

COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

A newsletter for the nation's coastal management and research reserve programs.

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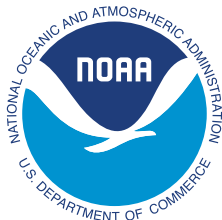
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I'M WRITING A FIRST DRAFT
AND REMINDING MYSELF THAT
I'M SIMPLY SHOVELING SAND
INTO A BOX SO THAT LATER I
CAN BUILD CASTLES.

– Shannon Hale

November 2024, Issue 68



COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

MAKING GOVERNMENT MORE ACCESSIBLE

As I reach the twilight of my career, I have one professional goal that is as relevant today as it was 30 years ago: make government more accessible.

While there are lots of different ways to go about it, my sphere of influence is limited mostly to the written word—but what a sphere this is. The writing I see produced by various state and federal agencies can be unnecessarily convoluted, yet these same organizations wonder why they are misunderstood.

A new grant program in my office, the [Climate Resilience Regional Challenge](#), included “improved communications” as an important part of their efforts to attract an applicant pool more diverse than in previous grant competitions. The actions taken by the team, which can be applied in many situations, are summarized here.

Background: The Grant Program

Through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, NOAA's Office for Coastal Management instituted several competitive grant programs designed to fund projects that increase community resilience from the negative impacts of climate change and other coastal hazards.

The [Climate Resilience Regional Challenge](#) is one such program, funded with a historic investment of \$575 million through the Inflation Reduction Act. An important part of the mandate was to garner increased participation from communities and organizations that may have been left out of previous grant opportunities.

Simplify the Application Language

No surprise here, right? When writing about grants, policies, and legislation, one feels almost required to include the overloaded bureaucratic language and legal terms as a means of protecting the organization and the process. This is understandable. But is there a way we can satisfy the attorneys and grant administrators and still be easily understood by your average Joe and Jane? Yes, it can be done.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

One approach was to ensure the documents, webpages, emails, and whatever else the applicant was asked to read were concise and used only plain speak. The bureaucratic and legal stipulations can be provided in an attachment or a link, through an accompanying Q&A note, or, at the very least, lumped together at the bottom of the document.

Simplify the Process

For this grant program, applicants were asked to submit a short pre-proposal called a “letter of intent.” While the pre-proposal added another step to the process, this approach allowed potential applicants to submit a basic, initial project proposal without going through the time and funds needed to create a full proposal. NOAA also created a template to help first-time applicants. Only those proposals deemed to have best met the published guidelines were asked to submit a full proposal. Invited applicants, as well as those whose projects did not meet the criteria, were provided feedback from the reviewers to help improve their project proposal effort.

Provide Assistance with the Application Process

People are different, and projects are different, meaning there is no one best way to offer assistance. A multipronged approach is necessary.

For this project, an email-based helpline was instituted. All requests were acknowledged (if not answered) within two working days. Virtual office hours were held for one-on-one assistance. Webinars were held to address various aspects of the program and in multiple time zones. An overview video was produced in English and Spanish, and a Spanish version was developed for several documents. Guidance was also developed and tailored specifically for tribes and nonprofits.

Reaching Out to Target Audiences

“If you build it, they may not come” is a favorite saying in our communications department. It is not enough to provide these services. You must also reach out, far and wide, to ensure the target audience knows about the opportunity. Our office took many steps to reach diverse audiences through umbrella organizations, such as the NAACP, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Climate Resilience Program, Anthropocene Alliance, GreenLatinos, and the United South and Eastern Tribes organization. Many shared the information through listservs and newsletters. We also relied on our regional staff to distribute the information to their contacts and to NOAA leadership.

Don’t get me wrong—this was not a perfect process, nor will it ever be, but striving for inclusivity means looking at a situation from the receiver’s point of view, working to make things as clear as possible, and ensuring the target audience is aware of the opportunity. The really good news is that all audiences will appreciate this improved approach to doing government business.

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COMMUNICATION PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Featured products: Coastal States Organization's Stories of Great Lakes Restoration

Source: coastalstates.org/healing-our-relationship-with-great-lakes-habitats-honoring-our-stories

Submitted by: Pamela Jacobs, Lynker for NOAA's Office for Coastal Management

What it is: A collection of stories, told through evocative art, that highlights the interconnectivity of the people, plants, and animals of the Great Lakes. Each artwork tells a unique story and, according to Vidya Balasubramanyam, the Coastal States Organization's research, science, and program director (and one of the featured storytellers), serves "as a testament to why habitat restoration work is important in the context of the deep relationships that people have with nature, especially [when] told through Black, Indigenous, and People of Color perspectives of the Great Lakes."

The project, which is part of the organization's habitat restoration work in the Great Lakes, is meant to capture the human connection to the habitats being restored. The team showcased and gifted art prints at the National Adaptation Forum and set up poster board for attendees to write stories of connection, disconnection, and healing related to their experiences with water, uncovering many beautiful narratives in the process.

Why I like it: People protect what they love. Telling people about the scientific and environmental benefits of habitat restoration is extremely important (it's what many of us do for a living), but sometimes showing the value of it through a personal, human-focused lens is what forms a deeper connection and makes them really care. These stories represent individuals' histories, traumas, and hopes, and give voice to people who, historically, weren't given the opportunity to be heard.

(Please note: this is not an endorsement of the designers, websites, or any proprietary tools, but simply this writer's opinion on a good communication product.)



FROM US TO YOU

OUTREACH TOOL SPOTLIGHT— CONNECTING WITH YOUR AUDIENCE: PLANNING YOUR NEXT INTERACTION

Successful communication begins and ends with making a connection with your audience—people want to feel seen and heard. This helpful worksheet, complete with examples and resources, allows just that by walking you through a planned interaction's goals, format, techniques, and more, all in a logical flow. Find it here: coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/audience.html.

UPCOMING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Follow us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, and tag along with these themes:

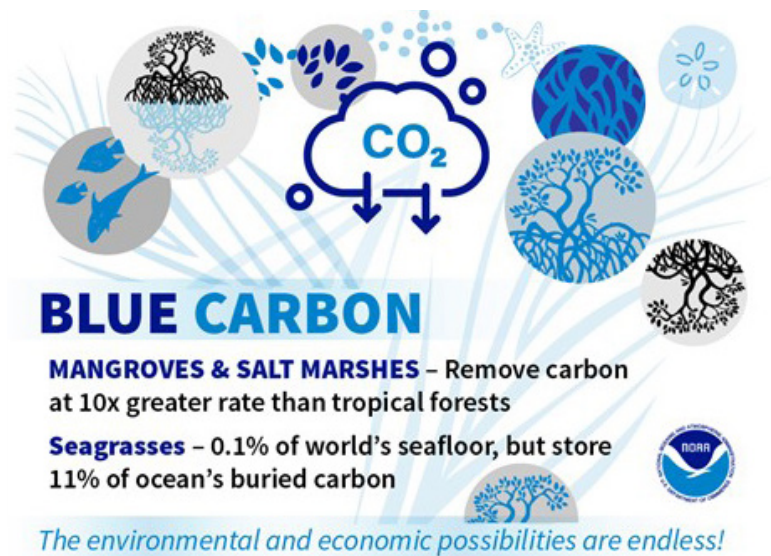
- ✦ November 4 to 8: Illinois
- ✦ November 11 to 15: Wisconsin
- ✦ November 18 to 22: Minnesota
- ✦ November 25 to 29: Give Thanks

NOAA'S EQUITY FRAMEWORK

Underscoring NOAA's commitment to making equity central to its mission, the agency recently released its first ever Equity Framework, designed to offer a deeper understanding of how to incorporate equity into everything we do. From program policies to community engagement and outreach products, equity considerations can be included in all aspects of climate science, including—or perhaps especially—in communications, as highlighted in this issue's "Communications Insights" article. Find the framework here: noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-10/EquityFramework_Doc_10262024.pdf.

FAST FACTS—BLUE CARBON

This is one of the many graphics and facts available for your use in presentations and handouts. Grab this one at coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/blue-carbon.html. If you have an idea for a new group of fast facts or illustrations, please let us know.



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Send questions or suggestions to coastal.info@noaa.gov.

View past issues at coast.noaa.gov/gallery/newsletter.html.

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