



**American Water Works
Association**



Communicating the Value of Water Basic Communications Plan

Overview

As leading water quality organizations representing thousands of water professionals worldwide, the American Water Works Association (AWWA) and the Water Environment Federation (WEF) share separate but similar missions to protect public health, the environment, and quality of life through innovative, smart, and sustainable water management.

Central to that effort is a commitment to work collaboratively with our respective members, dedicated utilities and various stakeholder partners to elevate clean water, clean water services, and the infrastructure that supports it as essential to keeping our communities safe and thriving. We understand that varying degrees of resources and dedicated public information staff can make it difficult to engage with consumers and target audiences so we have developed a quick reference outline of toolkit materials and sample distribution recommendations to assist in your efforts to communicate about the value and importance of water.

Purpose

Deploying the toolkit materials in a timely manner to meet your specific needs is key to public outreach success. Toolkit pieces include consistent imagery and messages that are meant to educate, engage and resonate with customers, the general public, local decision-makers, key influencers, community leaders, the media, and other stakeholders to create memorable, positive associations with water, water/wastewater infrastructure, and water sector professionals.

The toolkit, which contains a complete set of downloadable, customizable materials, is posted on both the AWWA and WEF websites:

AWWA: <https://www.awwa.org/resources-tools/water-and-wastewater-utility-management/communications-and-customer-service/value-of-water.aspx>

WEF: <http://www.wef.org/resources/for-the-public/value-of-water/>

TOOLKIT ELEMENT: MESSAGING PLATFORM

To establish a consistent narrative, it is important to reference the messaging platform and to look for opportunities to refer to and use these messages when communicating with the general public, decision-makers, community leaders, and media. Examples include:

- Inserts for water/wastewater bills
- Fact sheets, websites, and social media posts
- Emails to community leaders and key decision-makers

- Letters to the Editor
- Opinion editorials
- Press releases
- Media pitches
- Public speaking opportunities such as town hall meetings, budget meetings, festivals, editorial board meetings, media interviews, etc.

TOOLKIT ELEMENT: INFOGRAPHICS

Consider printing and distributing your applicable infographic when you are in the process of implementing a rate increase or a public works project that will need public support, investment and engagement.

The infographics include messages that help visually convey the value and importance of safe water, clean water services, and the modernized, maintained and reliable infrastructure that is needed to transport and deliver it to our homes, businesses, local waterbodies.

Distribute your applicable infographics at events around your city or town and during school visits, facility tours, town halls, festivals, parades, holiday events, editorial boards, and budget meetings.

Additionally, to optimize outreach, consider using and distributing applicable map infographics around/during the events and celebrations listed in the **EVENTS & CELEBRATIONS** section below.

TOOLKIT ELEMENT: CAMPAIGN BILL STUFFERS

As your most direct method of communication, the series of customizable bill stuffers can help you connect with your target audiences at optimal moments, such as in advance of a rate increase or during the implementation of a new public works project either at your facility or within the community.

Leading up to a rate increase or project, bill stuffers can be used to effectively communicate how and why public understanding and support is necessary to help your utility ensure the community member has reliable access to clean, safe water and clean water services. Beyond that umbrella message, you can customize the bill stuffers for your specific need(s) and/or call to action.

Additionally, to optimize outreach, consider bill stuffers around/during the events and celebrations listed in the **EVENTS & CELEBRATIONS** section below.

TOOLKIT ELEMENT: CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY

In Pipe Up, the campaign activity book for kids (3rd, 4th and 5th graders), players will try to successfully connect the pipes to reflect the drinking water, wastewater and stormwater cycle. Pieces required to complete the mazes include steps such as “replace old pipes”, “treat water”, “generate energy”, “pay your water/wastewater bill”, “thank water utility workers” and “help us protect the environment.”

The activity book also includes water-related call-outs that will resonate with children such as brushing their teeth; flushing the toilet; how water/wastewater is cleaned, transported, delivered, and returned to the environment for reuse, the age of our infrastructure (pipes, facilities), taking a sip from the water fountain after recess, running through the sprinklers and bathing your baby brother or sister.

Our goal with Pipe Up is to reach, engage and educate kids as soon as they can understand the value and importance of water as it pertains to what they do every day and what it takes “behind the scenes” to make that daily routine possible.

Distribute Pipe Up during facility tours, community festivals, at schools around applicable time periods such as the first day of school or school breaks, or through very targeted mailings.

Additionally, to optimize outreach, consider using/distributing Pipe Up during the events and celebrations listed in the **EVENTS & CELEBRATIONS** section below.

TOOLKIT ELEMENT: RADIO PSAS

By leveraging your target audience’s familiarity with, and trust in, radio stations and/or on-air talent, you can effectively reach, educate and influence community members on a large scale.

If your utility has established relationships with media outlets, reach out to those established contacts and use the messaging platform to pitch the campaign. If your utility has previously purchased media with an outlet, or has a current campaign running, ask if running either the :30 or :60 spot can be a value add for the current spend. Your sales manager may agree to put one or both spots into rotation as a “thank you” for your spend, and/or in hopes of garnering future paid business from your utility.

A relationship with a sales manager or sales executive at the station may tend to result in more flexibility; however, reaching out to the promotions manager or director is also a possibility.

If you do have any leverage, try to ask for A.M. or P.M. drive-time day parts. If not, just ask that the rotation of your spot(s) not be too heavily focused on overnights.

As with the bill stuffers and infographics, focusing your “ask” during applicable times such as community events, ahead of a rate increase or implementation of a public works project is recommended; however, running PSA spots throughout the year will help sustain a continued connection with the community.

Additionally, to optimize outreach, consider asking for PSAs to run around/during the events and celebrations listed in the **EVENTS & CELEBRATIONS** section below.

TOOLKIT ELEMENT: SOCIAL MEDIA GRAPHICS

Using and posting social media graphics is the best way to sustain a connection with the community and continually reinforce key messages. Please post/use the provided graphics on a regular basis and especially during water-centric holidays and celebrations.

If your utility is exhibiting at a festival or sponsoring an event, please use the social media graphics for promotional and marketing efforts leading up to the event and in post-event communications.

Additionally, to optimize outreach, consider using social media graphics around/during the events and celebrations listed below.

EVENTS & CELEBRATIONS

- Engineers Week (February)
- National Groundwater Awareness Week (March)
- World Plumbing Day (March)
- Fix a Leak Week (March)
- World Water Day (March)
- Earth Hour (March)
- Global Day of the Engineer (April)
- Earth Day (April)
- Drinking Water Week (May)
- Infrastructure Week (May)
- Smart Irrigation Month (July)
- National Water Quality Month (August)
- World Water Week (August)
- National Preparedness Month (September)
- Protect Your Groundwater Day (September)
- National Coffee Day (September)
- Imagine a Day Without Water (October)
- World Standards Day (October)
- National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week (October)
- World Toilet Day (October)