



BEST PRACTICES FOR CLIMATE COMMUNICATIONS

Climate change communications can be challenging for many reasons. The following suggestions can be applied when communicating with the public or partners. This is not an exhaustive list of evidence-based best practices; see “Additional Resources” provided at the end of the document.

1. **Emphasize the health angle:** Framing climate change as a public health issue can result in more support for adaptation and mitigation activities.¹ According to climate communications expert Ed Maibach, “when climate change is introduced as a human health issue, a broad cross-section of audiences—even segments otherwise skeptical of climate science—find the information to be compelling and useful”.²
2. **Identify your main point, goal, and/or message:** Identify what you want to communicate in the most concise, plain language way possible. Be clear if there is a call to action. If there is any confusion among you or your team about your main message, your audience will likely also be confused.
3. **Know your audience:** How you communicate your message should be determined by the needs of the audience. Think about how they receive messages and what they care about. Consider factors such as demographics, beliefs, attitudes, values, and knowledge when crafting your communications strategy. It may be more effective to focus on specific outcomes of climate change, such as “severe weather” or “extreme heat,” when communicating with an audience who might be skeptical about climate change. See the [Global Warming’s Six Americas Framework](#) from the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication for ways to segment communications approaches for different audiences.³
4. **Identify and work with trusted sources and social networks relevant to the audience of focus:** Trusted sources of information may vary by audience. For many groups, health care professionals, especially nurses, are a trusted source. For some groups, the most influential information sources are through close, personal relationships, like friends and family.⁴ Organizations that foster a sense of belonging, such as religious communities or civic groups, can also deliver messages with great persuasive effect.⁵
5. **Frame messages for the audience:** Framing should be based on knowledge of the audience and community. Whether intentional or not, all messages are framed in a specific way. How messages are framed influences how people respond. By knowing your audience, you will know what they care about. One strategy is to emphasize the many ancillary benefits of climate action, such as cleaner air, more green space, or more opportunities for active transportation; what ancillary benefits to highlight should depend on the priorities of the audience.



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6. **Provide actionable information and solutions:** Provide specific details about what the audience can do; this is called a cue to action. For example, the recommended action is less clear for “watch out for heat” than for “avoid exercising outdoors when the temperature is greater than 100F.” Remember to use plain language. It is also important that the audience perceives they have the ability to do what you are asking; if they do not, they are less likely to act.⁶ APHA’s [Climate and Health Communications](#) resource provides message examples that can be tailored to your situation.⁷
7. **Co-develop and test your messages:** Rather than assume what will resonate with the audience, increase your effectiveness by collaboratively crafting messages and testing them. This is a great opportunity to build relationships and work with partners.
8. **Keep it local and relevant:** People care most about their day-to-day lives – what is happening to them, their neighbors, and their community. This is true whether you are communicating with a decision maker or someone from the public. Share meaningful, tangible examples and stories from your locality to make it personal, close, and urgent.
9. **Capitalize on the power of storytelling and visuals:** Photos and videos cause a stronger emotional response than words alone, and can help people understand complex associations like climate and health.⁴ Help make the impacts of climate on health relevant to your audience through personal anecdotes, case studies, or real-life examples enriched with images, sound, or multi-media.
10. **Be thoughtful in using statistics:** Statistics without context can be meaningless. Presenting localized data where available helps people connect the dots. For example, stating “heat-related illness is increasing across the country” is less impactful than stating “heat-related illness cases have doubled in our community.” Use meaningful comparisons when you can. Follow the “keep it simple” principle—the less cognitive effort required, the more people will understand.⁴ When possible, integrate presentations of statistics with locally relevant stories that highlight the take home messages.
11. **Be persistent and clear to make the most of people’s scarce time and attention:** Today, many sources compete for our attention. In most cases, it is not that we do not know what to do that keeps us from taking action, but how to do it given the many other priorities we have. For example, we all know physical activity is good for us but how do we do it when there is so little time? It may take multiple channels, messengers, or creative outlets to communicate. Communication is an ongoing process that requires persistence and consistency, making sure we are clear in the message and knowing someone may only have a brief window of attention for it.



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Additional Resources:

- [APHA's Climate and Health Communications](#): A helpful reference for crafting messages, especially for local health departments, with specific examples.⁷ Also see [APHA's Climate Communications Bootcamp](#).⁸
- [Yale Program on Climate Change Communications' Six Americas](#): This interactive data explorer supports audience framing; The Program's polling data suggests six unique audiences in the American public in terms of perceptions of climate change.³
- [CDC's Climate and Health Webinars](#): a variety of webinars relating to climate and health; the AMPLIFY series on communicating the health impacts of climate can help state and local health departments think through their communications strategies.⁹
- [The Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health](#): A Series of six trainings that teaches participants how to strategically and effectively communicate about the intersection of climate change and health.¹⁰



BEST PRACTICES FOR CLIMATE COMMUNICATIONS

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