



Chapter 6

COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Effective Communication

Develop a plan for sharing information among people in the organization, those you serve, partner organizations and the community. Research has shown that effective, successful organizations support strategic communications to help achieve the mission and vision. Establish open channels of communication so the Board:

- Knows management and maintenance standards are being met.
- Hears residents' concerns.

a) COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING

Communications planning is linked to an organization's overall planning activities. Ideally, each organizational goal should be supported by communication activities, and no major communication activity should be launched by an organization unless it is aligned with key priorities. To prepare a communications plan:

- 1) *Identify your purpose* ~ Define the objectives your organization wants to achieve through strategic communications.
- 2) *Identify key audiences* ~ Prepare a list of individuals, groups and organizations you need to communicate with to achieve your purpose.
- 3) *Identify the main messages* ~ State what you want these audiences to know.
- 4) *Identify communication strategies* ~ Select the communication methods that will best reach your target audiences.
- 5) *Assign responsibility* ~ Confirm timeframes, identify actions and assign specific responsibilities to key communicators.
- 6) *Evaluate effectiveness* ~ Assess each communications activity when complete to ensure the desired outcomes are being achieved. Changes to messages, audiences or communications strategies may be required, based on the evaluation.



Communications planning example:

Objectives	Audiences	Key Messages	Communication Strategies	Measurement
Create/enhance internal and community awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff • Volunteers • Residents • Public • Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ The organization provides high quality housing and community facilities, daycare, and training opportunities for seniors and families ~ The organization is a credible source of information on resident and community issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Meetings ~ Publications ~ News releases/ media promotion ~ Open house ~ Presentations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Number of media stories ~ Attendance at meetings ~ Survey and/or focus groups to assess level of awareness
Increase number of new members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community • Residents • Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ The role of our organization is to provide safe, secure, affordable housing ~ Opportunities for participation include volunteering on the board, organizing events, providing support services for residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Presentations ~ Board member phone calls ~ Buddy system ~ Orientation kit ~ Media drive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Compare levels of participation

b) INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Assess Effectiveness

Internal communications are part of the Board’s advisory responsibility (see page 14). To assess the effectiveness of communication within your organization, ask people to rate their level of agreement with statements similar to the following:

- There is adequate communication among different parts of the organization.
- People do not withhold information to boost their own power.
- People are good at listening to each other.
- Policy makers use input from those who may be affected by their decisions.
- Meetings are well run.
- Minutes of meetings clearly document decisions and actions.



Survey Rating Scale

- 1 = Agree strongly
- 2 = Agree somewhat
- 3 = Neutral or unsure
- 4 = Disagree somewhat
- 5 = Disagree strongly

Allow space in the survey for people to write comments. Adapt the questions to your organization. Gather, analyze and share the results. Celebrate strengths and address weaknesses. Some communication tools you can use to share information within the organization include:

- Meetings ~ Research shows most people rely on one-on-one and group meetings to learn about initiatives and events, and use other methods for additional background information.
- Memos and minutes of meetings.
- Publications ~ A brochure, regular newsletter, flyer and reports can help keep people informed.
- Website/email.
- Notice boards.
- Organizational charts.
- Celebrations.
- Team building sessions/planning retreats.
- Training workshops.

c) EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Networking

Connecting with other housing and community groups can create opportunities to share resources, ideas and experiences. You can learn how others have resolved similar issues, work together on projects, and discover resources for residents. To connect with other groups:

- Participate in the BC Non-Profit Housing Association, which helps housing societies pool resources and work together on common issues.
- Work with the Co-operative Housing Federation of BC, an association that provides resources and connects member housing co-operatives.
- Network informally with other local housing organizations.



- Contact other housing groups and social service agencies such as the Food Bank, the BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses, the Salvation Army, the Canadian Mental Health Association, medical clinics, police community services, religious, native, seniors, women's and immigrant organizations. Invite representatives to speak to your Board. Offer to make a presentation to their Board to let them know what your residents' needs are, and to share information about your services and expertise.
- Ask BC Housing and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to refer you to other organizations.
- Join other community groups.

Public Relations

It's also important for people in the community to understand what your organization does, the people you serve, and how your work affects residents' lives. Sharing this information may motivate people to get involved by becoming volunteers or Board members. You can get your message out through:

- Publications ~ Brochures, fact sheets, newsletters, annual reports, posters, project profiles. Identify the people you want to reach, and where they're likely to look for information. Post notices in malls, community centres, churches, libraries, women's resource centres, seniors' centres, the YMCA, the YWCA, health clinics, food banks, thrift stores and laundromats, for example.
- Electronic media ~ A website, email.
- Media promotion ~ News releases, public service announcements, media events, advertising.
- Open houses.
- Making presentations.
- Awards/certificates.
- Talking to people about your work.
- Information booth or display at a shopping mall, conferences.

Visit the International Association of Business Communicators website at www.iabc.com for a list of publications you can purchase on public and media relations and communication strategies.

Visit the BoardSource for Non-Profit Boards website at www.boardsource.org, and click on the *Bookstore* section for a listing of publications you can purchase and free electronic books on communications and other Board responsibilities.



Media

There are two types of media relations: reactive and proactive. When a media outlet runs a story without consulting you, the story may be negative or inaccurate, and you will have to react. You will have to do your research quickly to get a response on air or in the newspaper by the reporter's next deadline.

Reactive coverage can be stressful, and you have less control over the messages that receive attention.

Proactive media work involves identifying potential stories and promoting them to the media. The research occurs ahead of time, people are prepared for the interviews, and you can publicize the messages you want covered in the story. For example, your Public Relations Committee could write a news release about a new childcare program the residents' association has started, send the story to the local newspapers, radio and television stations, and follow up with phone calls to arrange interviews. You could set a goal of promoting three or four positive stories each year to raise public awareness of your organization's work.

You may want to appoint one or two people on the Board as your spokespeople to deliver a consistent message for the organization, and provide them with media skills training. It's essential that your spokespeople represent the Board's perspective, not individual points of view. Everyone in the organization can refer media representatives to your directors who handle that responsibility.

The best way to respond to the media is to be open and honest about the information you are able to share. If you're asked about information you cannot reveal, just explain that you have to respect individual confidentiality and privacy. Reinforce the main messages you want people who hear the story to remember.

Contact BC Housing's Corporate Communications Department at 604-433-1711 for assistance handling media inquiries. You can also contact the BC Non-Profit Housing Association at 604-527-8859 or 1-800-494-8859 for assistance handling media inquiries and media training referrals.

Working with Government

Cultivate working relationships with government employees who can help when you need information or assistance. You may be able to obtain funding for resident services you want to offer through staff at various ministries. Learn about government program regulations to identify the assistance different people can offer. To build informal working relationships:



- Invite government staff and politicians to social functions such as an open house, an orientation session or a presentation.
- Ask an official to attend a Board meeting to discuss a specific issue.
- Maintain regular contact with your government connections.

d) PRESENTATION SKILLS

You can also raise public awareness of the organization and housing issues by making presentations to other groups in the community. Consider developing a regular speakers' list, where directors take turns making presentations to community groups, at schools and at other community meetings. You may want to develop some slides, overheads or a PowerPoint presentation to make the information more interesting for your audience.

Planning

- 1) What is the purpose of your presentation?
- 2) Why should the audience care?
- 3) What are the points/topics you want to cover?
- 4) How long will you have?

Keep your comments brief to stimulate interest and questions and avoid information overload.

Preparation

- 1) Divide your presentation into three parts: the introduction, body and conclusion.
- 2) Create a point form sheet to follow, not a script.
- 3) Create/assemble any visual aids or handouts.
- 4) Rehearse, timing yourself.

The introduction should be 10 per cent of your presentation and will:

- State the context and purpose.
- Approach the topic from the audience's perspective.
- Tell the audience what's in it for them.
- Link to current events or issues.
- Hook the audience with new information.



The body will be about 80 per cent of the presentation and will:

- Identify your main message.
- State your points clearly and simply.
- Support your points with evidence.
- Illustrate with examples or analogies.
- Anticipate questions.

Finally, the conclusion, at 10 per cent, will:

- Restate/summarize your main message.
- Leave the audience with something to think about.
- Thank the audience for their time.

Delivery

To establish and maintain audience interest in your presentation:

- Create rapport with the audience.
- Begin with their concerns, not yours.
- Grab attention in the first minute.
- Look at the audience.
- Modulate your voice and move your body.
- Use visual aids.
- Ask questions to make the audience think.
- Have the audience participate in an exercise or experiment.
- Give a strong closing statement.

Also invite people from other organizations to make presentations to your group to familiarize directors, staff, volunteers and residents with the work of different community groups.

e) COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Active Listening

Listening is perhaps the most important communication skill. Listening well is crucial in work and personal relationships, shows you care, and validates and empowers the speaker. To develop your listening skills:



- Look at the speaker.
- Nod and/or give verbal clues that you understand, such as “Tell me more,” “I see,” “Uh-huh,” and “That’s interesting.”
- Let the speaker finish before you speak.
- Ask questions to clarify if you are unsure about the intended meaning.
- Reflect back what you’ve heard.

Open and Closed Questions

Open-ended questions seek more information and encourage discussion. Open questions begin with “What,” “Who,” “How,” “When,” and “Where.” For example, who do you think should participate in the review? How would you describe staff morale?

Closed questions require a yes or no answer, and can help bring a particular point to conclusion. Closed questions begin with “Do,” “Don’t,” “Have,” and “Haven’t.” For example, would you like residents to participate in the review? Have you noticed low morale among staff?

Questions that begin with “Why” can either open communication or sound accusatory. Try to substitute “What” or “How” in conflict situations.

Use “I” Statements

Using “I” statements helps us take responsibility for our feelings and experiences. “I” statements also help a listener to understand our thoughts and can reduce feelings of defensiveness. Some sample “I” statements are: “I’m nervous about this situation,” “I’d like to suggest that ...” “I think that ...”

Clarifying Assumptions

To clarify assumptions, you can:

- State your assumption: “I assumed you were upset with ...”
- Describe the behaviour: “When I saw you leave the meeting, I thought ...”
- Ask an open question: “What caused you to leave?”
- Clarify your intent: “I’m asking you about this situation because I value your contribution and don’t want you to leave.”



Dispute Resolution

Conflict occurs when people experience an actual or perceived difference in values, styles, needs, wishes or perceptions. Most people are uncomfortable or afraid of dealing with conflict. However, unresolved conflict can create turmoil at a development, causing neighbours to take sides. It can result in increasing tension and complaints to management, additional pressures on staff, and residents moving out with hurt and angry feelings.

Still, conflicts are inevitable and offer an opportunity to work through differences collaboratively, to learn and grow, and to deepen connections with others.

It's important to have a clearly defined process people can rely on for resolving conflicts at all levels of the organization, between any combination of directors, staff, residents, and the Board.

a) APPROACHES TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION

There are many methods for dealing with disputes including:

Negotiation

The people involved discuss the conflict and reach a resolution on their own. The agreement can be verbal or, preferably, written. For this approach to be successful, both parties must be interested in continuing the relationship, committed to a collaborative resolution process, and have well-developed communication skills.

Mediation

A neutral third party leads a structured process to help two or more people reach a mutually acceptable resolution to a dispute. During the process, the people involved listen to each other's points of view on the problem, reach agreement on what the issues are, identify common ground, generate options for settlement, write an agreement, and develop a plan for evaluating the agreement. Again, all parties must have a stake in continuing the relationship and be committed to a collaborative resolution process to succeed.

Conciliation

A neutral third party acts as a go-between to re-establish a relationship or arrive at a resolution to a dispute. The success of this approach relies on the conciliator's ability to provide appropriate support and report accurately to both disputants. Also, both parties must have a stake in continuing the relationship.

Adjudication

A neutral third party listens to all sides of the dispute and determines a solution, which can be appealed. This process focuses more on finding a solution to the conflict than on continuing the relationship of the disputants, and the outcome creates a winner and a loser.



Arbitration

A neutral third party hears all sides of the dispute and decides on a solution that is binding on all parties. Again, the focus is on the solution to the immediate problem rather than on safeguarding the relationship, and will result in a winner and loser.

As parties move from negotiation to arbitration, they increasingly relinquish the amount of control they have over the outcome of the dispute. If the relationship is more important than achieving a particular outcome, negotiation and mediation are the preferred methods, because these approaches give people greater opportunity to protect the relationship than the other methods.

Refer to page 38 for more information on conflict resolution courses and services. The Resident Relations section of BC Housing's *Operations Guide* You'll find the guide in the *Housing Provider* Section of our website at www.bchousing.org, outlines a dispute resolution process for conflicts involving residents. In addition, your PPM can help assess conflict situations and discuss the options and resources available to help you.

Many housing co-ops have a Member Relations Committee to deal with disputes. If not, the co-op Board handles this responsibility. Co-op policies often provide for mediation and/or arbitration if parties are unable to resolve an issue.

b) CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCEDURE

Disputants can use this method by themselves or with the assistance of a neutral third party to try to resolve conflict. This process will only work if all parties are committed to resolving the conflict and continuing their relationship. People can reach solutions they feel committed to by identifying *interests* rather than maintaining *positions*. A position is a solution that meets an individual's needs, often expressed as demands or refusals, while interests are the collection of needs people must have met in an agreement, such as hopes, expectations, goals, fears, concerns, beliefs, values and priorities.

Step 1

Clarify that each party is committed to finding a mutually acceptable solution, and agrees not to opt for a different alternative to resolve the conflict.

Step 2

Review the process you will follow. Establish guidelines everyone agrees to that allow each party to participate openly and in comfort.

**Step 3**

Define what the issues are. Ensure each party to the conflict has input into defining the issues. Ensure the issues stated are the *real* issues, not just symptoms. Encourage participants to state interests rather than positions. Reach agreement on what the issues are.

Step 4

Collect all relevant information. Organize and analyze the information.

Step 5

Identify what is required to resolve the issue to everyone's satisfaction.

Step 6

Brainstorm all potential solutions. *Do not evaluate* ideas at this stage. Focus on quantity and creativity. At the end of the brainstorming session, each person should see several ideas they're willing to work with.

Step 7

Evaluate possible solutions, and eliminate any solutions that are unacceptable to any participant. Determine how well the solutions meet the criteria for a successful resolution established in Step 5. Choose a solution that's acceptable to everyone.

Step 8

Make a formal written agreement to work with the solution. Include a plan of action to implement the solution, and a time frame and plan for evaluating how well the agreement is working.

This process requires curiosity, sensitivity, and developed listening and communication skills. Participants will need a flip chart, markers and tape.



Problem Solving

Following are three structured problem solving methods – action planning, brainstorming or the Seven Step Model – you can use to address challenges, overcome difficulty or resolve uncertainty within your organization or with other groups.

You can also contact the BC Non-Profit Housing Association at 604-527-8859 or 1-800-494-8859, and the Co-operative Housing Federation of BC at 604-879-5111 or 1-866-879-5111 for advice.

a) QUESTIONS TO ASK TO SELECT A METHOD

Ask each of the following five questions about your problem. The answers will help identify the best approach to use.

- 1) Do you have an interpersonal or organizational communication problem? Refer to the communication techniques on page 61.
- 2) Does the problem involve conflict? Refer to the previous section on conflict resolution, beginning on page 63.
- 3) Is it a \$50 or \$50,000 problem? A \$50 problem does not warrant the costs of using a structured problem solving approach, which may involve hiring a facilitator and the time commitment of those participating. A \$50,000 problem does.
- 4) Who is involved or could be affected by the problem? Identifying those involved will determine who needs to help create a solution. If larger numbers of people are involved, their participation in resolving the issue may be indirect, through representatives.
- 5) Do you have an internal or multi-stakeholder problem? Internal challenges can often be addressed through a brainstorming or action planning process. If multiple parties are involved or affected, the Seven Step Model allows for diverse goals among participants.

b) ACTION PLANNING

Action plans should identify broad goals, specific objectives, those responsible for taking action, and a time frame for implementation.

Setting Goals and Objectives

To set long-range goals, ask the members of your group to identify changes you ultimately want to achieve. Write concise goal statements that begin with a verb. For example, a Facilities Improvement Taskforce might set a goal to ‘increase safety.’



Objectives are measurable accomplishments along the way to achieving your goals. To develop objectives, identify ways to reach each goal. Create two or more concise statements, also beginning with a verb, for each goal. For example, objectives to achieve the goal of increasing safety could be to “improve exterior lighting” and “reduce traffic speed on site.” You can also attach targets to your objectives, which state how much will be achieved and when. For instance, a target might be to “install ten new exterior lights by September 20__.”

Action and Accountability

List the tasks required for each objective. Determine the person or group responsible for implementing each action, and establish target dates for completion.

c) BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorming is one of the most widely used methods for group problem-solving, and involves generating and evaluating ideas. There are four rules for brainstorming sessions:

- *Rule 1* ~ Criticism is ruled out. Successful brainstorming relies on deferring judgement.
- *Rule 2* ~ Freewheeling ideas are welcomed. Participants should suggest any idea that comes to mind.
- *Rule 3* ~ A large quantity of ideas is desired. The more ideas people generate, the more likely a successful solution will be found.
- *Rule 4* ~ Combining ideas is encouraged. Participants can build on and/or combine others' ideas.

Facilitators can use the following steps to lead a brainstorming process:

- 1) Develop a statement of the problem.
- 2) Select a group of six to twelve participants.
- 3) Send a memo to participants listing the statement of the problem, background information, the four brainstorming rules, and the time and place of the meeting.
- 4) Start the session by explaining the format for the session, reviewing the brainstorming rules, and using a warm up exercise unrelated to the problem.
- 5) Write the problem statement on a flip chart or board and edit if necessary.
- 6) Facilitate the group's brainstorming for 30-45 minutes. (If the group is brainstorming without a facilitator to lead the process, aim for a maximum of 15 minutes.) Record all ideas in a numbered list.
- 7) Select an evaluation group of about five people, and ask them to identify and develop the best ideas. The group can use criteria such as feasibility and timeliness of ideas for evaluating the list of ideas.



- 8) Report the list of selected ideas to the original group, and ask for any additional ideas or modifications.
- 9) Present the revised list to the people responsible for deciding on a solution.

d) SEVEN STEP MODEL

The Seven Step Model can be used by a few people to plan a celebration, or by large groups to get a major project back on track. An external facilitator usually leads the process. Set chairs in a circle or oval with a space for the facilitator and flip chart.

Step 1: Task

Establish consensus on the problem-solving task. The facilitator should write the task on the flip chart and check for agreement. Generally, people have a common understanding of the problem, and the wording simply needs fine-tuning.

Step 2: Goal

Each participant states their goals, which the facilitator writes, verbatim, on the flip chart. Some people may state *process goals* about a desired way of working, for example, to include diversity in a housing policy roundtable, while others may state *substantive goals* about a desired result of the work, for example, to document best practices in non-market housing development.

Step 3: Facts

The group identifies relevant facts, such as the resources available and the current status of the problem. The facilitator summarizes the facts.

Step 4: Ideas

Group members brainstorm, using the four brainstorming rules from page 67. Everyone is free to add ideas without fear of being criticized. The facilitator records all ideas.

Step 5: Options

The facilitator helps participants group the ideas as options, which are often mutually exclusive. For example, one option might be to “continue operating as an unincorporated group and review the question again in six months,” and another might be to “form a working group to proceed with incorporation.”

Step 6: Assessment

Group members can identify the pros and cons of each option. Alternatively, the facilitator can create a grid to judge each option by a set of criteria, which can be developed from the goal statements. The solution needs to address all the goals to gain support from everyone.



Sample Assessment Grid

Criteria (Derived from goals)	Option 1 Continue operating as an unincorporated group	Option 2 Form a working group to proceed with incorporation
Ensures diversity of participation		
Enables creation of a best practices project		

If one option is generally strong, but is weak in one area, you may be able to integrate another option that's strong in that area.

Step 7: Decision

The group decides which option to select, by consensus, if possible. The decision may require further problem-solving or planning to determine the implementation details. The same seven steps can be used, or the group may agree to form a sub-group to develop and monitor an action plan.

The Seven Step Model requires a flip chart or white board, markers and masking tape. Provide refreshments so participants are not distracted by hunger or thirst.

e) FOLLOW-UP

Monitoring implementation is key to the success of any problem-solving method. Plan your follow-up process during the problem solving stage. The follow-up should examine:

- What action is being taken.
- Why tasks are not getting done on time, if this occurs.
- Whether desired outcomes are being achieved.
- Why actions are not having the desired impact, if this occurs.

Your follow-up team may have to determine whether actions are still appropriate, reassess responsibilities, and/or adjust timelines.