Video as a Trust Builder

Video Makes Public Works Human



DOESN'T HAVE TO BE
PERFECT



A PHONE + HONEST
EXPLANATION WORKS



PEOPLE TRUST FACES
MORE THAN TEXT



Video as a Trust Builder



Internal Communication Best Practices

01

Use one clear source of truth for updates

02

Keep messages short, clear, and actionable

03

Confirm understanding – don't assume it

04

Create space for two-way communication



Leadership Sets the Tone

Be

Be clear, transparent, and consistent

Explain

Explain the 'why' behind decisions

Respond

Respond promptly, even if it's just acknowledgment

Own

Own mistakes and communicate course corrections



Role-Play: Put It Into Practice



Resident upset about construction noise



Explaining a project change to a field crew



Updating stakeholders on a project delay



Focus on listening, empathy, and next steps



Debrief: What Worked?



WHAT LANGUAGE HELPED
DEFUSE TENSION?



WHAT MADE THE
MESSAGE CLEARER?



WHAT WOULD YOU DO
DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME?



Key Takeaways

Communication =
Clarity +
Consistency +
Connection

Listen first, then
respond

Tailor the message
to the audience

Proactive
communication
prevents problems



Closing Thoughts



Every conversation shapes
how Public Works is
perceived



Clear communication builds
trust internally and
externally



Commit to upping your
communication game—
starting today



THANK YOU!

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