



Communications Strategy

Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership
2012-2014

I. Introduction

The Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership (APNEP) renews and updates its core communications, education, and outreach strategies through this update to its two-year Communications Strategy. APNEP implements this plan in furtherance of its mission and in accordance with its Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan.

II. Goals

The goal of this plan is to facilitate the implementation of APNEP's Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan and support the Partnership's mission. Communications efforts will be prioritized and linked to CCMP objectives, actions, and associated environmental outcomes.

III. Target Audiences

APNEP engages its partners throughout the region to achieve its mission and implementation of the CCMP. The program has identified several target audiences that are well positioned to assist with actions identified in the plan. This list is not exclusive. Instead, it indicates high priority constituencies that can most effectively support and implement the CCMP. These constituencies include local government officials and community leaders; state and federal government officials; science and research community; K-12 educators; partners and funders; and media, including both traditional and digital media.

IV. Media Strategy

1. *Traditional media*

APNEP will coordinate with traditional print, television, and radio outlets to further program strategies contained within its CCMP. Traditional media offers the opportunity to enhance public awareness of regional conservation efforts and the program.

- a. **Press releases.** Press releases will publicize APNEP activities, initiatives and news. This may include but is not limited to publicizing requests for proposals, completion of joint initiatives between APNEP and its partners, and other newsworthy items. Press releases will be coordinated with designated NCDENR staff and staff of partner organizations when appropriate.
- b. **Media relations.** APNEP's staff will develop and maintain relationships with news reporters in the region that cover environmental issues. APNEP will also work through DENR's Communications Office to achieve this aim. As the opportunity arises, local media outlets will be invited to cover newsworthy events.
- c. **Opinion pieces.** APNEP staff will offer program support for Policy Board or advisory committee members who wish to publish opinion pieces regarding environmental issues substantially related to APNEP's mission. All opinion pieces must conform to Policy Board or advisory committee bylaws regarding representation of APNEP its Board or Committees.

2. Digital media

The progression of digital media forums offers an excellent opportunity for APNEP to directly and inexpensively connect with interested members of the public. APNEP will engage its audience by providing a variety of online media content. Trends, services, and capabilities within this medium change at a rapid rate, and APNEP will remain abreast of changing trends and best practices.

- a. **Website.** APNEP retains the capability to instantaneously update content. Where feasible, all program materials should be accessible or viewable at this source. The site should provide an overview of the estuarine system, provide information about the program, detail APNEP's current initiatives, and offer resources of interest to APNEP's target audiences. While current and accurate information must be available, the website must also be curated in a way that ensures navigability and relevant content for the target audience of the program. The website will also perform as a clearinghouse for important APNEP documents such as the annual work plan and budget.
- b. **Social Media.** APNEP will maintain a social media presence on platforms that effectively reach its target audience. APNEP will maintain an engaging and intelligent tone in its online communications. Currently the program maintains a presence on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, but other forms of social media will continually be evaluated for inclusion in APNEP's communication strategy. All social media relations will be conducted according to "Best Practices for Social Media Usage in North Carolina." Content on the sites should be posted in grammatically correct English. To ensure discipline and a consistent presence, this strategy recommends providing thematic content in a regular manner according to the medium and its target audience. Other program announcements and developments will also be shared as they occur. Social media sites should be regularly monitored for spam or negative commentary. Entries including spam or profane commentary may be deleted, but a record of the entry should be kept in accordance with NC's open records act. Negative but non-profane commentary is uncommon but should remain posted. Comments of this nature should be addressed in concert with the program director, with consultation from NCDENR's Communications Office if necessary.
 - i. **Twitter.** Twitter users are among the most digitally sophisticated of APNEP's audience. Many of these users are young, comfortable with technology, and/or use the service professionally. All of APNEP's content should be posted to Twitter, but the service's 140 character limit requires brevity. APNEP staff will provide regular program updates and communicate directly with other Twitter users. As news clips are updated on the website, notification via Twitter is recommended. A suggested schedule for Twitter posts is as follows.
 - Monday: Offer facts about the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem (#soundfacts)
 - Tuesday: Highlight people, organizations, and research in our region (#apnepspotlight)
 - Wednesday: Post a photo from our region (#sightsofthesounds)
 - Thursday: Note interactions through "Ask an ecologist" (#askanecologist) or refer to specific APNEP web content.
 - Friday: News story of the week (#apnepechoes)
 - ii. **Facebook.** Most Facebook users that subscribe to APNEP's content are members of the general public with an interest in conservation issues, and they view content on their personal time. Posts should consider this audience and provide content that is regular but carefully curated. Posts that contain information appropriate for a Twitter post can be expanded to provide more detail for Facebook posts. A major concern of many users is that programmatic content might become overwhelming, and APNEP will aim to post no more than 3 Facebook updates per week except unless extraordinary developments occur. APNEP staff will provide regular program updates and communicate directly with other Facebook users. A suggested schedule for Facebook posts is as follows:
 - Monday: Offer information about the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem
 - Wednesday: Sights of the sounds: post a photo from our region
 - Friday: Post news story of the week

- iii. **LinkedIn.** LinkedIn users are mostly professionals working or seeking work in the field of conservation. All APNEP staff members currently have personal LinkedIn accounts, and the group maintains both a group page and a subgroup page targeting science and technology professionals. APNEP will use this medium to offer regular program updates and communicate directly with other LinkedIn users. A suggested schedule for LinkedIn posts is as follows:
 - Tuesday: Highlight people, organizations, and research in our region
 - Friday: News story of the week
- iv. **Flickr.** APNEP shares its photographs on Flickr as well as the other social media sites referenced above. Flickr is the official photo sharing service of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources and also has limited social media capabilities. Flickr facilitates the exchange of information between partners and contractors by allowing them to instantaneously upload or download pictures for publicity purposes or to fulfill contract obligations.
- c. **Newsletter/Blog.** Historically, APNEP has digitally published a quarterly newsletter, "Soundings." The newsletter contains content on subjects including APNEP projects, partner projects, upcoming events of interest to stakeholders in the region, grant opportunities and relevant news. In order to provide more current content and better integrate information from "Soundings" with its other media offerings, APNEP has transitioned to publishing "Soundings" to a blog format. The newsletter is distributed online and is highly visible on APNEP's home page.
- d. **Mailing list.** APNEP maintains a mailing list hosted by the North Carolina state government's listmail service. Only APNEP staff can send email through this service, but listmail gives subscribers the option to instantly subscribe, unsubscribe, or have emails sent in digest form without the investment of staff resources. Because most environmental professionals communicate primarily through email, this medium enables consistent contact with that target audience. Emails are sent once every week or two, usually referring to a Soundings post and also providing other information of relevance.
- e. **News.** APNEP leverages the resources of the N.C. Department of Natural Resources, the N.C. Department of Agriculture, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality to select and post news stories online that are relevant to the program's mission. These clips provide updated daily content for APNEP's home page and are also published via RSS feed and Delicious, a social bookmarking website.

V. Branding and Program Image

APNEP will maintain a current and professional look across various media including its logo, website, newsletter, apparel, signage, and business cards. This objective cuts across all other aspects of this communications strategy by increasing program awareness and encouraging positive impressions of the program and its mission. Initiatives led or funded by APNEP will include the APNEP logo on appropriate documents, signage, and other materials.

VI. Community Engagement Efforts

In addition to its media initiatives, APNEP will implement other engagement and outreach initiatives to effectively engage its target audiences and other program constituencies.

1. **Constituent relations.** All program staff members will work to develop and maintain relationships with its constituents throughout the region, particularly as those constituencies relate to specific job descriptions. APNEP's director and policy and engagement manager will coordinate program relations with state and federal legislators in concert with legislative liaisons for both North Carolina and Virginia.

2. **Full Participation by Committee Members.** APNEP will encourage active participation by Policy Board and advisory committee members in APNEP outreach activities as they are scheduled.
3. **Incentivizing public involvement.** APNEP will incentivize the incorporation of an outreach component into each APNEP funded project. These outreach activities should emphasize APNEP as a *sponsor* or *partner*.
4. **Engagement.** Through its initiatives, APNEP will educate community leaders regarding APNEP's mission, its management plan, and relate how plan actions will affect their communities.
5. **Outreach Materials.** APNEP will maintain updated materials that provide an overview of APNEP, its mission, and the Albemarle-Pamlico estuary. These materials include case statements, program presentations, and other program documents. These materials will remain available both online and in paper form.
6. **Committee Role in Engagement.** APNEP will encourage Policy Board and advisory committee members to serve as ambassadors for APNEP in their other professional roles, including their primary employment and professional organizations. APNEP staff will share program materials that facilitate this role.
7. **Conferences.** As resources allow, APNEP will host or sponsor conferences that promote its general mission or specific initiatives.
8. **Full Membership.** APNEP staff and committees will seek to maintain full membership on APNEP boards and committees. Ad hoc committees will be created as needed and provide board members with opportunities and responsibilities to support the Program.
9. **Cooperation.** APNEP will facilitate inter- and intra-agency cooperation to achieve CCMP goals.

VII. Support of CCMP

APNEP's communications efforts are and will continue to be specifically tailored to support specific CCMP actions and objectives. All CCMP actions will be generally supported using the tools and approaches described in this strategy. Effective implementation of many CCMP actions will heavily rely upon effective communications efforts. As necessary, more detailed communications approaches will be developed for the implementation of specific CCMP actions.

VIII. Evaluation of Communications Efforts

APNEP will continually evaluate its communications plan and associated strategies to identify areas of strength and weakness.

1. **Performance Metrics.** APNEP has developed and will continue monitoring metrics of communications performance. These metrics are available through Google Analytics and integrated social media monitoring tools. Also, APNEP will evaluate communications efforts according to indicators developed to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of CCMP efforts. Results will be reported annually.
2. **Feedback.** APNEP will solicit feedback from its membership and the general public regarding its communication efforts.
3. **Social Network Analysis.** Pending available resources, APNEP will incorporate social network analysis tools into its ecosystem-based management toolkit to provide information on the structure and function of the conservation community in the Albemarle-Pamlico region. An initial study is underway, which will allow APNEP to examine the utility of these indicators for future use.