

Workshop 2: Clear talk about wild fire: Meeting the communications challenges of the wide wildfire audience

Tools and advice to help wildfire scientists and professionals communicate clearly with the media

Tools or templates can help scientists and other specialty communicators stay on track. Regardless of which you use, there are a handful of common rules.

Know your audience

The typical scope of a story will vary by audience:

- Local
- Regional
- National

Medium matters

Effective communication techniques will vary by medium:

- Visual: Broadcast/photography
- Written: Newspaper/Website
- Audio: Radio news/Podcast

Narrow your focus

Regardless of who your audience is or what medium the reporter is using to tell a story, it is helpful to limit the number of main points you want to deliver. Three is good. Five is the maximum. You can go deeper into depth on each one if your audience engages to that level. People generally do not track more than five major ideas well.

Tools or templates

Basic message template

Especially helpful for local or regional media covering an incident

Questions to answer for a basic media briefing	In science terms:
Here's what we know.	The basic science
Here's what's new.	The new finding
Here's why it matters.	The implications for scientists or society

A blog: <http://scientistsascitizens.org/2014/04/08/how-to-talk-with-journalists/>
A book: [A Scientist's Guide to Talking with the Media -- Union of Concerned Scientists](#)

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Template for science-based policy discussions

Especially helpful for regional or national media covering policy influenced by an event

Questions to answer for an interview that seeks to inform policy development or debate
Problem: What a project is trying to address.
Solution: What research suggests can address the problem.
Action: What steps or series of steps can flow from the studied solutions.
Benefits: What societal goals could be served by following these actions.

<p>The basic version:</p> <p>PROBLEM: Low-income seniors are becoming more vulnerable to heat-related illnesses as the climate warms.</p> <p>SOLUTION: We found that senior centers with strong community bonds are better able to respond to extreme heat.</p> <p>ACTION: Buildings should come up with heat response plans and identify floor captains who can check on their neighbors.</p> <p>BENEFITS: These plans can save lives at little to no cost.</p>	<p>The slightly more compelling version:</p> <p>PROBLEM: For many older Americans, summers are hotter than they remember, and that's a danger for low-income seniors, in particular.</p> <p>SOLUTION: Strong communities are safe communities and that's true when we're talking about extreme heat.</p> <p>ACTION: It's as simple as having a floor captain who can knock on a neighbor's door to check in.</p> <p>BENEFITS: In the middle of a heat wave, a knock on someone's door can save a life.</p>
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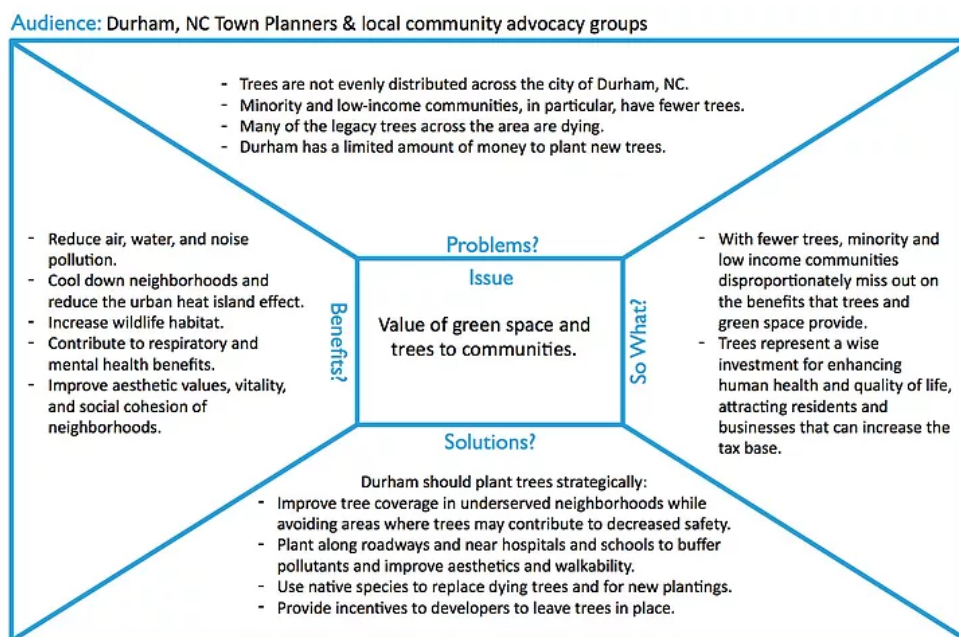
Examples of communicating public health research about heat exposure and climate change in low-income, high-rise apartment buildings from Jalonnie White-Newsome, by way of Aaron Huertas.

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The Compass Message Box

Especially helpful for complex science that informs discussion among specific audiences

Dr. Anne Neale is a research scientist at the EPA. She completed this Compass Message Box to illustrate how information made available through EnviroAtlas (in this case, about the location of trees in Durham, N.C.,) can be used to enhance tangible benefits to communities and the environment.



The EnviroAtlas is an online, open-access tool allowing users access to a wealth of geospatial data and other resources related to the benefits humans receive from nature. This data can inform decisions and policies at multiple spatial scales, educate a range of audiences, and supply data for research. Neale geared her Message Box to local planners to help guide decision-making about tree plantings in the city.

Detailed guidance and examples of how to use the Compass Message Box Workbook are available for free online. <https://www.compasscomm.org/message-box-workbook>. (There's a large, blank message box at the end of this document for you to work with.)

Strategic Mission Message Box

Helpful in the face of known opposition or conflicting interpretation of information on a specific issue.

Your message	Your opponent's message
What you say about a topic	What your opponent says about the same topic
What you say about your opponent's message	What your opponent says about your message

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Here is an example of a message box about education. Your opponent wants to improve education too, but thinks the best way to do this is to build more schools.

Your message	Your opponent's message
<i>What you say about a topic</i> Better education means better chances for rural people.	<i>What your opponent says about the same topic</i> More schools mean more opportunities for rural people.
<i>What you say about your opponent's message</i> Quality is more important than quantity.	<i>What your opponent says about your message</i> You can't educate people if they can't get to the schools.



The Message Box

