“Managing” Outside Utility Walls: Communication Strategies for Revenue Enhancement

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What best describes your governing board’s role in financial decision making?

1. We present and they say yes
2. We present and they say no and tell us to cut
3. They provide thoughtful ideas that are incorporated into proposals and decisions
4. We propose and they sound interested and defer
5. They voice their opinions loudly, but generally follow management’s lead.
Which information do you think would be most helpful presenting a rate increase to your board?

1. Price of cable in community
2. Average increase in cell phone service over last 5 years
3. Length of years it will take to rehabilitate/replace entire distribution system based on last year's investment level
4. Number of line breaks last year
5. Salary of general manager
Session Objectives

• Share perspectives on message target – reading your political environment
• Share perspectives on message content -- Identify priority messages and stories that need to be told.
• Identify effective messaging techniques and channels
What did your family spend on their water and wastewater bill last month?

1. Less than $25
2. $25 to $40
3. $40 to $55
4. $55 to $70
5. More than $70
6. No idea
When was the last time your personally reviewed your water and/or wastewater bill?

1. Last week
2. Last month
3. Month before last
4. 3 to 4 months ago
5. I don’t know
Who is the Audience for Your Finance Story?

- yourself
- your board
- your newspaper
- your boss
  - Engineer
  - Finance
- your neighbor
Impact of Operating Environment: Governance Structure

- Municipal
- County
- Authority/special district
- Elected board
- Appointed board
- Number of local governments
- Number of board members
- For profit board
Impact of Operating Environment: Demographics

- Income
- Growth rate
- Residential vs. non-residential
- Unemployment
Brainstorm Question

Go around the room and try to identify a distinct method, your utility can communicate revenue and financial information
Crafting your story

http://www.wuc.on.ca/information/distribution.our_watermains.cfm

Asset Replacement Projections for a Combined Water & Wastewater Utility

Source: Dawn of the Replacement Era, AWWA
I think our utility’s business model in 15 years will?

1. Look a lot like what we have today
2. Be very different and I have a good idea what it will look like
3. Be very different, but I don’t have any idea what it will look like
NEXT STEPS
Forum Toolbox

- PowerPoint Slides
- Survey result summary, stripped of attributions
- Shared utility documents (e.g. EBMUD’s finance policy, CMU customer guide)
- Related Foundation reports
Two-way communication

1. Blog discussion
2. Post-forum survey
3. Ya’ got the good out of me
Report Format

1. Two page executive summary
2. Series of two page fact sheets
3. 10-15 page report
4. 20-30 page report
Utility Communication Tools

1. Rates/Financial dashboard
2. PowerPoint slides to adopt and use
3. Draft press release
4. Talking points
5. Op-ed template
Future Research Proposals

• Purchasing Procedures
• Customer dividend payments
• Rating agency’s evolving criteria
• Key performance indicators