

WHAT WOULD MY STAKEHOLDERS WANT?

Steps to understanding my stakeholders

WORKSHEET

Context

For your science communication endeavor to be effective, you will need to identify a specific stakeholder group that you aim to engage. Then, you'll need to consider the stakeholder's potential values/assumptions about various factors you are conveying in your project. To evaluate yourself and others, you'll need to consider how well various factors (e.g., visual design, persuasive/rhetorical strategies, etc.) work to engage the target stakeholders.

Keeping all this in mind, complete this worksheet (4 steps, 9 questions) about what your stakeholders might want, know, and care about. These will inform your planning as you decide the optimal way to engage your stakeholders.

STEP 1. IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET STAKEHOLDER GROUP.

First, you will need to identify a specific stakeholder that you think will have a stake in the communication idea/project you have in mind.

Example: for a discussion of the rural youth exodus, there are several possible stakeholder groups: parents who live in small rural communities, new residents of rural areas, recent high school students from small towns who plan to leave (aka, the youth exodus), rural doctors (or other professionals working in rural communities), high school administrators, those wishing to live off the grid (or those wanting to live a more green existence/simple life), social workers in rural communities, spiritual leaders in rural communities, etc.

Question 1: What is the problem/issue you are working to address through sharing science?

- Describe in roughly one single-spaced page.
- Why is this problem persistent? What has already been tried?
- How do you think science can help?

Question 2: Who might be impacted by this problem and/or be able to influence it or do something productive with the science you want to share?

- Make a list of at least 10 stakeholder groups.
- Organize them by who is impacted and who has influence or authority over the situation.
- Provide details about why each group is interested in the problem.

Question 3: Who do you want to try to reach, and why?

- From among those possible stakeholder groups, identify 1-3 distinct groups that you plan to focus on.

- Describe why these are of primary interest to you. Consider factors such as feasibility, time frame, who can actually change things, etc.

STEP 2. LEARN STAKEHOLDER'S VALUES AND ASSUMPTIONS.

Next, you'll need to consider in detail the stakeholders' potential values/assumptions about the topic(s) you're working to communicate.

In many cases, you may need to reach out to people in this demographic and learn first-hand what they value. This can include attending headings, roundtables, community events, conducting surveys or interviews, etc. You should also conduct literature searches to identify research that has characterized this audience thoroughly. You may also be able to use digital listening tools common to content marketing.

Example: For the rural youth exodus, these might include mobility, diversity, definitions of success, etc. They will likely vary from one stakeholder group to the next, and some individuals may fit into multiple stakeholder groups.

Question 4: Reflect on some tools or approaches you may use to better understand your stakeholder group.

Question 5: In addition to the tools you can use to better understand your stakeholder group, what do you already know about your stakeholder(s)?

- What do they care about, broadly?
- How does that relate to your scicomm effort?

Question 6: What are some attitudes, values, or existing knowledge your stakeholder has about science?

- How do your stakeholders perceive science overall?
- How do your stakeholders perceive the discipline or research approaches you use?
- While you may not know for certain, you can likely find information to provide insights. And, if you are in a position to, you can actively solicit this information from stakeholders.

STEP 3. IDENTIFY VALUES THAT OVERLAP WITH YOUR STAKEHOLDER GROUP.

After evaluating your stakeholders values, you'll need to find some common ground with your stakeholders values and your own.

- Return to the 'values-driven scicomm' section of Merkle et al. 2021 (Human-Wildlife Interactions) for a detailed sequence and specific tools to articulate your values overall, with regard to science, and for the specific scicomm effort you are planning.
- Note that the values and goals sections of Merkle et al. 20201 (HWI) are closely related and we recommend you complete them both in parallel to this worksheet.

STEP 4. PLANNING ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUR STAKEHOLDERS.

Once you have identified overlapping values and considered your goals with them, it is time to develop a plan for engaging your stakeholders.

Question 7: What are the optimal avenues and ways to engage your stakeholders?

- Where do your stakeholders get their information?
- Where do your stakeholders socialize?
- Who in the community (or other socio-cultural context of your scicomm effort) do your stakeholders trust?

Question 8: What types of communications materials might work well with your stakeholders?

- Brainstorm potential points, visuals, designs, or different elements to include in creating your story to effectively communicate with your stakeholders.
- Why do you think this particular content approach or design might work well or be problematic for your stakeholders?

Question 9: Take a look at your science goals, overlapping values, and engagement plan, and consider the following:

- What types of evidence does your project use/use most often? Do you think this type/these types of materials are likely to be seen as credible or adequate for your stakeholders?
- What parts of your science might be persuasive or problematic for these stakeholders?
- Are there objections your stakeholders would have for the content that your goals fail to adequately address? If so, describe them and consider how you may address them.

NEXT STEPS

Determining your own values and connecting those with the values held by your stakeholders is essential for effective scicomm. Beyond the reflection prompts in this worksheet, we recommend numerous scicomm planning and engagement tools. These are listed in the literature cited section of Merkle et al. 2021 (HWI).

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