



# Communicating Impact to Elected Officials

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## **Abstract:**

This module will focus on the importance of the communicating the positive impact of Cooperative Extension to elected officials serving at all levels, from county to state, and beyond. Mastery of three concepts – impact; the communications process; and the nature of elected officials – will equip any advisory leader with the potential for success in all of her/his communications efforts.

Understanding “impact” is the first key to successful communication. Knowing what your elected officials need to know, how much they need to know, when they need to know it, and how to get the information to them, will all improve your communication efforts. Often, Extension professionals are comfortable with these concepts and in executing communication efforts along these lines. However, for advisory leaders these concepts may move them out of their comfort zones. Strategies for assessing impact and determining the extent to communicate it will be addressed.

A complete and thorough understanding of the communications process is critical for any individual who needs to ensure that a communication effort is clearly achieving its desired result. As communication is a critical step in the program development cycle, the basic pieces of the communications process will be reviewed:

- Source
- Message
- Encoding
- Channel
- Decoding
- Receiver
- Feedback
- Context

Finally, an analysis of elected officials will round out this session. Who are they? What makes them tick? What presses their buttons? Understanding the answers to these questions will help advisory leaders maximize the value of their communications efforts.

### **Objectives:**

- Given a range of details about a program or event, participants will identify effective/ineffective communication pieces as applied across a range of elected officials
- Participants will identify the key elements within the communications process
- Participants will demonstrate the ability to customize methods of communication based on the potential audience

### **Advance Preparation:**

- Review/Study Lesson Plan
- Write out two simple, 8-12 word “messages” for Interest Approach

### **Materials Needed:**

- PowerPoint presentation
- Computer and LCD projector
- Easel, flip chart with paper, markers

### **Time Needed:**

- 30 minutes

## **BACKGROUND**

Across the United States, Cooperative Extension annually delivers thousands of programs dedicated to improving the quality of life for millions of citizens. These educational programs are characterized by unbiased, research-based information coming from America’s land grant universities and colleges. These educational programs deliver the types of information that people need, to the people who need it.

Internally, as members of the organization, Cooperative Extension professionals are comfortable with most of these claims. Our clientele would probably agree with most of them, as well. As a publicly and cooperatively funded governmental entity, however, one of the biggest challenges we face is convincing our elected officials at all levels that Cooperative Extension should remain a funding priority.

Sitting back and hoping that Extension will always be supported with funds from the local, state, and federal levels is simply not an option. We need large numbers of key influential advocates communicating the impact and relevance of Cooperative Extension to elected officials at every level.

## **INTEREST APPROACH**

### **“The Message Game” – (2 versions)**

1 – Ask that all participants stand from their seats and arrange themselves in one straight line, at least 3 feet apart from one another. Instruct participants that a brief message (8-12 words) will be read quietly to the person at one end of the line. That person will, in turn, attempt to quietly convey the exact same message – word for word – to the next person in line. The pattern will repeat until the message reaches the last person in the line, who will in turn relay the final outcome to the instructor. Original message and final message are then compared (on a flip chart, if desired).

2 – The intended outcome is the same as in Round 1. However, all participants are to remain moving at all times, walking in random motion all around the room (in corners, amongst tables/chairs, etc...). The order of “passing the message” shall remain the same as Round 1. However, the person whose turn it is to pass, might have to locate and then move to the next recipient. Additional distractions may be added [i.e., loud music; other intervening messages read aloud by the instructor; lights going on/off; etc...]. When the message reaches the final person, she/he will in turn relay the final outcome to the instructor. Original message and final message are then compared (on a flip chart, if desired).

Assuming that the second message was significantly more altered in its final version than the first, ask participants to identify obstacles to good communication.

## **LESSON**

### **Communicating Impact to Elected Officials**

#### **I. Understanding Impact**

- A. What is “impact”?
- B. Examples of “impact”
- C. Why is “impact” significant and important?

#### **II. Communication**

- A. A critical step in the Program Development Cycle
- B. The Communications Process
  1. Pieces/Stages
    - a. Source
    - b. Message
    - c. Encoding
    - d. Channel
    - e. Decoding
    - f. Receiver
    - g. Feedback
    - h. Context
  2. Identifying and Removing Barriers

III. Elected Officials – Who are they?

IV. Communicating with Elected Officials

- A. What is important?
- B. Communicating with LOCAL officials
- C. Communicating with STATE officials
- D. Differences between elected and appointed officials

## **APPLICATION**

## **REFERENCES**

- Mind Tools, 'Why you need to get your message across',  
<http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/CommunicationIntro.htm>
- Marketing Arizona Cooperative Extension,  
[http://ag.arizona.edu/extension/marketing/elected\\_officials.html](http://ag.arizona.edu/extension/marketing/elected_officials.html)
- Communicating with Elected Officials,  
<http://extension.psu.edu/advisoryleadershipgems/Documents/4%20Mobilize%20-%20Module%20III/13%20Communicating%20with%20Elected%20Officials%20-%20HO.pdf>

## **HANDOUTS**

## **POWERPOINTS**

- (please see attached)

## **EVALUATION**

- (please see attached)