Using Climate Change Communications Research to Engage the Montgomery County Community in Action

Evidence-Based Communications Subgroup
February 2020

What are Evidence-Based Communication Strategies?

- Based on evidence and research. This includes journal research, assessments, focus groups, surveys, etc. to better understand your audience.

- Bring a better and measurable return on investment.

- Ensure that communications investments and activities are spent on tactics and messages that deliver results.

Goals of the Montgomery County Climate Change Communication Workgroup

1. Provide the concept frame for a communications campaign aimed to increase stakeholder interest and engagement in support of urgent changes needed in Montgomery County.

2. Develop a process that assures ongoing community engagement and advocacy in support of urgent changes at the individual, nonprofit, business, and government levels.

Knowledge, Belief, and Behavior Objectives for Communication Campaign

KNOW – we have a climate emergency and climate change is already harming us – without action, things will get worse. Reducing carbon will have immediate health benefits and help our environment too.

BELIEVE – personal and community actions make a difference. Montgomery County can have a big impact by leading in Maryland and the region.

ACT – learn more about climate change and existing programs, change behaviors that reduce carbon, and support policy that embraces climate action.

Facing a Climate Emergency: Why Montgomery County Must Act Now

- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report notes we have until 2030 to take immediate action to reduce carbon emissions.

- In 2017, Montgomery County Council declared a climate emergency making climate action and carbon reduction a priority.
  - The County Executive has affirmed this stance in setting the 80% reduction in carbon emission by 2027 and 100% by 2035.
  - The workgroups are producing recommendations for the County Council, which will inform climate-related policy proposals in the near-term.

- Our community's health and future depend on our taking immediate and sustained action.

Where we are:
Opinions of Montgomery County Residents

According to the Yale Climate opinion maps*, specific to Montgomery County:

- 83% believe climate change is happening
- 71% believe it is caused by humans
- 74% are worried about global warming
- 68-81% believe global warming is hurting plants and animals, developing countries and will harm future generations
- However: only 51% believe it is hurting them personally

Sample: American adults age 25 and older

Many research studies indicate that people care most about:

- How climate change affects health.
- How climate will affect their children and grandchildren.

Communication Strategy Logic Model
"MoCo Carbon-Free 2030: A Healthy County for a Better Future"

Resources

County Agencies & Staff
Interagency Workgroup
Message Matrix
Stakeholder Engagement
  Strategy
Website
Social Media
County Official
  Communications (Letters,
  Signs, Emails)
Supportive stakeholders
Federal and state agencies
Business Community
Faith Community
Non-Profit community
Education Community
Resources

Theoretical Models
Diffusion of Innovations Theory
Theory of Reasoned Action
Social Norms
Stages of Change

Activities

Interagency Workgroup
- Monthly reports on climate change initiatives from EVERY agency
- Inclusion of comm staff in interagency workgroup

Engage Stakeholder Leaders
- Discussion groups
- Direct outreach phone calls/emails
- Develop County Climate ambassadors
- Convene Ambassador Meetings
- Build advocacy skills (toolkits, trainings)

Communicate and Disseminate
- Develop pervasive and regular content: Website, factsheets, newsletters and social media, emails, letters
- Presentations
- Stakeholder presentations
- Media Outreach & Earned Media

Objectives

1) Strengthened internal communications across county divisions
2) County's activities are showcased in external outreach
3) All county and stakeholder communications use evidence-based comm frames and messages
4) Climate change solutions that require and benefit most from public stakeholder engagement and support are prioritized in communications
5) County stakeholders engaged as ambassadors to promote climate action
6) Community engaged as partners in developing plans based on their needs

Knowledge and Belief Outcomes

Knowledge
- Reducing carbon emissions will have immediate and long-term **health benefits** for us and our county
- Stakeholders know how to access and use resources.

Beliefs
- Personal and community **actions make a difference**
- People that I know and care about support taking action on climate change.
- **Initiative will make our county a better and healthier place to live and work.**

Behavioral Outcomes of Comm Campaign

1. County residents **successfully engaged** in achieving county's carbon reduction goals.
2. County residents **actively support** county's carbon reduction goals and need for resources to accomplish these goals.

County Objectives

Montgomery County has set goals of 80% reduction in carbon emission by 2027 and 100% reduction by 2035.

Target Audiences in MOCO

- Informed and concerned citizens (already among the worried ~60-80% citizens).
- County staff across all divisions (internal).
- Stakeholders (influencers including civic, business, education, and faith leaders who are already engaged in climate action).
- Vulnerable populations (children, older citizens, people with disabilities or other life challenges, poor and income-concerned).

The campaign focuses resource on communicating with residents that are already taking climate action, are likely to support needed behavior change, and understand that climate change is happening right now.

Key Influencers to Engage

- Businesses and industry associations
- Faith leaders
- Civic associations
- Schools and PTAs
- Youth and children
- Health providers and long-term care providers
- First responders (police, EMT, fire brigades)
- Nonprofit groups
- Foundations

Core Health-Frame Messages

- Climate change is a health emergency. Climate change is harming the health of MoCo residents now, and, unless we respond, these harms will increase.

- Climate solutions are health solutions. Fighting climate change will improve our health immediately and protect our own and our children's health for the future.

- Your actions and support will make a difference for climate and health in MoCo.

Key Recommendations

COUNTY COMMUNICATIONS

1. Increase and stimulate internal Climate Action communications across divisions.

2. Showcase county's climate action activities via external communications.

3. Develop and use evidence-based climate action communication frames and messages.

4. Prioritize communicating climate change solutions that require and benefit most from public stakeholder engagement and support.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

5. Engage and facilitate action through ongoing external stakeholder actions (meet residents where they are).

6. Engage community as partners and support their needs, so they will take action on a personal level and support MoCo activities.

Recommendation 1: Increase and stimulate internal climate action communications across County divisions.

1. County should host an internal government kick off climate change meeting to elevate the issue and demonstrate it's a county government priority that all agencies should support.
   a. ALL divisions should participate. https://montgomerycountymd.gov/government/orgchart.html

2. County should integrate climate change messages throughout the government to change internal behaviors and decisions.

3. Any legislation from county council should align and prioritize the work of the workgroups.

4. Establish an interagency climate change group with leadership from each division and comm leads; meet quarterly.
   a. Emphasize communication methods with this group.
   b. Each division share activities and communication strategies.

Recommendation 2: Showcase county's climate action activities and commitment via external communications

1. County should institutionalize a steady drumbeat of outreach from EVERY division.
2. Communicate county's progress in implementing climate action recommendations (Data & Results).
3. Integrate climate change messages into county outreach.
   a. Bottom of traffic tickets: "Did you know slowing down by 5 miles an hour …"
   b. On buses: "Taking public transit rather than driving alone in your car reduces carbon…"
4. Include climate change connection messages when there are emergency events.
   a. When emergency happens (flooding, storms); issue news release to show the climate change connection is communicated and highlight urgency of action.
5. As county implements emission reducing activities, publicize examples for community. Examples:
   a. Improving building insulation.
   b. Eliminating plastic water bottles at events.

Recommendation 3: Develop and Use Evidence-based Communication Messages

1. Based on communication theory and effective practices, create a communication message box of core messages that should be shared in ALL external communications.
2. Create Communication Process flow (slide 19). The process flow will help to determine which recommendations will be highlighted in the campaign and determine:
   a. Is internal (government) or external (community)?
   b. Will have immediate and measurable impact (only support and promote activities with immediate carbon reduction impacts)?
   c. Are there impacts and accounts for disadvantaged and vulnerable populations and provides equitable approaches?
3. Core Messages include: Health, Local, Urgency, Legacy, and Economics. "Your health and our community will benefit from these changes!"
4. Establish additional core messages relevant to each County division.
5. Provide regular trainings on communications research and behavior change related to climate change for government communications officers.

Recommendation 4: Prioritize communicating climate change solutions that require and benefit most from public stakeholder engagement and support.

1. Prioritize what benefits most from public engagement (using resources wisely).

2. Use the process flow to determine what actions are promoted in the campaign.

Recommendation 5: Engage and facilitate action through ongoing external stakeholder actions (meet residents where they are)

1. Implement broad public relations campaign to encourage stakeholder engagement that supports broader and more significant urgent county changes.

2. Form a standing Climate Change Communication Commission or Committee of Climate Change Ambassadors from the community.

    a. Create an ambassador model (e.g., trusted messengers) to encourage engagement and behavior changes. Peer-to-peer sharing leads to behavior change.

    b. Provide compelling and useful tools (e.g., campaign like Green Initiative (GI) or "Healthy Green Community" that would brand everything together).

        i.   Create behavior checklist.

        ii. Give A Shift YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCV3GlZazdyO8SlKgDbF5H1Q

    c. Include community leaders, ambassadors, and other public figures in outreach efforts.

    d. Use humor when and where possible.

Recommendation 5: Engage and facilitate action through external stakeholder activities. (continued)
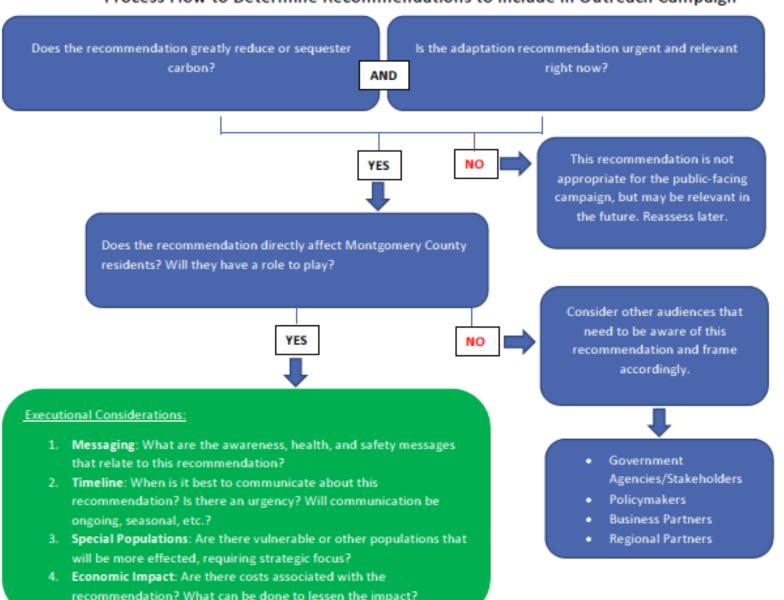
3. Develop and implement business outreach strategy.
- Good for business
- County "green seal of approval" stickers

4. Develop and implement strategies for various stakeholder groups.
- Health
- Education
- Civic Groups
- Faith-based
- … and more

Recommendation 6: Engage community as partners and support their needs so they will take action on a personal level and support MoCo activities.

1. Make the community feel seen, heard, and valued by placing humans and human needs at the center of the communication work.

2. Move away from extracting information from people to inform the plan and bring people in as partners so they contribute to and are a part of the plan.

3. "Implementation partners" could be youth (receiving SSL hours or college credit for their work), faith communities (receiving small grant), etc. – some "compensation" that shows value for time and commitment.

4. What do you need? … and what climate action will help address that need. (focus on listening rather than telling so that people can see themselves in it).

5. Use the volunteer ambassadors to facilitate the dialogue in neighborhoods.

Process Flow for Determining Which Activities Are Communicated in Outreach Campaign

Evidence-Based Communications
Process Flow to Determine Recommendations to Include in Outreach Campaign

Does the recommendation greatly reduce or sequester carbon?

AND

Is the adaptation recommendation urgent and relevant right now?

YES

NO → This recommendation is not appropriate for the public-facing campaign, but may be relevant in the future. Reassess later.

Does the recommendation directly affect Montgomery County residents? Will they have a role to play?

YES

NO → Consider other audiences that need to be aware of this recommendation and frame accordingly.

- Government Agencies/Stakeholders
- Policymakers
- Business Partners
- Regional Partners

Executional Considerations:

1. **Messaging**: What are the awareness, health, and safety messages that relate to this recommendation?
2. **Timeline**: When is it best to communicate about this recommendation? Is there an urgency? Will communication be ongoing, seasonal, etc.?
3. **Special Populations**: Are there vulnerable or other populations that will be more effected, requiring strategic focus?
4. **Economic Impact**: Are there costs associated with the recommendation? What can be done to lessen the impact?

Creating Effective and Persuasive Messages

- Keep it simple and clear.

- Focus on audience benefits (and needs) – tell real stories about real people.

- When using fear, provide solutions and trusted sources.

- Use messages that are impactful, concrete, and personal.

- Make messages easy to remember.

- Include fun and humor, when possible.

- Aim for the big idea and make norms visible.

- Do not reinforce the frame that you are trying to move away from.

Possible Campaign Brand and Tag Lines

BRAND RECOMMENDATION: MoCo Carbon-Free 2030

TAG LINES (based on top two concerns – health and fate of kids/grandkids):

- "Protecting our health and future."

- "Healthy county, healthy planet."

- "Your lungs and your children will thank you."

Example: Improving Heat Extreme Awareness and Planting Trees

Core Message: Climate change is a health emergency in MoCo.

Extreme heat events are becoming more frequent in MoCo and threaten all residents with heat stroke and other heat-related illnesses. Most vulnerable are student athletes, outdoor workers, the very old, and very young and those living in homes and communities with greater exposure to heat extremes. Trees provide the canopy of shade that keeps us cool in the heat of the summer.
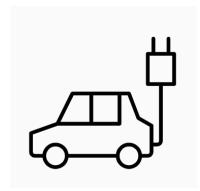
Core Message: Climate solutions are health solutions.

Planting trees will reduce carbon pollution and provide protection against extreme heat.

Core Message: Your actions and support will make a difference for climate and health in MoCo.

Take action against extreme heat that will protect you and your family members. Supporting tree planting in MoCo will improve your health and the health of all MoCo residents. Learn more here [web site or other resource.]

Example: Greening the Grid

Core Message: Climate change is a health emergency in MoCo.

Climate change reduces air quality because heat increases smog, wildfires and pollen production. All MoCo residents are harmed by air pollution, but people with respiratory conditions such as asthma or chronic lung disease are most vulnerable.
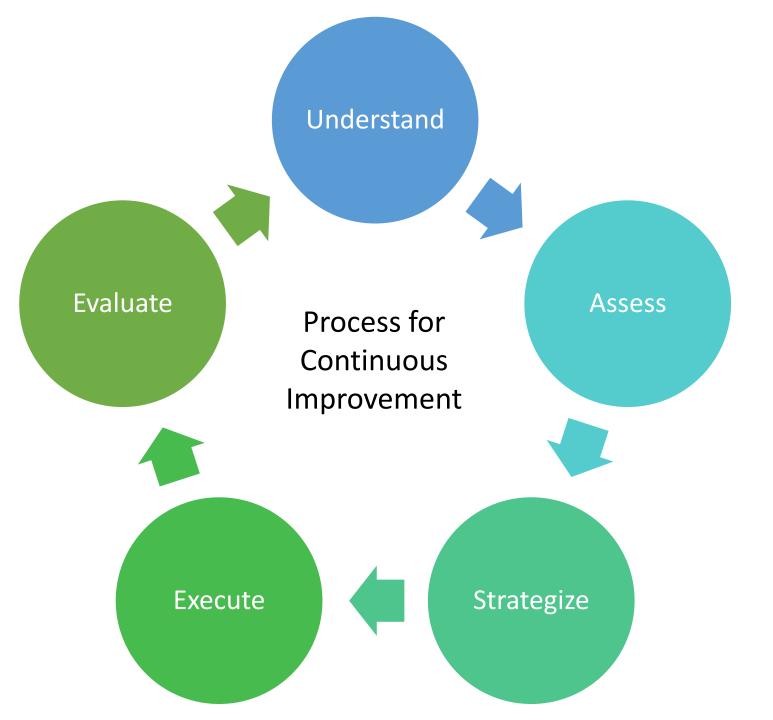
Core Message: Climate solutions are health solutions.

Switching from gas to hybrid or electric engines and getting around by walking, bicycling, and using public transit will help fight climate change and immediately reduce air pollution in MoCo. Shifting your transportation habits this way also reduces the risk of injuries and health concerns like obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and osteoporosis.

Core Message: Your actions and support will make a difference for climate and health in MoCo.

You can reduce air pollution by driving an electric car and walking, bicycling, and using public transit whenever possible. Learn more about the difference "greening our grid" will make for MoCo here [web site or other resource.]

Communication Development and Improvement Process

Process for Continuous Improvement

Understand → Assess → Strategize → Execute → Evaluate → Understand

Communicating Results: Measuring and Reporting Outcomes

- Ongoing reporting (quarterly) to the county should include the recommendations being implemented, benchmarks, and measured outcomes. This will include efforts within and outside the campaign.
  - Include calls to action
  - Include community engagement needs in new activities
  - Share funding needs and requests to solicit input, connections, and resources
  - Include measured outcomes
- Climate Change Communication Commission of Volunteers or Ambassadors should meet and report (quick poll) outreach and engagement accomplishments to include in quarterly reports.