

Thriving Through Change: Opportunities for Local Climate Action

Community Engagement and Risk Communication

January 28, 2025

Webinar Presenters



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Webinar Series

Thriving Through Change: Opportunities for Local Climate Action

1/14: Local Resilience Infrastructure and Governance

View a recording of Part 1 of the series here!

1/28: Community Engagement and Risk Communication

Webinar Goals:

- Understand why **risk communication** is an important part of **resilience**
- Become familiar with **best practices** in **wide-spread and effective** communication of climate change and climate-related hazards
- Feel empowered to **take action** in your community
- Learn about ideas for **events and initiatives** to communicate risk and reach out to the community regarding climate change

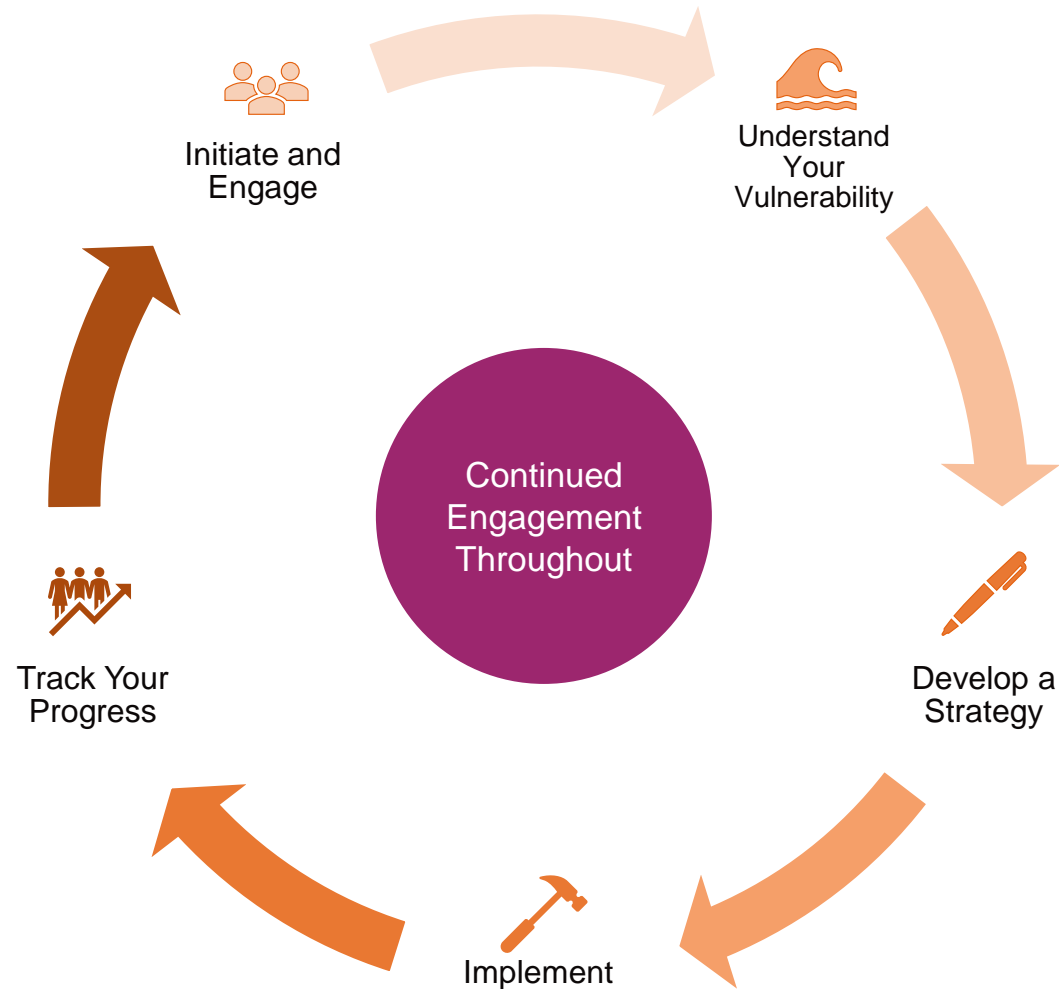
Agenda

1. Defining Risk Communication
2. Resilience and Risk Communication – Empowering Communities to Take Action
3. Best Practices in Climate Communication
4. Risk Communication Spotlight: Resilient NENJ
5. Community Outreach Opportunities for Risk Communication
6. Conclusion and Questions

Community Engagement and Risk Communication

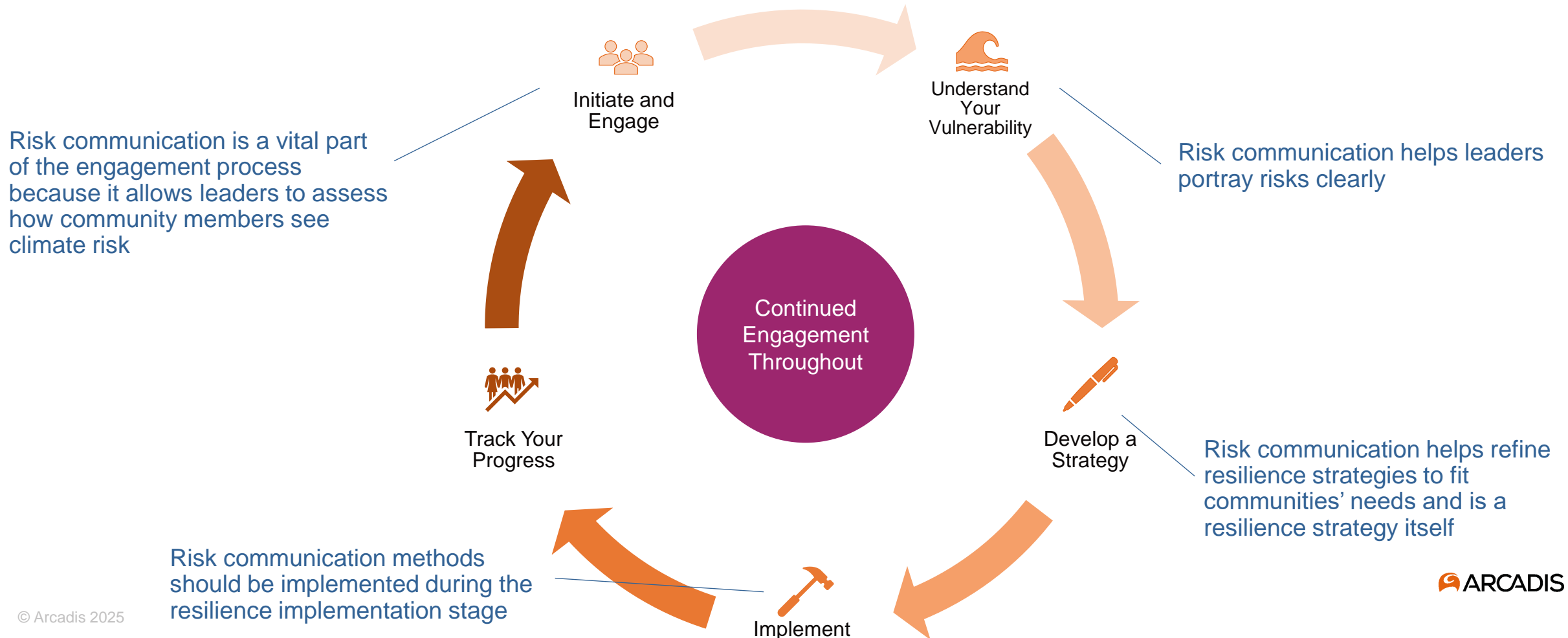
Community engagement in climate action projects can take many forms, including **public meetings, listening sessions, public art, feedback on projects**, and participation in the **decision-making** process.

Webinar 1 discussed steps to build local resilience shown in the graphic to the right.



Community Engagement and Risk Communication

This webinar will focus on **risk communication**, which is an integral part of community engagement in climate-related projects and is relevant across multiple stages of the resilience planning process. Engaging the public by helping people understand climate risks and sharing ways to mitigate risks to individuals and the community is a key way to build resilience!



What is risk communication and why does it matter?

Risk communication is “*exchanging thoughts, perceptions, and concerns about hazards to identify and motivate appropriate action.*”

[NOAA Digital Coast](#)

Why is risk communication important?

1. Different people have different perceptions of risk

- “Risk can be perceived very differently by populations that experience similar kinds of events based on culture, economic practices, education, and length of flooding events...it is necessary to **help them understand**, through **compelling** and **clear** messaging.” ([Risk Communication: A Campaign for Coastal New Jersey \(NJDEP\)](#))

2. Everyday actions can increase preparedness and reduce climate hazard risk

- “Importantly, the **everyday actions** of people also can help reduce flood risk. Talking to your friends and neighbors and spreading information about flood risk can also **make your community better prepared.**” [What is Risk? \(RNJ RRBC\)](#)

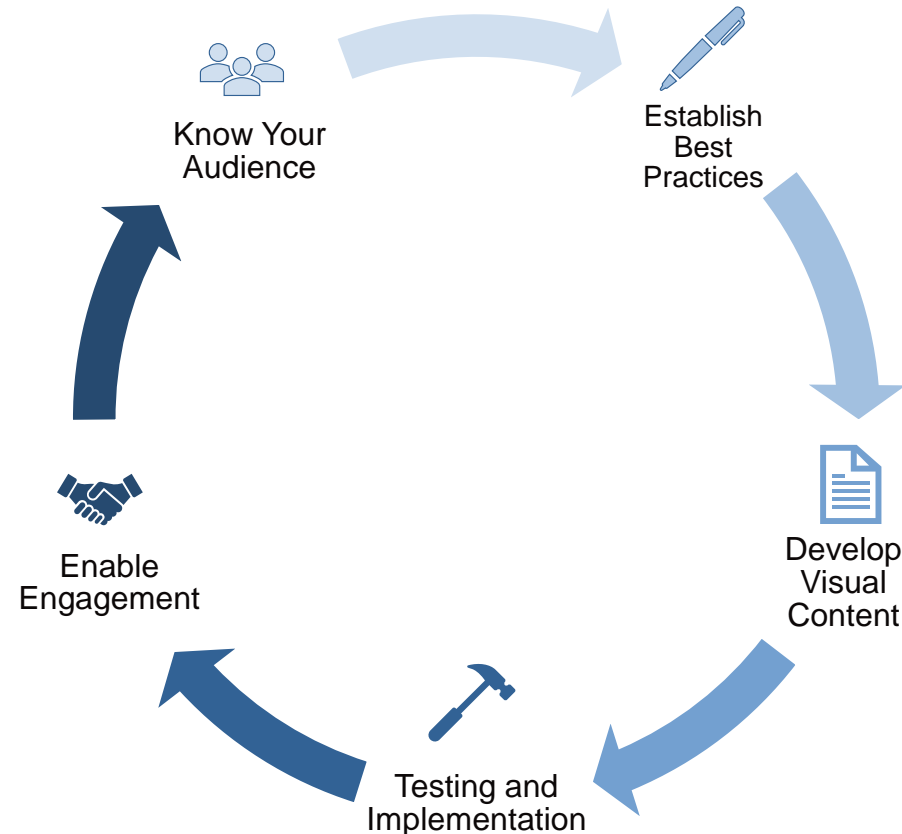
How does effective risk communication improve resilience?



Source: (1) Evidence-based recommendations for communicating the impacts of climate change on health, Translational Behavioral Medicine, Oxford Journal, May 2022 (2) 64% of Americans recognize climate change as a health issue (Leiserowitz et al., 2021) – Advancing and Integrating U.S. Climate and Health Policies, Yale Center of Climate Communications; (3) The Preparedness Payoff: The Economic Benefits of Investing in Climate Resilience. US Chamber of Commerce, June 2024

Key Steps to Risk Communication

Risk communication is a critical part of the community engagement and planning process because it helps residents better understand climate risk and be better informed to provide feedback during plan development. Though there are many aspects of risk communication that Environmental Commissions can consider, we will focus on **five key steps** to risk communication during today’s discussion:



Key Steps to Risk Communication

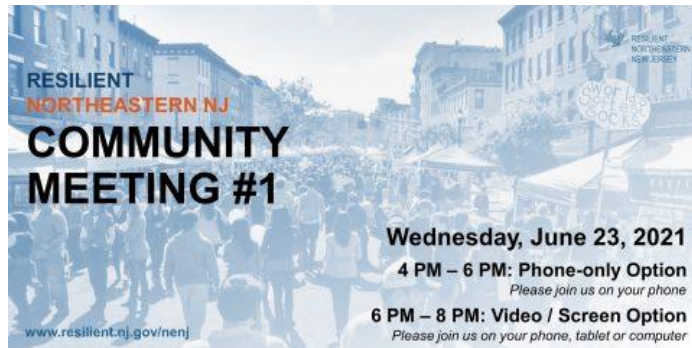
Know Your Audience

- **Objective:** Connect the issue with the audience's emotional connections and interests, recognizing that their interests may differ from the local government's interests.
- **Goal:** Gather community member perspectives on climate change and hazards to understand what is most important to residents and understand which residents are most vulnerable
- **Content:**
 - *Understanding your community:* What are your community's **characteristics**? How does the community aspire to **change** and **grow** over the next 10, 20, or 50 years?
 - *Baselining risk:* What **beliefs** does the community hold about climate risks and resilience?
 - *Identifying vulnerability:* Has the community been **affected** by climate hazards recently? What parts of the community were affected? (See *Webinar 1 for more information on this topic.*)
 - *Baselining available information:* Where do community members receive **information/alerts** on climate hazards? Are there **pain points** that make it difficult for people in the community to access this information?

Key Steps to Risk Communication

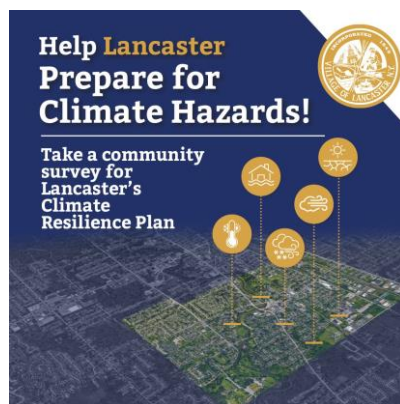
Know Your Audience

- **Effective Formats:**



Public Working Sessions

- Listening to and working with the community to discuss **climate risk** and risk mitigation activities is an important aspect of risk communication.
- Potential participants include local emergency management officials, community leaders, and government officials.



Public, Tailored Community Surveys

- Surveying community members on their **understanding** of climate risk can identify potential information gaps and start the process to fill in **missing information**.

Key Steps to Risk Communication

Know Your Audience

- Effective Formats:



Remember that understanding how the community's most vulnerable populations receive and interpret information is critical.

Public Working Sessions

Listening to and working with the community to discuss climate risk and risk mitigation activities is an important aspect of risk communication. Potential participants include local emergency management officials, community leaders, and government officials.

Public, Tailored Community Surveys

- Surveying community members on their **understanding** of climate risk can identify potential information gaps and start the process to fill in **missing information**.



Key Steps to Risk Communication

Know Your Audience

- Effective Formats:



Consider the different languages that community members speak. Be sure to have translated materials available and offer interpretation services at meetings when possible.



- Surveying community members on their **understanding** of climate risk can identify potential information gaps and start the process to fill in **missing information**.

Risk Communication Case Study: Flooded Homes – EPA’s “Audience First” Approach

EPA researchers built a team of 25 employees from federal, state, and local agencies to **test methods** to **communicate health and safety risk** lessons about indoor air quality hazards resulting from flooding. The team provided insights and highlighted gaps to help EPA **refine risk communication** methods that people preferred based on their **experiences with flooding**.

EPA used the SALT framework (Strategy, Action, Learning, and Tools) to understand the audience so the project could provide **useful** and **tailored** information to people who have experienced flooding.

EPA conducted **focus groups** and **interviews** to understand ways to make the risk messaging more effective and used the information to develop short videos about air quality hazards resulting from flooding. The team reflected on lessons learned that can be applied to **other risk communication projects**.

FLOODED HOMES

RISK COMMUNICATION THROUGH THE LENS OF THE SALT FRAMEWORK



Goal:

Protect public health and support recovery in the aftermath of flooding.

Objectives:

- Improve audience understanding of health risks following flooding.
- Provide meaningful, understandable, and actionable information that meets audience needs, while combatting misinformation.
- Increase feelings of control over potential risk.
- Empower people to take informed action.

Risk Communication Case Study: Flooded Homes – EPA’s “Audience First” Approach

“The team flipped EPA’s traditional risk communication strategy. Instead of telling people what to do, we asked them what they wanted to hear.” – Dr. Keely Maxwell, EPA Office of Research and Development (ORD), March 2021

Learning

The project team met on a weekly basis after conducting focus groups and interviews to reflect on insights from the research and how to improve the products to improve the risk communication.

Focus Groups



Focus groups brought new ideas and methods to convey information.

Example: Added a “Know Before You Go” statement for emergency issues (electrocution, lead, etc.) to ensure that the most important message from the videos and infographics was brought to the front.

Interviews



Over 15 different individuals who experienced flooding shared their stories so the team could understand what areas to focus on and what information needed to be created to meet their needs.

Agile Development



The team also utilized agile development which allowed for flexibility and easier revisions to the workflow with small, continued changes, then large-lengthy efforts. Agile development gives projects the opportunity to pivot quickly once an issue is determined and provides for better reflection and learning throughout the communication development.

Tailored Content



Research findings determined that individuals desired content specific to their situation (renters, elderly, volunteers) even if the information was consistent across various groups.

Example: After interviews, the team added a new section to the website specifically tailored for resources about getting additional assistance and how to take care of family members or friends who were with them during the flooding experience.

Key Steps to Risk Communication

Establish Best Practices

- **Objective:** Establish communication guidelines that align with proven methods and are tailored to your community
- **Goal:** Develop a set of internal guides and protocols that establish methods best suited for the community or source guides from a trusted source
- **Techniques to explain risk:**
 - **Start with impacts.** Highlight relevant risks first, focusing on what the community cares about, and paint a picture of what happens to the community
 - **Start with what we know** about potential climate risk but acknowledge that there are things we do not know.
 - **Avoid the term “uncertainty”** as this can undermine credibility and instead highlight what actions are being taken to plug in knowledge gaps
 - Avoid excessive **doom** and **gloom**

Key Steps to Risk Communication

Establish Best Practices

- **Language:**
 - Be consistent and avoid conflated or conflicting messages
 - Avoid jargon – communicate plainly and limit highly complex/technical topics.
 - Make connections to the community and reasons to embrace climate resilience, such as people’s homes, businesses, and cherished spaces.

Language Best Practices: “Lessons From Covid-19”

- 1 Establish and maintain social norms** – Strengthen social norms of climate action with invitations toward a common goal (e.g., “Let’s Do It Together.”).
- 2 Focus on belonging and empowerment** – People identify more with a cause when they have positive feelings about the message, encouraging them to share information with others.
- 3 Temporal reframing** – Shift away from long-term impacts and emphasize near-term benefits of climate mitigation behaviors (e.g. improved air pollution, reducing property loss)
- 4 Agency assignment** – Use verbs to encourage direct, proactive behavior – “Preparing For XXX”, “Be Ready For XXX”
- 5 Use simple and personal statistics** – Do the math for your audience! Rather than informing people about climate flooding through 100-year statistics, convey the risk of flooding to their home/living space (see *Webinar 1 for more information.*)

Key Steps to Risk Communication

Establish Best Practices

- **Channels:**
 - Use existing channels and trusted local messengers, such as **local community groups** and **news channels**, that can help spread the message
 - Diversify channels to reach **vulnerable populations** – for example, the elderly may prefer television to social media



NEWSPAPERS

Who is the audience? All residents

Pros: Trusted source of information

Cons: Many people are getting their news from digital sources and other media like TV



SOCIAL MEDIA

Who is the audience? People who receive and share information digitally; generally younger audiences

Pros: Large numbers of impressions; cost-effective strategies available to increase followers

Cons: Content can sometimes get lost or forgotten; some people don't have smart mobile devices or computers; requires some moderation of comments and replies



TELEVISION

Who is the audience? All residents, particularly home-bound people

Pros: Reaches many residents; news programs run throughout the day to syndicate messages

Cons: Ads are expensive



FLYERS / POSTERS

Who is the audience? Active communities where people interact regularly and use local services

Pros: Designs can help grab attention; people can take them home

Cons: Hard to measure impact



RADIO

Who is the audience? All residents, particularly home-bound people; workers who listen to radio on the job

Pros: Generally cost-effective advertising; remains a good platform for alerts, particularly with emergencies

Cons: Difficult to convey messages in shorter amount of time



WORKSHOPS

Who is the audience? Vulnerable communities; people who are engaged in community groups

Pros: Good for two-way communication; Community feels involved

Cons: Reach is reduced because of lower participation numbers

Key Steps to Risk Communication

Establish Best Practices

- Channels:

- Use existing channels and trusted local messengers, such as **local community groups** and **news channels** that can help spread the message
- Diversify channels to reach **different populations** – for example, the elderly may prefer television to social media

Share in the chat: what channels do you and your community use to share information? What other channels might reach vulnerable groups?



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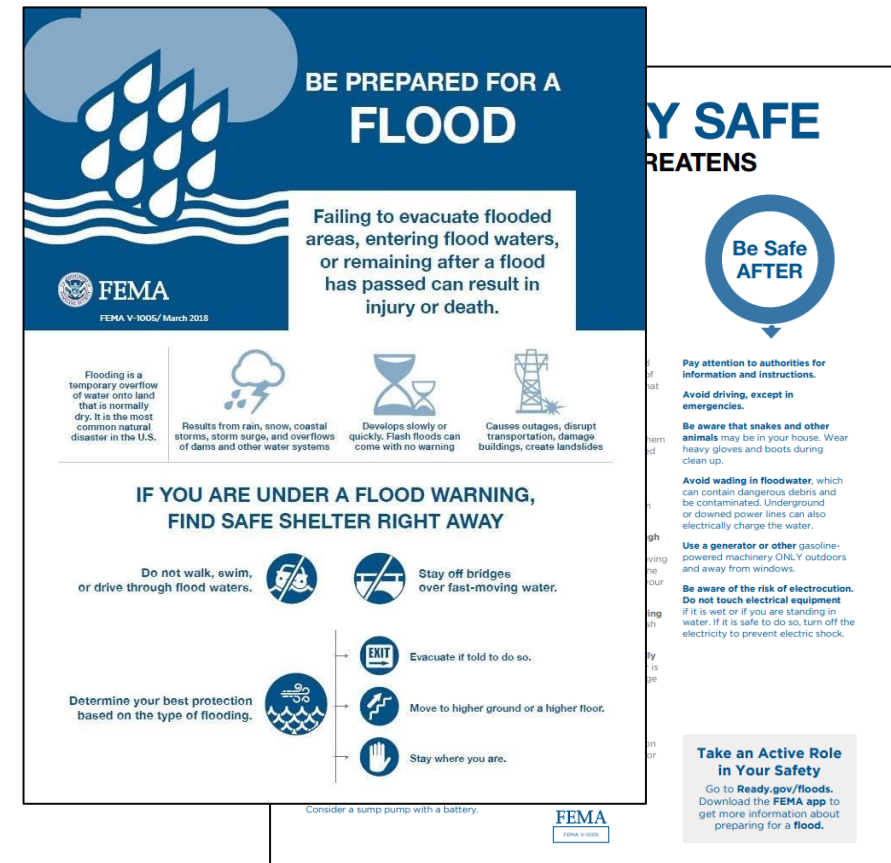
WORKSHOPS

Who is the audience? Vulnerable communities; people who are engaged in community groups
Pros: Good for two-way communication; Community feels involved
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Key Steps to Risk Communication

Develop Visual Content

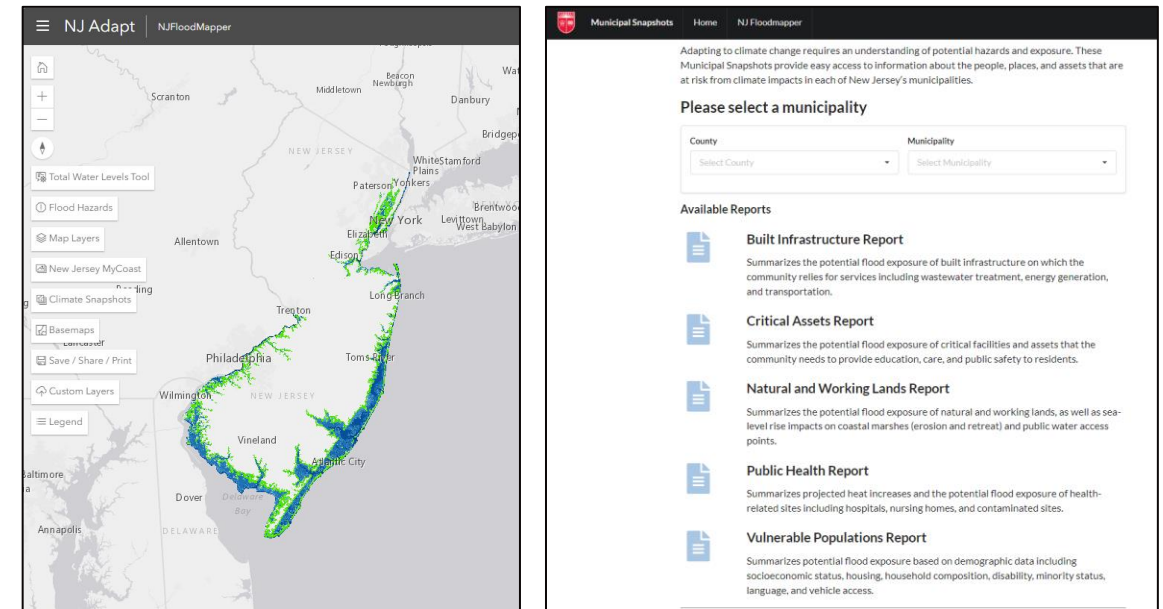
- **Objective:** Share complex climate information through visuals that communicate information efficiently
- **Goal:** Gather or develop off-the-shelf visual content that can be effectively used as-is for communication scenarios (e.g., Resilience Toolkits of Homeowners)
- **Content Examples:**
 - For General Community / Residents:
 - Flyers
 - Flood maps for neighborhood flood zones
 - Permanent road signage
 - Social media campaigns
 - Video series



Key Steps to Risk Communication

Develop Visual Content

- **Objective:** Share complex climate information through visuals that communicate information efficiently
- **Goal:** Gather or develop off-the-shelf visual content that can be effectively used as-is for communication scenarios (e.g., Resilience Toolkits of Homeowners)
- **Content Examples:**
 - For Property Owners:
 - Residential toolkits, including asset-level risk mapping and mitigation options



NJFloodMapper and Municipal Snapshots are free online resources that help communities understand flood risk by mapping potential inundation areas and providing information about the assets at risk from climate impacts. Refer to Webinar 1 for more information on climate risk and vulnerability.

Key Steps to Risk Communication

Develop Visual Content

- **Objective:** Share complex climate information through visuals that communicate information efficiently
- **Goal:** Gather or develop off-the-shelf visual content that can be effectively used as-is for communication scenarios (e.g., Resilience Toolkits of Homeowners)
- **Content Examples:**
 - K-12 education:
 - Animated shorts and large-text posters



NASA Climate Kids has videos and other climate educational materials for kids.

Key Steps to Risk Communication

Develop Visual Content

- **What are the characteristics of effective visual content?**
 - Use **noticeable** and **appropriate** colors to convey credibility and align with the tone of the message
 - Use **contrast** and **white** space to highlight key phrases
 - Use **images** tailored to the community for more powerful reactions

***Environmental Commissions** can share resources through social media or other channels and can encourage local government officials to do the same.*

PREPARING YOUR HOME FOR HEATWAVES

As warmer weather and extreme heat days become more intense and prevalent due to climate change, it's important to know what measures you can take to stay safe and healthy. We've provided a list of actions below to help keep you and your household cool, at minimal, moderate or no cost to you.

HEAT STRESS

Heat stress can affect anyone, but certain populations are particularly vulnerable, including the elderly, people with pre-existing medical conditions and essential workers who work outside.

Symptoms of heat stress include:

Higher body temperature
Hot, red, dry, and/or damp skin
Fast, strong pulse
Headache

Dizziness
Nausea
Confusion
Fainting/passing out










HEAT & COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic heightens the health risks of intense heat in our city. Many of our residents who are vulnerable to COVID-19 are also at higher risk to suffer from heat stress. When seeking heat relief outside of your home, make sure to stay 6 ft. (1.5m) away from others in parks and public spaces. Only visit emergency cooling centers if absolutely necessary.

If you feel unwell, seek medical help by calling your medical provider or emergency services, or going to an emergency room.

HEAT RELIEF AT HOME

In these summer months during COVID-19, it's important to be aware of indoor heat risks. Here are some solutions for keeping cool inside:

NO COST  <p>If outdoor air quality isn't poor, open windows and doors on opposite facades to ventilate in the early mornings and late evenings when outside temperatures are lower.</p>	NO COST  <p>During the day, close windows and shutters, especially those facing the sun, and turn off artificial lighting and electrical devices as much as possible.</p>	NO COST  <p>Have lighter meals, use cooking techniques that don't release much heat or steam, and avoid using the oven.</p>
LOW COST  <p>Drink enough water.</p>	LOW COST  <p>If you have air conditioning, buy or create draft stoppers for doors and windows to keep cool air in.</p>	MEDIUM COST  <p>Hang shades, curtains, or shutters on windows that face the sun.</p>
MEDIUM COST  <p>Use a regular fan or install ceiling fan that helps circulate the air in the room.</p>	MEDIUM COST  <p>Apply solar window film to help control light or heat coming through.</p>	MEDIUM COST  <p>Install temporary shading structures or planters on flat roofs, balconies and terraces.</p>

For more information, visit:
<http://www.ghhn.org/heat-and-covid-19>
<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/index.html>

C40
CITIES

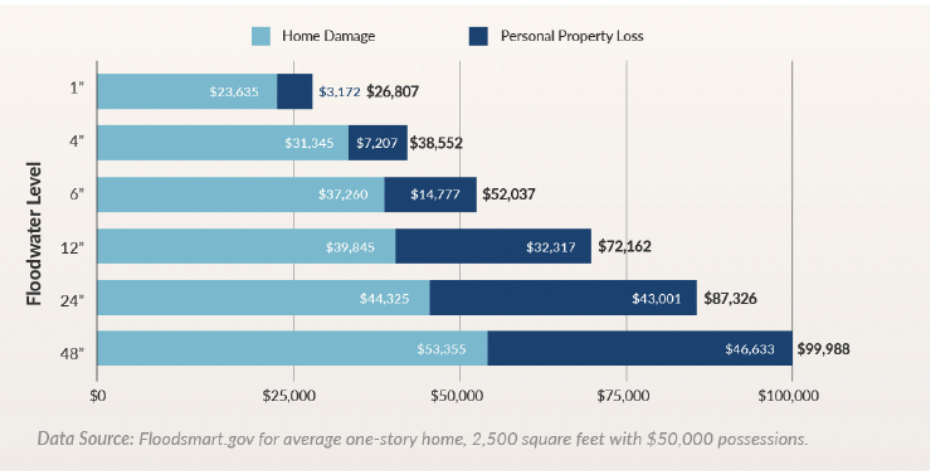
What are three elements that are effective in communicating risk?

Agency assignment – use of verbs!

Temporal reframing to outline immediate benefits to personal health and expected financial commitment

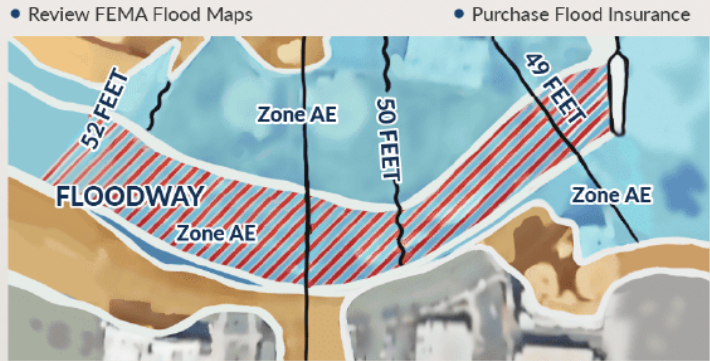
Use of images, white space, and large font

HOME DAMAGE BY FLOODWATER LEVELS



What are three elements that are effective in communicating risk?

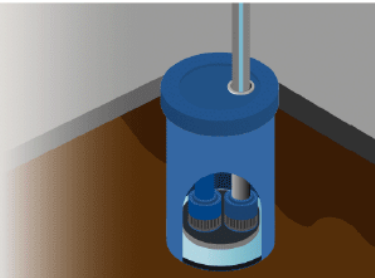
FLOOD PREPARATION



What could be improved?

FLOOD PROTECTION FOR YOUR HOME

- Interior Drainage System
- Sump Pump
- Basement Vapor Barrier or Crawl Space Encapsulation
- Foundation Flood Vents
- Drainpipe Check Valves
- Landscape Grading
- Correctly Sized Gutters and Downspouts



To learn more about flood protection for your home, contact your local basement waterproofing and foundation repair experts.

What are three elements that are effective in communicating risk?

What could be improved?



BE READY FOR FLOODS

PREPARE • SURVIVE • RECOVER

Turn Around Don't Drown



What are three elements that are effective in communicating risk?

What could be improved?

PREPARE BEFORE



STAY INFORMED ON LOCAL NEWS



PREPARE AN EMERGENCY KIT WITH FOOD, WATER, DOCUMENTS



KNOW HOW TO EVACUATE & SAFE ALTERNATIVE ROUTES



SIGN UP FOR EMERGENCY & WEATHER ALERTS

SURVIVE DURING



DO NOT WALK OR DRIVE IN FLOOD WATER



GET TO HIGHER GROUND AS SOON AS POSSIBLE



DISCONNECT ELECTRICITY & GAS



FOLLOW EVACUATION ORDERS

RECOVER AFTER



AVOID CONTACT WITH FLOOD WATER



STAY AWAY FROM FALLEN POWER LINES



DO NOT RETURN HOME OR TO DISASTER AREAS UNTIL THEY ARE DECLARED SAFE



COMMUNICATE TO YOUR FAMILY THAT YOU ARE SAFE

Key Steps to Risk Communication

Testing

- **Objective:** Test messaging with a core group, then refine materials based on feedback to get greater engagement with climate risk issues
- **Goal:** Shape messages to affirm the values of those receiving the messages, identifying where gaps currently exist
- **Testing Formats:** Similar to 'Know Your Audience', Focus Groups or One-on-one Interviews are the most common formats

***Environmental Commissions** can participate in testing as local government leaders who host the testing activity or as participants who provide feedback on gaps in messaging.*

Key Steps to Risk Communication

Testing

- **Testing Methods:**
 1. Set the scene for a **climate hazard** and **risk mitigation** options (see *Webinar 1 for more information on this topic*)
 2. Ask **questions**, which can be divided into two categories:
 - Did the materials provide participants with a base level of understanding about the content?
 - *What topics were clearly outlined?*
 - *What topics were interesting?*
 - *What areas were confusing?*
 - Do participants feel empowered to apply the information they learned?
 - *Do you know what resources are available to you as a resident?*
 - *What mitigation options outlined today might be possible for you to implement?*

Share in the chat: *What other questions might be important to ask during a Testing conversation with community members?*

Key Steps to Risk Communication

Testing

- **Testing Methods:**
 3. Allow residents to respond. **Listen** to community members' feedback and strive to understand what is driving their response.
 - *Do materials need to be revised to better reflect the community's lived experience?*
 - *Do materials communicate risk effectively, or are parts still confusing?*
 4. Respond with **guiding questions**
 5. Repeat with 1-2 more diverse groups of participants to find **patterns** in responses
 6. Summarize participant feedback and **edit materials** to reflect participants' feedback

Share in the chat: *What other Testing Methods might be important to include in your community's testing process?*

Key Steps to Risk Communication

Enable Engagement

- **Objective: Empower the community to inform and educate one another**
- **Goal:** Create opportunities for communities to engage with resilience activities and highlight their own success stories
- **Content Examples:**
 - Permanent public art installations
 - Community meetings and resilience events
 - Information placards/graphics for visitors
 - Local action public database to inform the community about what actions the government is taking to address climate risk



Murals and public art can highlight growing climate risk while beautifying public space.

Image source: [Imperial](#)



Community meetings provide an opportunity for community members to discuss resilience, engage with climate-related materials, and share their thoughts on adaptation in the community.

Image source: [FiDi & Seaport Climate Resilience Master Plan](#)

What can environmental commissions do to communicate climate risk?

1. Environmental commissions can **advise** local governments on potential policies and policy enhancements that can improve resilience.
2. Environmental commissions can **assess** the existing climate risk communication landscape in the community and **highlight** gaps in risk communication.
3. Environmental commissions can **research** risk communications best practices and **advocate** for best practices to be implemented in the community.
4. Environmental commissions **participate** in the risk communication process by sharing information through EC channels and by starting conversations with community members.

Share in the chat: *What are other methods ECs could use to communicate climate risk?*

Risk Communication Spotlight: Resilient NENJ

In addition to community engagement events, the Resilient Northeastern NJ project incorporated a public art project to raise awareness of climate hazards and resilience throughout the region.

The public art campaign, “**Faces of Resilience**,” began in June 2022. The campaign **highlights leaders** in resilience and environmental justice to raise awareness, **elevate** the labor and accomplishments of individuals in the space, and **empower** others to get involved.



Source: [Resilient NENJ](#)

Brainstorming Activity

Anytown, NJ, faces increasingly severe flooding and local leaders want to help community members understand the risks they face and ways the community can adapt.

As a local leader, you are trying to work with the community to communicate risk, but people haven't been responding to your messaging approach.



What strategies might a local leader employ to communicate risk more effectively in this scenario?

Community Outreach Opportunities

Environmental Commissioners and local government leaders can host events tailored to climate risk communication (such as community meetings or listening sessions), but risk communication can happen anywhere! Local government partners such as elected officials, city planners, and emergency management officials can facilitate events alongside Environmental Commissioners.

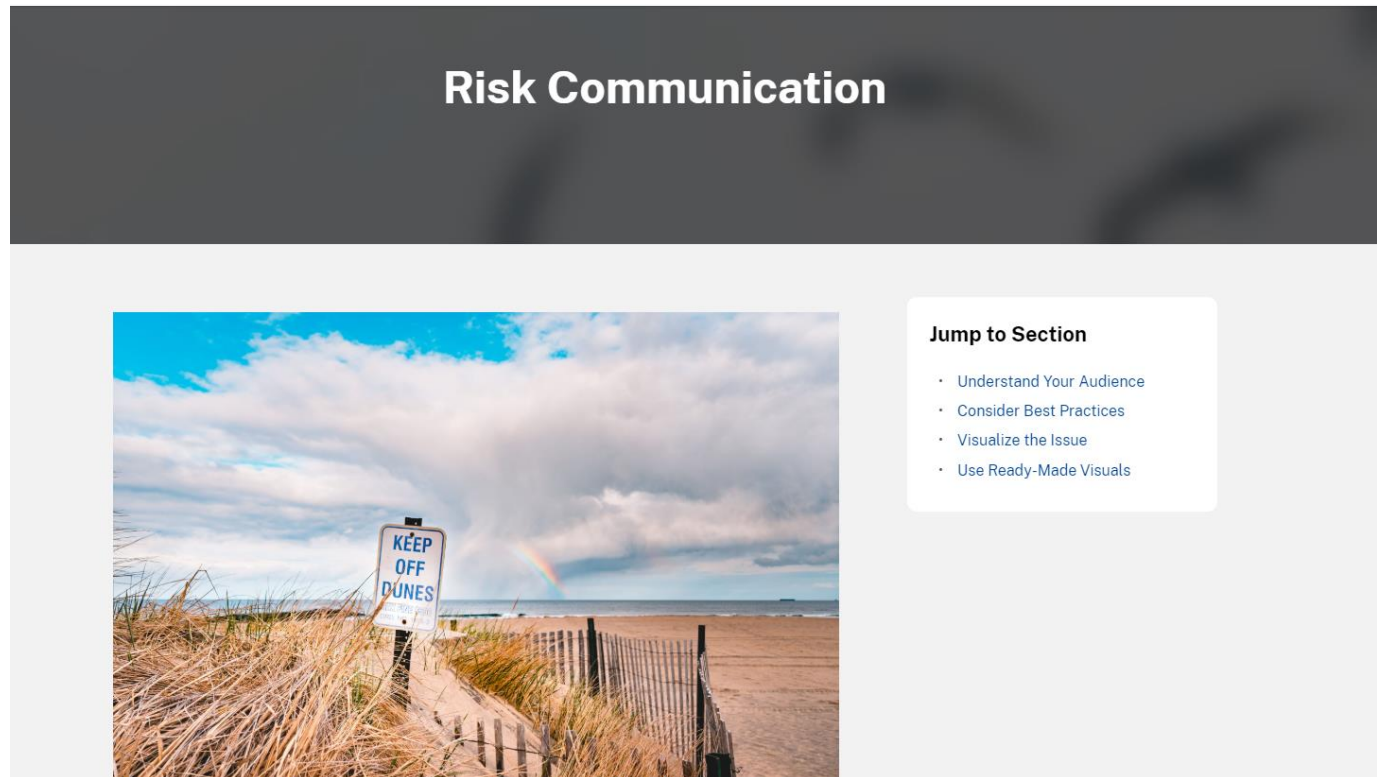
Event locations could include:

- Farmers' Markets
- Local libraries
- Community festivals and events

Share in the chat: *Are there other partners who would be good partners for climate risk communication? What locations would be well-suited to reach people in your community?*

Resource Spotlight: NOAA Digital Coast Risk Communication

NOAA Digital Coast provides a comprehensive set of training materials for risk communication that can help local leaders reach general audiences and underserved communities. Pre-made flyers, best practices documents, and training videos are available on the site.



Understand Your Audience

Training – Publication
[Risk Communication Basics](#)
 Outlines why people respond to risk the way they do and how to inspire risk-wise behavior with risk communication best practices.

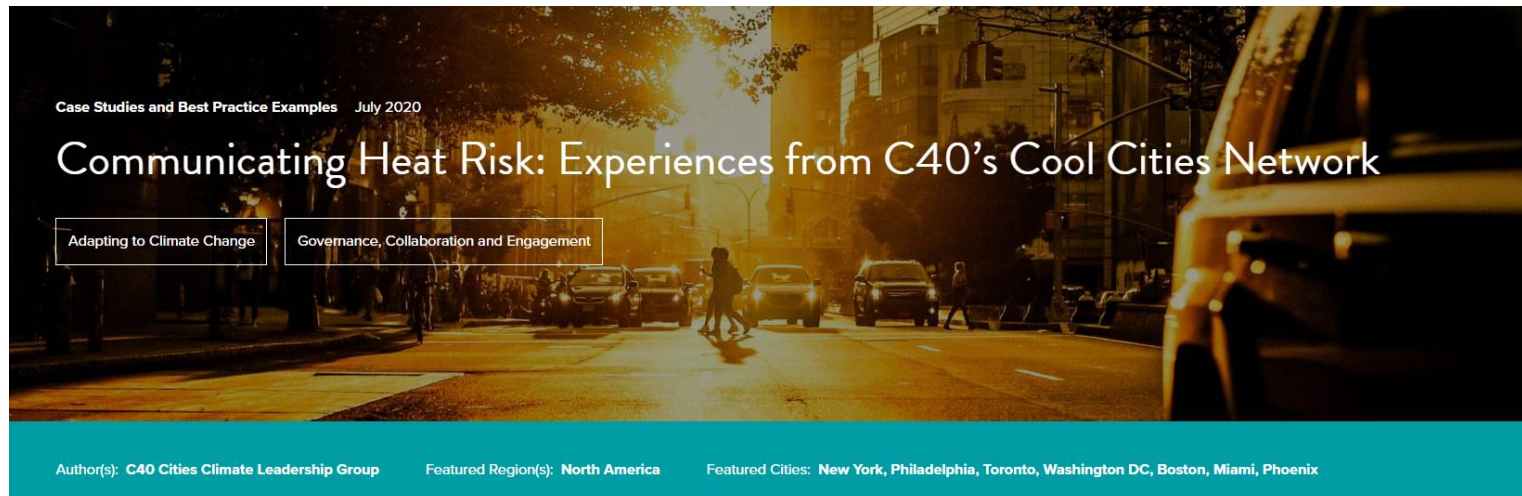
Training – Publication
[Enhanced Engagement and Risk Communication for Underserved Communities](#)
 Reviews risk perception, risk behavior, and communication approaches from the literature, and provides best practice recommendations.

Training – Online Guide
[Risk Communication Mental Shortcuts: Why People Do What They Do](#)
 Demonstrates mental shortcuts people take to make decisions about risk, and provides communication tips on how to work with these shortcuts.

Training – Quick Reference
[Building Risk Communication Skills: Questions to Ask and What to Listen For](#)
 Provides questions to help get the conversation started about risk.

Resource Spotlight: C40 Cool Cities Network

This report includes key guidance on how to reach vulnerable groups through communication channels as well as examples of best practices for communication during the COVID-19 pandemic from seven North American cities (Boston, Miami, New York City, Philadelphia, Toronto, Phoenix, and Washington DC).



Jump to: [Related Knowledge](#)

As the climate crisis deepens, extreme heat events are becoming more intense and frequent around the world. This has brought heat to the forefront of the conversations around climate change adaptation, and more and more city governments are concerned about the risks posed

 [Download Resource](#)

Source: [Cool Cities Network - C40 Cities](#)

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Resource Spotlight: FEMA

FEMA has extensive resources to support existing outreach, engagement, and projects, including a Disaster Multimedia Toolkit, Risk Communications Guidebook for Local Officials, and a Guide to Supporting Engagement in Rural Communities

Community Engagement Toolkit for Emergency Managers

Section 2

- Resources to Support Communications**
- Risk and Crisis Communications

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Section 3

Resources

Call to Action

Appendix A

Appendix B

Resources to Support Communications

Participating in community engagement and disaster planning requires time and resources, both of which may be limited. FEMA regional staff, resources, and grants can support your existing outreach, engagement and projects.

- The [Disaster Multimedia Toolkit](#) provides external partners and media with disaster recovery content to share on social media, including social graphics and messages, flyers and announcer scripts, accessible videos, and animations in multiple languages. Accessing this pre-made content can support you as you share risk and crisis communications to support your community.
- The [Risk Communications Guidebook for Local Officials](#) prioritizes community engagement and whole community resilience through each phase of the floodplain mapping—or Risk MAP—process. This guidebook includes tools, tactics and templates to help different audiences understand more clearly how flood risk is determined and what it means.
- The [Guide to Supporting Engagement and Resiliency in Rural Communities](#) reviews essential elements of successful engagement with rural communities and provides practical suggestions, tips and ideas for how to better consider rural audiences' needs and perspectives.

Conclusion

Local leaders must consider ways to communicate climate risk in a way that is accessible and tailored to the community to improve resilience.

Environmental Commissions play a critical role in risk communication by:

- **Highlighting** the importance of resilience
- **Sharing** risk communication best-practices with local government leaders
- **Communicating** climate information with the community through multiple channels
- **Advocating** for increased risk communication opportunities in the community, from public art to risk-specific listening events

Thank you! Questions?